



DAKOTA RESOURCE COUNCIL
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News Release

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DRC Disappointed ND Congressional Delegation Undermines Democracy with Trade Votes

Bismarck, ND – Dakota Resource Council members from across the state are disappointed that Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, Sen. John Hoeven, and Rep. Kevin Cramer voted to give “fast track” or Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) to Pres. Barack Obama. After the House passed TPA, the final Senate vote passed 60-38 Wednesday afternoon.

Todd Leake, DRC member and farmer from Grand Forks County, said “Sens. Heitkamp and Hoeven are fully aware that by passing fast track authority there will be no way to remove these investor-state provisions, that just like the NAFTA and WTO agreements before, sent hard working American’s jobs overseas, and allowed imports of wheat, sugar and other commodities to flood American markets, while our trade partners perennially protect their markets and get away with it because the US doesn’t want to upset our trade alliances. The American farmers and workers keep paying the price.”

Trade Promotion Authority creates a “fast track” process for ratifying trade deals negotiated in secret. Congress has limited debate and no right to offer amendments. The Obama Administration is seeking fast track authority to finalize at least two free trade agreements, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Leake said, “There is a provision in these huge trade agreements that would allow foreign corporations to sue the United States or North Dakota if they determine our laws that we enacted are reducing or will reduce their profits. Our Senators, Representatives and President Obama need to ensure that the sovereignty of the U.S. is protected, and they’re not doing that.”

DRC members and Underwood farmer Gene Wirtz urged Sen. Heitkamp to oppose fast track authority, “As a farmer, price is very significant and this particular ‘fast track’ bill doesn’t prevent other countries from manipulating their currency. Artificially low and manipulated foreign currencies hurt North Dakota farmers and ranchers because it gives those countries an unfair advantage in the marketplace.”

Jeri Lynn Bakken, rancher from Adams County, added, “Trade agreements like the two currently proposed, do not take into effect the unique circumstances of North Dakota ranchers. How can North Dakota livestock producers compete with low-wage, low-quality producers in other countries? We cannot afford another ‘one size fits’ all trade agreement. We already know the model of NAFTA doesn’t work. Why would these trade agreements, using the same model be any better for our state and its producers?”

Of over 500 past trade agreements since 1974, only 16 have been “fast tracked.” Dakota Resource Council opposes “fast track” because they believe in robust public discussion and transparency.

“The fight is not over because Congress will still vote on the particular agreements, although with limited debate and a simple majority needed to pass,” Bakken added. “Fair trade agreements emerge when the trade negotiating process is open and democratic, ‘fast track’ takes away transparency.”

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Founded in 1978, Dakota Resource Council is a statewide, multi-issue organization bringing together farmers, ranchers, small business owners, workers and other North Dakotans to address issues that affect their lives and livelihoods.