

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations



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Statement by AFL-CIO President John Sweeney On the Expiration of President Bush's Fast Track Authority June 28, 2007

This week, working families, both here and abroad, will gain a little more security as President Bush's "fast track" authority to negotiate trade agreements with minimal input from Congress will expire. For the last six years, this Administration has negotiated one bad trade deal after another, each agreement passing by the slimmest of margins, over the objections of working people worldwide.

President Bush's trade agenda has failed because he has ignored the legitimate concerns of so many who are affected: workers, environmental, development, and human rights activists, family farmers, and many domestic producers. It now appears likely that Congress will refuse to give the President yet another blank check.

Congress must use this opportunity to assert its constitutional authority over trade policy, so that it can craft a set of rules that will put the interests of working families in the U.S. and around the globe front and center – instead of those of corporate interests.

The Democratic leadership in Congress has made significant progress in improving workers' rights and environmental protections in future trade deals, and we look forward to working with them to further improve other important provisions that have not yet been addressed.

But while the new template is a positive step in the right direction, it is by no means a complete fix appropriate for any country or any situation – including the proposed free trade agreements with Colombia and South Korea. Grave human rights violations in Colombia and unequal market access issues in South Korea put these two agreements in a completely separate – and significantly more problematic – category.

In Colombia, trade unionists continue to be murdered and threatened with alarming regularity, and their murderers operate with impunity. The Colombian government must show workers and the international community that it has both the capacity and the will to tackle impunity and end the violence before we even consider signing a free trade agreement.

The proposed trade agreement with Korea is one-sided and decidedly against the interests of manufacturers and workers in the U.S. Our battered manufacturing sector simply cannot withstand another flawed trade deal that purports to open foreign markets, while instead serving to exacerbate the current imbalanced and unequal trading relationship. If the president sends this flawed deal to Congress, it should be rejected.

Opening markets and increasing trade between nations is critical in a global economy. The U.S. must continue to trade with other countries if we expect to remain globally competitive and we must explore ways to regulate that trade fairly. But absent a fair trade policy that puts working people first, we will continue down a destructive path that has led to the loss of millions of good American jobs, stagnation of real wages here and abroad, gross violations of workers' rights and the erosion of global standards.

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