



INSTITUTE
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NAFTA'S IMPACT ON MINNESOTA LAWS

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Late today, George Bush may announce the completion of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Tomorrow, a vote in Congress will tell him that it's dead on arrival, for good reason. NAFTA in its current form will threaten U.S. health, safety, labor and environmental standards. Fortunately, Congressmen Henry Waxman of California and Richard Gephardt of Missouri listened to citizens' concerns about these issues. They co-sponsored House Concurrent Resolution 246 which states that "the Congress will not approve legislation to implement any trade agreement (including the Uruguay Round and the U.S.-Mexico Free Trade Agreement) if such agreement jeopardizes United States health, safety, labor and environmental laws...." Two hundred and twenty two members of Congress, a majority, have signed on as co-sponsors to Waxman-Gephardt, which is scheduled for a vote at 9:00 tomorrow morning.

As citizens of the United States, we are concerned about what will happen to federal laws in these important areas. But as citizens of Minnesota, we are especially concerned about NAFTA's impact on Minnesota laws and the power of our state legislators to protect the public good. NAFTA will be superior to state law. In other words, this trade agreement will have more power to determine what we eat, how we handle our garbage, whether we handle other people's garbage, and how we choose to support the local consumption of Minnesota products, than our own legislature. We simply cannot let this happen. We can't let democracy be traded away at the negotiating table. That's why we've worked hard through the Minnesota Fair Trade Coalition and the National Fair Trade Campaign to encourage our representatives in Washington to co-sponsor and vote for Waxman-Gephardt.

What kinds of Minnesota laws and programs might be challenged under NAFTA? Here are some examples: our restrictions on pesticides that are tougher than federal standards; parts of our highly successful Minnesota Grown Program, like the catalog that produces more than \$1,000,000 in new local sales for Minnesota producers; minority set-asides for state procurement; programs that support the state's micro-breweries and small wineries; the state moratorium on the use of bovine growth hormone; recycling programs; and our groundbreaking law which went into effect August 3 requiring that genetically engineered organisms have an environmental review prior to their release in Minnesota's environment.

What may be even more important is what will happen when state legislators want to make new laws that other countries could claim create either technical barriers to trade, or what are called sanitary-phytosanitary barriers, a fancy term for food safety. States will have to run a gauntlet to prove that their standards are scientifically justifiable and that they are the least restrictive approach for trade. Let's face it. That means lowering standards, no matter how pretty NAFTA sounds.

A vote for Waxman-Gephardt tomorrow is a vote to preserve local participatory democracy and the protection of public health and welfare that it entails. We thank Congressmen Vento, Sabo, Sikorski, Peterson and Oberstar for becoming co-sponsors of Waxman-Gephardt and urge Congressmen Penny, Ramstad and Weber to vote with them.

