

February 23, 2015

Letter to Member of Congress

We, the undersigned 40 organizations committed to local and community level responses to climate change, are writing to express our opposition to fast track trade negotiating authority. We are concerned that fast track authority would expedite the quick passage of trade agreements without a full debate or assessment of climate and other potential negative impacts, and threatens to undermine efforts to address climate change at the local and community level.

Two future trade deals are currently being negotiated by the Obama Administration, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The impact of these trade deals on climate change, and specifically the ability of communities to respond to climate change at the local and community level, have not been adequately addressed or assessed.

Community-level responses are essential to developing the resilience necessary to address climate change. Communities must retain control over their local natural resources. It is at the local level where U.S. citizens are directly experiencing the impacts of climate change with mounting energy costs, rising variability in farm production, increasing damage to land and water resources, transportation infrastructure damage, insurance rate increases, less stable water availability, poor air quality, and larger public health effects. Using fast track to pass TPP and TTIP before involving citizens in evaluating their climate impacts at the local level will likely limit much needed community-based climate initiatives.

A public assessment of the proposed trade agreements' climate impacts is currently impossible because the Obama Administration refuses to make the negotiating text public. Fast track trade authority would eliminate the opportunity for Congress to address climate-related concerns in the trade agreement by only allowing an up or down vote, with limited debate. This intentional strategy to eliminate public input and assessment of these trade agreements – related to climate and other important issues – means fast track authority must be rejected.

There is little question that the economic globalization largely driven by trade deals over the last several decades has contributed to the expansion of fossil fuel and other dirty energy production that cause climate change, expanded deforestation and other methods of natural resource extraction, while undermining local and community-level responses to climate change. Here are a few examples of how trade rules are already hindering community responses to climate change:

- Driving tar sands expansion and running pipelines through rural communities and tribal lands. Trade rules under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) actually [require Canada to export](#) an ever-increasing amount of oil to the U.S. The export of climate-polluting tar sand oil is driving a push to construct the Keystone Pipeline and expand the Alberta Clipper pipelines, thereby disrupting rural communities, farmland and sovereign Native American nations. Cheap tar sand oil has the additional climate impact of undercutting the development of cleaner, community-based energy in the U.S.
- Undermining the creation of green jobs to produce locally-sourced energy. Trade rules under the World Trade Organization [challenged an Ontario policy](#) designed to support the creation of green jobs to produce locally-sourced renewable energy, by claiming that it discriminates against foreign corporations. Sadly, the Obama Administration has [targeted a similar program](#) in

India. A number of U.S. state programs and local programs to support local, clean energy production that support local companies and create jobs have been identified as potentially violating existing trade rules.

- Challenging support for U.S. farmers growing sustainable, perennial feedstocks for local biofuel and biomass markets. [Farm and energy programs](#) that are available only for U.S. farmers targeting local markets may violate WTO rules. National and state-based policies supporting farmers growing feedstocks for local production of cellulosic ethanol have come under question.
- Granting multinational corporations the right to legally challenge the ability of countries to set their own energy policy. Trade rules have allowed Swedish companies to [challenge a German ban](#) on nuclear energy production, undermining the country's ability to decide what kind of energy it wants to use.
- Weakening the rights of local communities to set prohibitions on fracking in order to protect waterways. Trade rules under NAFTA were used by an energy company [to challenge](#) a Quebec ban on fracking, designed to protect the St. Lawrence River.

There is already evidence that these new trade deals will impact climate-oriented policy. For example, under both the TPP and TTIP the United States Department of Energy would be required to automatically approve all exports of natural gas to countries included in the pacts. Automatic approvals of natural gas export limits would greatly expand the damaging practice of fracking in rural communities around the country. Others see the agreements as a chance to lift the U.S. ban on crude oil exports, another potential source of increased emissions and oil fracking.

Both TTIP and TPP grant multinational corporations' additional legal rights to challenge nearly any local rule or regulation they feel could impact their future profits. These damaging corporate rights provisions, known as Investor State Dispute Settlements, could directly impact the ability of local communities to respond to climate change.

While climate change will affect everyone, it's important to recognize that some communities—often the most vulnerable— will be more affected than others. The same is true for trade agreements – where there are winners and losers in any trade deal. Unfortunately, it is often the same communities that are most impacted by both climate change and trade deals. Low income urban communities, who have seen jobs offshored and local businesses shuttered due to trade deals, are vulnerable to rising energy costs and increased air pollution. Rural communities, and especially diverse and traditional rural communities, have also seen the trade deal related loss of community viability, local businesses and farms, experience longer driving times and are more vulnerable to weather-related infrastructure and resource damage. Mitigating impacts on tribal communities would require full consultation with the Tribal Nations who already face huge resource and climate issues.

Climate impacts at the community level have not been fully or adequately considered prior to passing past trade deals. This has been a crucial mistake that continues to drive global increases in greenhouse gas emissions and hinders our ability to build bottom-up solutions to climate change. We believe the combination of secret trade negotiations and fast track approval represent an affront to democracy, pose a grave threat to the climate and must be rejected.

Sincerely,

Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy; Minnesota

Barnett Shale Hell; Texas
Center for Food Safety; California
Community Alliance for Global Justice; Washington
Delta Land & Community; Arkansas
Earth Day Los Angeles; California
Earth Law Center; California
Environmental Justice Committee, Thomas Merton Center; Pennsylvania
Farm Aid; Massachusetts
FLOW (For Love of Water); Michigan
Food & Water Watch; Washington D.C.
Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature
Global Exchange; California
Green Career Central; California
Green Map System; New York
Honor the Earth; Minnesota
Illinois Citizens for Clean Air & Water; Illinois
Institute for Local Self-Reliance; Minnesota
Institute for Policy Studies, New Economy Maryland Project; Maryland
International Forum on Globalization; California
Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future; Maryland
Labor Network for Sustainability; Maryland
Liberty Tree Foundation; Wisconsin
Living Economies Forum; Washington
Local Futures; California
Long Island MoveOn.org; New York
Main Street Project; Minnesota
New Paltz Women in Black; New York
NC Environmental Justice Network; North Carolina
Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group; New York
Northwest Farm Bill Action Group; Washington
Park Slope Food Coop; New York
Rainforest Relief; New York
Roots of Change; California
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter & NYC Group; New York
South Sound Sierra Group; Washington
Sustainable Economies Law Center; California
Tilth Producers of Washington; Washington
Virginia Association for Biological Farming; Virginia
Waterkeeper Alliance; New York
Western Sustainable Agriculture Working Group; Nevada