

TESTIMONY OF MARK MACPHERSON
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ON THE TRANS PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP (TPP)
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATIONAL RESOURCES
MAY 21, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mark McPherson. I am an organizer with Joint Council 37 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which represents some XX,XXX members here in Oregon. I have been a Teamster for XX years and a labor organizer for XX.

The Teamsters have many grave concerns regarding the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, OR what we have taken to calling NAFTA on steroids.

First we are concerned with the labor rights provisions of the agreement; we do support the current US negotiating position, which stands for core labor rights that are enforceable by trade sanctions. However, it is worth noting that we have yet to see a free trade agreement that has improved worker's rights – either here in the US or the world over. 1,100 garment workers were killed just last month at a shabby facility in Bangladesh – the latest sacrifices at the altar of free trade.

Second, we are stunned by the secrecy with which this broad ranging agreement is being negotiated. No one outside of the negotiating countries and industry representatives has seen what is in the agreement – not members of Congress, not environmental groups, not labor unions, not state legislators. TPP chapters will include such broad ranging topics as Investment, the Environment, Government Procurement, Intellectual property and others that will impact every facet of American life, but we're not supposed to know what's in them.

Third, we are particularly concerned about the Dairy Chapter in the TPP. The Teamsters represent approximately 30,000 workers in Dairy production and processing here in the United States, and an additional 10,000 in Canada. This includes about 600 workers at eight facilities in Oregon. That number may seem relatively small, but its impact is substantial when we consider the other jobs in warehouse, transport, and retail that rely on this core Teamster Dairy work.

As we understand it – and again, this process is taking place in secret – the pending TPP trade agreement will have tremendous impact on where and how dairy products are produced and processed both here in Oregon, and throughout the United States. We are concerned about sanitary standards and market access – in short, concerned that the agreement will be unhealthy and will kill US jobs in the Dairy Industry. Many of us may not know much about New Zealand, which is one of the twelve countries in negotiations, but it is my understanding that New Zealand is to milk what Saudi Arabia is to oil. New Zealand has a monopolistic dairy sector wherein essentially one company, Fonterra, has evolved only several degrees from a state owned entity. New U.S. market access for New Zealand would be especially damaging not only to Teamsters, but to Oregon Dairy Farmers as well.

For the past several months, the Teamsters Union, on behalf of its 1.4 million members and their families, has been making essentially three simple requests:

1. We have asked that the US Trade Representative publish all negotiating texts, consult with the relevant congressional committees and stakeholders (and Oregon should be considered a stakeholder); and provide a thorough and public trade balance assessment of how this trade agreement would impact the US Dairy Industry.
2. We have asked that the Congress provide trade negotiators with mandatory negotiating objectives that guarantee US goals are met regarding: food safety, food sovereignty, conservation, elimination of currency manipulation, and worker rights;

And

3. We have asked for a process by which a majority of the Congress must vote to certify that the pact is in the public interest, and that the negotiating objectives I just mentioned have been met before the pact can be signed.

To date – none of this has happened.

We have learned from experience that there is nothing FREE about Free Trade. Over the years, these agreements have cost millions of American jobs, and our trade deficit balloons shortly after each deal is inked.

Why should we believe that this one will be any different?

I think we already have the answer. I think that the answer is that it won't be. That's why, although this agreement will impact all of us in virtually every aspect of our lives – including the milk we pour into our cereal every morning – we haven't been able to see it. It's a big, bad secret. We know the drill. After working on a multi-volume document for over 3 years – it will be shoved in front of congress for a rushed, take it or leave it vote – and we'll be told it has to pass or the world will end.

As a Teamster I know more than a little bit about negotiating. The first rule is that you better be doing it in the best interests of the members – not what you “think” is in their best interest – but what they tell you is in their best interest. If they are not in the loop every step of the way – it's a bad deal. It all falls apart and nothing works.

This TPP is a bad deal. And because our requests have gone unheeded, we have joined with our Brothers and Sisters in Teamsters Canada, the National Farmers Union, the National Family Farm Coalition and a growing global cohort from Mexico to Japan, to demand that the Dairy chapter should be abandoned. In the TPP, Dairy should be taken off the table.

I hope that the members of this committee, and the State of Oregon, can join us in making sure that message is heard.

Again, I thank you for your time this morning.