March 25, 2015

Dear Senator:

I understand that a new Fast Track bill will soon be introduced. According to press reports, there has been deep disagreement within the Finance Committee over so-called “improvements” to the bill, particularly over whether it will contain any provisions to hold the executive branch accountable for achieving Congressional negotiating objectives and a balanced trade agreement.

The Constitution vests power over international trade with the Congress. Congress should not abandon its Constitutional authority by allowing the executive branch to disregard its objectives and hide its activities but still be awarded with preferential and expedited treatment.

Let me be clear, the provisions described in the press are unacceptable. Our high standards for the reform of the broken trade authority process are not intended to subject a trade deal and its implementing legislation to an unwieldy vote-a-rama process. Our goal is to ensure that bad deals go back to the negotiating table instead of becoming bad laws. Some in Congress have implied that this simple process is too much to ask, but this shows just how dysfunctional U.S. trade policy is.

Any evaluation process that lies solely within the discretion of the committees responsible for trade policy (Finance and Ways & Means) simply won’t provide a reliable measurement of the quality of the trade deal. It is widely conceded that neither committee is representative of the opinions of the full Congress when it comes to trade.

Nor should the process set impossibly high super-majority vote thresholds. If Fast Track privileges can be granted to a trade agreement on a simple majority vote, it is reasonable to expect that the privileges could be removed with a simple majority vote.

Trade should be just one of many tools to help create jobs and raise living standards, not a corporate entitlement that Congress dares not hinder. There are many possible approaches to improving trade negotiating authority and creating good trade agreements. The processes described in the press to date are not among them. The AFL-CIO and its allies will remain firmly against any trade negotiating authority that retains the unaccountable, undemocratic nature of Fast Track.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Richard L. Trumka
President

RLT/WS/Ikr