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For Immediate Release:
January 28, 2014

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Obama Downplays Trade Authority, Trans-Pacific Partnership: Fleeting Mention Doesn't Even Reference Recently Introduced Camp-Baucus Fast Track Bill

Statement of Lori Wallach, Director Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch

“Corporate interests were fiercely lobbying for President Obama to dedicate serious time in this speech to pushing Fast Track and the Trans-Pacific Partnership in order to try to overcome broad congressional and public opposition to both, but instead he made only a passing reference that largely repeated his past statements.

With almost no House Democratic support for Fast Track, a bloc of GOP “no” votes and public opposition making congressional phones ring off the hook, high-profile treatment of the issue was considered necessary to revive any prospect that Fast Track could be passed in this Congress.

“Opposition has been growing to the massive Trans-Pacific Partnership deal. Implementing this NAFTA-on-steroids deal would undermine Obama’s efforts to battle income inequality. It would be like drilling a hole in a boat just as you are trying to seal the cracks that are letting the water in.”

Tomorrow at 1:15 PM, Wallach will join a telephone press briefing with Reps. Rosa DeLauro, George Miller, Louise Slaughter, Keith Ellison and Alan Grayson to address the trade elements of the State of the Union. To participate, dial 1-877-366-0711 and provide the PASSCODE: 54842826#.

Background: President Obama’s references to trade in tonight’s speech were similar to [his 2013 SOTU trade](#) mentions: “To boost American exports, support American jobs and level the playing field in the growing markets of Asia, we intend to complete negotiations on a Trans-Pacific Partnership. And tonight, I’m announcing that we will launch talks on a comprehensive Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union – because trade that is fair and free across the Atlantic supports millions of good-paying American jobs.” Tonight’s speech also replayed the administration’s standard statement on Fast Track, for instance in the [2013 Annual Trade Policy Agenda](#): “To facilitate the conclusion, approval, and implementation of market-opening negotiating efforts, we will also work with Congress on Trade Promotion Authority. Such authority will guide current and future negotiations, and will thus support a jobs-focused trade agenda moving forward.”

A [letter](#) released Monday by more than 550 Democratic base organizations and a [news conference](#) today by Tea Party leaders against Fast Track reiterates the breadth of grassroots opposition. The letter included organizations such as MoveOn, SEIU, AFSCME and the American Federation of Teachers, that have not been involved in past “trade” fights and who are strong Obama supporters.

Past [trade pacts’ role in fueling the growth of U.S. income inequality](#) is animating new entrants into the Fast Track debate. Over the weekend, former Clinton Labor Secretary [Robert Reich called for opposition to Fast Track and the TPP](#). The failure of Obama’s past SOTU trade promises is feeding skepticism. In his 2011 SOTU, Obama promised the pact would expand U.S. exports to Korea. [In the pact’s first year, exports dropped 10 percent](#), imports soared and the U.S. trade deficit with Korea grew 37 percent, equating to a net loss of approximately 40,000 more U.S. jobs.

Democratic and GOP presidents have struggled to persuade Congress to provide Fast Track authority, which Congress has authorized for only five years (2002-07) of the past 20. In late 2013, [151 House Democrats signed a letter opposing Fast Track](#). Two weeks ago, when U.S. Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.) and U.S. Sens. Max Baucus (D-Mont.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) introduced legislation to establish Fast Track, 17 [Senate Democrats](#) sent [letters](#) opposing the bill, which did not have a single House Democratic sponsor. Two groups of [GOP](#) representatives have also sent [letters](#) opposing Fast Track.

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