



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA – UAW



BOB KING, President

DENNIS WILLIAMS, Secretary-Treasurer

VICE PRESIDENTS: JOE ASHTON • CINDY ESTRADA • GENERAL HOLIEFIELD • JIMMY SETTLES

October 12, 2011

IN REPLY REFER TO

1757 N STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036
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Dear Representative:

The House is expected to vote this week on legislation to implement pending free trade agreements and renewal of the 2009 Trade Adjustment Assistance program (TAA). The UAW urges you to vote for the U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS FTA) and TAA, and to oppose the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

The automotive provisions of the original 2007 trade agreement with South Korea were substantially renegotiated by the Obama administration in 2010. The revised agreement creates the opportunity to address our Korean trade imbalance by providing greater market access for American exports and stronger safeguards to protect our domestic markets from harmful surges of Korean automotive imports.

The revised KORUS FTA keeps the 2.5 percent U.S. tariffs on automobiles and most auto parts in place until the fifth year after the agreement goes into effect. It also allows the U.S. to maintain the full 25 percent tariff on light trucks until the eighth year, and then phases this tariff out over three years. Korea will immediately reduce its electric car tariffs from 8 percent to 4 percent, and will phase out the tariff by the fifth year of the agreement. American automakers believe that the delayed tariff reductions will give them sufficient time to enhance their ability to compete in the historically-closed Korean market.

The revised KORUS FTA includes an auto-specific safeguard provision to protect against drastic increases in imported Korean vehicles that harm the domestic auto industry. The remedy for a finding of injury is the “snapback” to the original tariff levels prior to implementation of the FTA. The new agreement also addresses the pervasive use of Korean non-tariff barriers (NTBs). The KORUS FTA includes standards for the protection of worker rights, including obligations for South Korea to respect core International Labor Organization (ILO) labor rights and standards, to refrain from weakening any laws that reflect those rights in any way, and to effectively enforce labor laws designed to ensure a level playing field for American workers to compete. These labor standards are enforceable in the same manner as the commercial provisions of the FTA.

The UAW believes that the revised KORUS FTA will lead to an improvement in our economic relationship with South Korea and help to protect America’s domestic auto industry and its workers from South Korea’s tradition of engaging in unfair trade practices. Therefore, the UAW urges you to vote for the implementation of the KORUS FTA.

The UAW commends the Obama Administration’s efforts to strengthen labor and human rights protections in Colombia through the recently negotiated Action Plan, and we are hopeful that the provisions in the Plan will result in significant changes on the ground in Colombia. We note, however, that the Action Plan is not included in the Colombia FTA. Moreover, we cannot support Congressional action on the Colombia FTA until there is significant progress on the paramount moral issues surrounding the continued violence against unionists and concrete evidence that the perpetrators of these crimes are being brought to justice.

Earlier this month, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) released its new Annual Survey on Trade Union Rights, which confirmed that Colombia remains the most dangerous place on earth for unionists: last year 49 people were murdered for their trade union activities, more than the rest of the world combined; 75 additional individuals received credible death threats; at least 2,500 unionists were arrested; and thousands more fired from their jobs solely due to union membership. The Action Plan is not enforceable under the FTA, and the passage of the U.S.-Colombia FTA would seriously weaken the pressure on the Colombian government to fulfill its human rights obligations. The Colombian government has been unambiguously complicit in the abuse of labor and human rights and the signing of the FTA would be an insult to workers everywhere, and to the basic principles of freedom and justice. Therefore, we urge you to vote against the Colombia FTA.

The 2009 enhanced TAA program expired in February of this year. Since that time, tens of thousands of service workers and manufacturing workers whose jobs were shipped to China and India have been ineligible for TAA retraining benefits, and workers who have been certified for TAA have received reduced benefits. The UAW urges you to vote for legislation already passed in the Senate to reinstate the provisions of the 2009 TAA so that workers whose jobs have been offshored have an adequate opportunity to find reemployment.

Accordingly, the UAW urges you to vote for the KORUS FTA and TAA, and to vote against the U.S.-Colombia FTA. Thank you for considering our views on these very important matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'B. Somson', followed by a long horizontal flourish line extending to the right.

Barbara Somson
Legislative Director