

# Sen. Wyden gets an earful from free trade opponents

By DON McINTOSH  
Associate Editor

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) voted for NAFTA and all but three NAFTA-style trade deals since then. But he's in agreement with organized labor about one thing: Trade negotiations shouldn't take place in secret.

In May, Wyden introduced the Congressional Oversight Over Trade Negotiations Act, which would require U.S. trade negotiators to share documents with members of Congress and their staffs. The bill, co-sponsored by Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and two other senators, was provoked by the refusal of U.S. trade negotiators to divulge any details about negotiations under way to create the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), a NAFTA-style trade deal that could eventually cover the entire Pacific Rim.

On Aug. 13, Wyden brought the issue home with a "listening session" about TPP at a federal building in Northeast Portland. At the meeting, Wyden heard from an invited panel and from constituents. Most of the panel consisted of corporate and industry representatives who support TPP, but most of the crowd was critical.

Panelist Arthur Stamoulis, director of the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign, drew the biggest applause.

"Despite 13 major rounds of negotiations and requests by hundreds of thousands of Americans, the U.S. trade representative still refuses to tell the public what he's been proposing in our name," Stamoulis said. "His office has also indicated that they have no intention of releasing any text until the negotiations have concluded and the pact is signed, at which point it will be very difficult to effect any kind of change."

"That lack of transparency is anathema to democratic policy-making, but it's also a rollback," Stamoulis said. "Even the Bush Administration pub-



"We cannot afford another job-killing trade deal," Oregon Fair Trade Campaign activist Elizabeth Swager tells U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden at an Aug. 13 public meeting about the Trans Pacific Partnership. "Before NAFTA we had a trade surplus with Mexico," Swager said. "Now it's a massive deficit."

lished the bracketed text of the Free Trade Area of the Americas [a multi-lateral trade deal that failed to get off the ground]."

Wyden agreed with Stamoulis: "Something's way out of whack when special interest groups can . . . get access to the whole thing, and have more access to it than elected officials and the American people."

"Too often trade agreements have only benefitted a few multinational corporations," said panelist Tom Chamberlain, president of the Oregon AFL-CIO. "And local businesses, local workers, and workers in our trade partner countries often end up worse off."

If organized labor was looking for allies in opposing NAFTA-style deals like TPP, it didn't have to look far: The auditorium was packed with about 200

people who'd turned out during the workday and waited in a long line to get through a security check to attend. Most of them were mobilized by environmental organizations, and were there to oppose export of coal and liquid natural gas to Asia. Their opposition was based on concerns over local environmental impacts, as well as the contribution to global climate change that could come from additional fossil fuel burning.

But opposition to natural gas exports got a business argument as well at the

meeting. Pam Barrow, an energy expert representing the Northwest food processing industry, said the region's industries benefit from cheap domestic natural gas. Asians pay six times as much for natural gas. Barrow argued, and Wyden agreed, that if natural gas exports take off, Asian prices will come down, and Northwest prices will go up, hurting industry in a big way.

"Natural gas is a strategic American advantage today," Wyden said. "I'm

particularly concerned that industries like food processing, heavy equipment manufacturing, steel, that we preserve your ability to get reasonable energy prices."

TPP is currently being negotiated between the United States and nine other Pacific Rim countries, including Vietnam, Mexico and Canada, and could ultimately include all 21 members of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

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## THE FIRST LABOR DAY

Two men have been credited with suggesting a holiday to honor working people in the United States — Matthew Maguire, a machinist from Paterson, N.J., and Peter J. McGuire, a New York City carpenter who founded the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners. Both men played an important part in staging the first Labor Day parade in New York City on Sept. 5, 1882. In 1887, in accordance with the plans of the Central Labor Council, Oregon became the first state to make Labor Day a legal holiday. In 1884 the first Monday in September was selected to be the holiday, as originally proposed, and the Central Labor Council urged similar organizations in other cities to follow the example of New York and celebrate a "workingmen's holiday" on that date. The idea spread with the growth of labor organizations, and in 1885 Labor Day was celebrated in many individual centers of the country.

As the years went by the nation gave increasing emphasis to Labor Day. The first governmental recognition came through municipal ordinances passed during 1885 and 1886. From them developed the movement to secure state legislation. The first state bill was introduced into the New York Legislature, but the first to become law was passed by Oregon on Feb. 21, 1887. During the year four more states — Colorado, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York — created the Labor Day holiday by legislative enactment. By the end of the decade Connecticut, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania had followed suit.

By 1894, 23 other states had adopted the holiday in honor of workers, and on June 28 of that year Congress passed an act making the first Monday in September of each year a legal holiday in the District of Columbia and the territories. President Grover Cleveland signed it into law making Labor Day a national holiday.

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