

Avakian urges Congress to nix TPP trade deal

Panel at AFL-CIO-sponsored event says fast track trade deal is a power grab by large corporations and should be stopped by Congress

By Michael Gutwig
Editor & Manager

Calling it “the single biggest threat to job opportunity in our country right now,” Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian urged Congress to reject the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement.

Avakian was part of a community panel discussion on trade policies April 9 sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO. Several hundred people attended.

Also on the docket were national AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) President Ed Hill; Mary King, labor economist at Portland State University; Marty Hart-Landsberg of Lewis & Clark College; Barbara Dudley of the Working Families Party; and Elizabeth Swager of the Oregon Fair Trade Campaign.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) was invited to speak, but he declined due to other commitments. Wyden is the key negotiator for U.S. Senate Democrats on fast track, also referred to as trade promotion authority. He will make or break the decision to hold a fast track vote.

Fast track is legislation that would make it easier for Congress to pass the TPP—a secret agreement being negotiated with 11 other Pacific Rim nations. Under fast track, after a deal is presented, Congress must hold an up-or-down vote within 90 days with limited debate and no amendments on a document with several thousand pages.

“Fast track itself is really a non-starter. Everybody needs to oppose fast track,” said Avakian, questioning how anyone could

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— Oregon
Labor Commissioner
Brad Avakian



TOP PHOTO: Oregon Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian (third from right) waits his turn to speak at a community discussion on fast track and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Avakian said the proposed free trade deal is the single biggest threat to job opportunity in our country.”

PHOTO RIGHT: National AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler (right), chats with Rose Etta Venucci, president of IATSE Local 28.



support expediting the process on a treaty that’s been negotiated in secret, with no oversight, with no public purpose behind it, “but with the clear purpose to simply benefit wealthy corporate interests.”

He said the North American Free Trade Agreement already has stripped over 8,200 living wage jobs from Oregon, and that agreements with China and Korea have cost the state 62,000 jobs—six million manufacturing jobs nationwide.

“Oregon has lost over and over and over again under free trade agreements. And I’m telling you now, we certainly cannot afford another one,” Avakian said.

Economics professor Marty Hart-Landsberg said the American public is being lied to about the nature of the TPP and other trade agreements.

“The fact is, the government ... doesn’t have the slightest idea

of what this agreement will do in terms of our GDP, or employment. What it knows is—it will greatly effect corporate profits and power, and that is what it cares about. The rest is all salesmanship.”

Hart-Landsberg said the U.S. has a history with trade agreements “and they’ve been harmful.” Trade deals, he continued, “are mostly about other things—though trade is a little part of it.”

“The government knows that the more people know about these agreements, the more they’re going to be against them. So they want to fast track them. They want a procedure that will allow a quick vote. And most politicians like that, because they know if they vote for something that everyone knows is bad, they’re going to be in trouble. So they would rather get the corporate money, and take it, and have a fast track so no one’s really go-

ing to have much attention on what they’re doing, and then they can be ‘shocked’ to learn that this agreement is like the past seven agreements that have the very same chapters.”

Ed Hill, international president of the IBEW, talked about a legal provision in the proposed TPP called the “Investor-State Dispute Settlement.” ISDS is a process in which foreign investors can sue governments in special tribunals comprised of trade lawyers if new regulations reduce expected profits.

“We’re talking about labor laws, health and safety regulations, even wage and hour laws,” he said.

Hill pointed to a French multinational corporation that recently brought a case against the government of Egypt, challenging that country’s decision to raise its minimum wage. In another case, a major British corporation sued the Indian government for changing its tax laws.

“Don’t think it can’t happen here. It can, and it will,” he said.

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Liz Shuler urged union members and allies to keep the pressure on Wyden and Oregon’s congressional delegation. “We’re close,” she said.

In conclusion, Shuler said that if the TPP was such a good deal for the American people, “why is it being negotiated in secret?”

Stop Fast Track rallies slated in four Oregon cities April 18

Workers are stepping up the pressure on U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and members of Congress to stop Fast Track for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Organize labor and several of its allies will host rallies Saturday, April 18, in Portland, Eugene, Bend, and Medford.

In **Portland**, protesters will gather at Terry Schruck Plaza starting at 1 p.m. The Plaza is located between Southwest Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue on Madison Street downtown.

The rally in **Eugene** begins at 2 p.m. at 7th and Washington Street downtown.

In **Bend**, rallygoers will gather at 2 p.m. at Brandis Square, located on the corner of Wall Street and Newport Street

downtown.

In **Medford**, protesters will meet at 2 p.m. at Vogel Plaza downtown.

All union members are asked to contact Sen. Wyden and urge him to oppose fast tracking the TPP. He can be reached at 1-866-828-4162.

Sponsors of the anti-fast track rally include the Oregon AFL-CIO, United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, Working Families Party, Sierra Club, Jobs with Justice, Causa, VOZ Workers Rights Education Project, and the Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United (also known as PCUN).

For more information, go to www.oraflcio.org/4-18/.