

Portland should join other progressive cities in opposing TPP trade agreement

Portland is a national leader in addressing climate change. City Council passed a historic resolution to oppose new fossil fuel infrastructure last year, and with citywide participation in the Climate Action Plan, we've reduced carbon dioxide emissions to 15 percent below 1990 levels, placing us well ahead of the national trend.

So why then, when other cities around the country are taking a stand against an international trade agreement that could be catastrophic to Earth's fragile climate, are officials standing quietly on the sidelines?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a multi-national trade agreement among the United States and 11 other Pacific Rim countries. The deal will govern a whopping 40 percent of the global economy, creating the largest trade zone in the world.

Signatories include some of the United States' biggest trading partners – Canada, Mexico and Japan – as well as several countries with spotty human rights records, such as Brunei, a country where being LGBTQ is a death sentence, and Vietnam, where clothing items are often made with forced and child labor.

Critics of the deal – who exist on both sides of the political spectrum – warn the agreement would send even more American jobs overseas, roll back environmental protections to air, water and land, and erode labor laws.

One of the most disturbing provisions of the TPP, should it be enacted, is that it will expand a tool that corporations are already using under NAFTA to sue governments that stand in the way of their profits. It's called the Investor-State Dispute Settlement system, and if you want to learn more about it, there will be a panel discussion at 7 p.m. March 31 at First Unitarian Church downtown.

While all 12 countries signed the controversial trade deal in February, it's far from being enacted.

Each country must still ratify the agreement, and in the U.S., that means Congress must pass a bill to implement it. President Barack Obama wants it done this year.

Corporations wishing to advance the trade deal, as it will likely equate to astronomical financial gains, are heavily influencing our representatives in Washington, D.C.

It's imperative that green-thinking citizens and municipalities ensure their voices are heard on Capitol Hill as well.

That's why city councils in New York City, San Francisco, Seattle, Eugene and, earlier this month, Spokane, Wash., have all passed

symbolic yet hard-to-ignore resolutions in opposition to TPP.

When Seattle passed its resolution in March 2015, Puget Sound Business Journal quoted council member Nick Licata as saying: "We are a port city. This will send a very strong message to Washington, D.C."

Portland should also take advantage of its position as a major West Coast port.

But while all of the city councils that passed an anti-TPP resolution did so unanimously, only one member of Portland's City Council, Commissioner Amanda Fritz, told Street Roots she would support a resolution to oppose TPP.

Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioners Steve Novick, Nick Fish and Dan Saltzman all declined to state their position on the trade agreement.

If Portland were to pass such a resolution, it could potentially influence Oregon's members of Congress – many of whom plan to vote in favor of the deal.

While most environmental and labor groups are vehemently opposed to TPP's enactment, Portland's business community – including giants Intel and Nike – have voiced their support, saying it could help them create more jobs in the U.S. The Oregonian has also come out in favor of the agreement, citing the potential economic boost it could give Oregon.

While making economic gains and creating jobs is necessary for the livelihood of many Oregonians, it cannot come at the cost of our climate – which, according to NASA, hit 2 degrees Celsius above normal in the Northern Hemisphere last month for the first time in recorded history.

This was the threshold at which scientists have warned the climate may become dangerous to humanity. While we only hit this milestone momentarily, we should do whatever we can to keep it from becoming the new normal, and that means we need to have the legal right to stand up to fossil fuel companies that are intent on extracting every last drop of oil, chunk of coal and plume of natural gas from the ground.

At a time when the Pacific Northwest is the thin green line standing between fossil fuel deposits in the Alberta tar sands, Bakken oil fields, Powder River Basin coal mines and the rest of the world, we need area leadership to unite against a trade deal that would make it easier for corporations to export these dangerous fuels through our cities and ports.

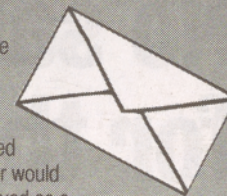
We urge Portland City Council to join other progressive West Coast cities in passing a resolution to oppose TPP and defending Oregon's environment before it's too late.

EDITORIAL

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