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Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Reauthorization Vital to Balance New Free Trade Deals

Washington, DC – The bi-partisan agreement to reauthorize the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program by Senator Max Baucus (D-MT) and Representative Dave Camp (R-MI) will restore vital retraining, health care and accessibility provisions for workers who have lost their jobs as a result of U.S. trade policies that have shifted jobs abroad. TAA provides opportunities for trade-impacted workers to train for new careers and support their families as they transition to new jobs. The program has assisted thousands of laid-off workers, particularly in the wake of the recession, and reauthorization would continue vital provisions that expired in February.

The National Employment Law Project's executive director, Christine Owens, hails this compromise, stating that "TAA has a proven track-record of easing the job loss and career transition that trade-impacted workers in the U.S. face. Reauthorization of this historically bi-partisan program is the least Congress can do to help balance the jobs lost to trade at a time when unemployment remains high, especially in parts of the country most impacted by trade. It's high time that Congressional leaders found the will to rise above partisan politics and do what's best for our nation's trade impacted workers. We look forward to seeing this reauthorization package approved in short order because the workers who have been denied coverage and benefits should not be made to suffer any longer."

The Baucus-Camp agreement will maintain adequate retraining funds, the 2009 expansions of TAA which allow for service workers and additional production workers to participate in the program, a robust health care tax credit so that workers and their families can maintain health insurance, and provisions which make applying for this program more accessible for workers, many of whom apply for certification without the benefit of legal counsel or any representative to help them with the process.

Additionally, because the program was not reauthorized when the 2009 version expired, the Department of Labor and its state counterparts have been running two different programs this year, with recently displaced workers eligible for vastly diminished benefits and programs than those laid off last year. The compromise will make the reauthorization fully retroactive, a move that will benefit not just workers and the economy, but also those who staff these programs at the state and federal level, saving much needed resources all around.

Congress's long overdue update of TAA in 2009 came in response to significant shifts in the U.S. economy. For decades, workers in manufacturing were the main victims of imbalanced federal policies that rewarded companies for shipping American jobs abroad. Today, service workers in once-secure fields such as accounting, computer programming, and health care are as vulnerable to trade as their manufacturing counterparts were a generation ago.

The 2009 changes expanded the program to cover public- and service-sector employees as well as shifts in production to non-Free Trade Agreement countries such as China and India. More than one-third of TAA layoffs were service-related in 2010, and because of the updates to TAA that Congress adopted in 2009, many were eligible to participate in the program.

“Over the past decade, Congress has passed more than a dozen free trade agreements, which have caused millions of U.S. workers to lose their jobs, often without opening doors to new opportunities. It is vital that Congress reauthorize TAA so that displaced workers can continue to get skills retraining and reemployment services to help them find good-paying jobs, provide for their families, contribute productively to their communities and restart their careers,” said Owens.

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