

Civil Society, Environmentalists Firmly Opposed to Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

Widespread Environmental Opposition to TPP Leads to Embarrassing White House Statement Claiming Environmental Support – the Opposite of Reality

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The White House has published a handful of comments from “environmental groups” implying widespread support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership and other corporate trade agreements. Yet these cherry-picked comments from some of the most conservative, corporate-funded environmental groups actually reveal the administration’s desperation to find any support for such deals.

Indeed, the reality is that scores of major environmental organizations including Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council, League of Conservation Voters, Defenders of Wildlife, Union of Concerned Scientists, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, 350.org, and many others oppose fast-track for the TPP. Many recognize the TPP is a backward step for environmental protection that will help push the world over the tipping point for climate change.

The White House’s false image of environmental support for the TPP

The White House is having a hard time generating any momentum for fast-track trade authority for the TPP and other agreements. The Obama administration pushed to stop the [Seattle City Council](#) from opposing fast-track legislation and the TPP, but instead got a unanimous vote against them from a major port city that trades with Asia.

One of the key issues that has fostered opposition to the TPP is the impact of the agreement on the environment. In order to counter the reality of broad environmental opposition, the [White House published an article](#) seeking to spin reality. The White House carefully selected environmental groups that are heavily corporate-funded and then cherry-picked quotes inaccurately portraying their position. In fact, [all the groups quoted by the White House have said they have not endorsed the TPP](#) and are waiting to see what the agreement says.

In response to the White House effort [Karthik Ganapathy, a spokesman for 350.org said](#): “So many groups and organizations who care about climate change have repeatedly bashed this corporate giveaway — and suggesting otherwise is nothing short of misleading cynicism.” And, [Jake Schmidt, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council’s international program said](#): “The White House took some of their statements and spun them out. There are a large number of environmental groups that came out pretty clearly and said ... ‘What we’ve seen on TPP doesn’t look good.’”

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carefully selected quotes from environmental groups that are heavily corporate-funded, then it cherry-picked quotes inaccurately portraying the positions of these groups.

The first quote comes from Carter Roberts, CEO of the World Wildlife Fund. WWF, which is [viewed as one of the most conservative](#) environmental groups, receives more than [\\$50 million in grants from the government](#), making up 19 percent of its funding. [Corporate Watch accuses](#) WWF of being too close to businesses to campaign objectively. [WWF was one of seven](#) environmental groups that provided cover for President Clinton to fast track NAFTA. In 2010 WWF [received \\$80 million](#) from corporations, including many heavy-polluting industrial or energy companies. Some donors are actively involved in deforestation and other environmental abuses, and WWF has [hired executives](#) from those companies.

[Jeffrey St. Clair wrote for Counterpunch](#) in 2002 that WWF “functions more like a corporate enterprise than a public interest group.” He continued, reporting that it “rakes in millions from corporations, including Alcoa, Citigroup, the Bank of America, Kodak, J.P. Morgan, the Bank of Tokyo, Philip Morris, Waste Management and DuPont. They even offer an annual conservation award funded by and named after the late oil baron J. Paul Getty. It hawks its own credit card and showcases its own online boutique. As a result, WWF’s budget has swelled to over \$100 million a year and it’s not looking back.”

From this corporate/government enterprise the White House picks a quote that claims the TPP is “one of those potentially game-changing solutions . . . to help protect our planet.” This quote was lifted from [a blog post that WWF CEO Roberts penned](#) for the Huffington Post in January 2014, right after the leak of the environmental chapter which showed no environmental enforcement in the TPP.

Yet Roberts also notes in his post that the TPP could protect the environment if it “includes strong environmental obligations [that] could provide critical new protections for some of our planet’s important natural resources.” And he asks: “Do they keep their promise to create an ambitious 21st century trade deal with a fully enforceable environment chapter or do they abandon real environmental protections for weak, voluntary promises?”

Despite the promises of U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman, it seems the TPP wouldn’t even pass WWF’s test because it lacks an environmental enforcement mechanism.

The next quote, which continues to use phrasing like “if the administration can deliver,” comes from [a March 16 letter](#) to President Obama from several organizations including the Nature Conservancy, the largest and most corporate environmental group in the Americas with assets of \$6.14 billion in 2014 and [\\$1.1 billion in revenue](#). President and CEO Mark Tercek is a former managing director of Goldman Sachs. The Nature Conservancy has ties to roughly 1,900 corporate sponsors. [Its funders include notorious polluters](#) such as Arco, Archer-Daniels-Midland, BP, DuPont and Shell. Its governing board consists of numerous executives and directors of oil companies, chemical producers, auto manufacturers, mining concerns, logging operations, and electric utilities.

Indeed, the Nature Conservancy has a reputation for remaining silent on key environmental issues that involve business practices in general. But it has been known to sometimes work with corporations to weaken environmental laws, as with the [rewrite of the Endangered Species Act](#). The Nature Conservancy’s stated mission is to preserve land, yet it [permits oil drilling, timbering, mining, and natural gas drilling](#) on land donated to the organization and

has been involved with [controversial land deals](#).

The excerpt from that letter is followed by a snippet from [a March 20 statement](#) from the Humane Society, which boasts \$229 million in assets and \$125 million in annual income. While there is a constant presence of dogs and cats in its fundraising, the Humane Society is not affiliated with local animal shelters. It gives [less than 1 percent](#) of its funding to animal shelters, spending [more on its pension plan and lobbying](#). Positive comments from the Humane Society are especially strange, since one of the goals of the agreement, [according to Friends of the Earth](#), is “to undercut consumers’ right to know what is in their food and whether the food is produced in a humane manner protective of animal welfare.”

Other statements pointed to in the White House Blog come from Bloomberg Philanthropies and The Center for American Progress, a virtual White House think tank, whose former director, John Podesta, served as chief of staff to President Clinton and as counselor to President Obama.

The reality: Broad opposition in the environmental and climate justice communities

The White House is well-aware of the vast environmental and climate justice opposition to the TPP and fast-track trade authority, so it is intentionally trying to deceive the public. Forty-four environmental groups expressed their opposition to TPP and other deals like it in a [Jan. 21 letter](#) to Congress. The letter begins:

“As leading U.S. environmental and science organizations, we write to express our strong opposition to ‘fast track’ trade promotion authority and to urge you to oppose any legislation that would limit the ability of Congress to ensure that trade pacts deliver benefits for communities, workers, public health, and the environment.”

The letter goes on to specifically describe how the deals being negotiated would undermine the environment rather than protect it, and they urge a totally new approach to trade that creates a race to the top for environmental, health, jobs and other areas, rather than a race to the bottom. This new approach needs to be transparent and participatory, not secret, rushed and without broad participation, they assert.

When the letter was released, [Michael Brune, executive director of the Sierra Club, said](#), “Trade should be done right — not just fast — to protect our families and neighbors from pollution and climate disruption. Fast tracking flawed trade pacts is a deal-breaker. With fast track, we would be trading away clean air, clean water, and safe communities.”

Likewise, [Peter Lehner, the Natural Resources Defense Council’s executive director, said](#), “Congress shouldn’t give a fast lane to trade pacts that don’t protect our public health and climate. These trade bills would give foreign corporations and governments the right to challenge our bedrock protections for clean air, safe drinking water, healthy food and proper chemical safeguards.”

In a recent report, [Teamster Mike Dolan writes](#) that NRDC was one of seven environmental groups that provided cover to President Clinton when he fast-tracked NAFTA through Congress.

The environmental chapter of the TPP was [published by WikiLeaks](#) in January 2014. It was a

major setback for the TPP and fast-track because it solidified opposition to the trade agreements among environmental and climate justice advocates. Indeed, the leak showed that the TPP represents a step backward from the Bush-era deals because it provides no environmental enforcement mechanism. A [joint analysis of the leaked environment chapter by Sierra Club, World Wildlife Fund, and NRDC](#) notes, “[T]he leaked text takes a significant step back from the May 2007 agreement.”

“Environmental protections are only as effective as their enforcement provisions, and a trade agreement with weak enforcement language will do little or nothing to protect our communities and wildlife,” [Lehner said](#), further noting, “Considering the dire state of many fisheries and forests in the Asia-Pacific region and the myriad threats to endangered wildlife, we need a modern trade agreement with real teeth, not just empty rhetoric.”

As a result of the environmental community’s strong reaction to the leak, a month later more than 120 members of Congress sent [a clear message](#) to U.S. Trade Representative Froman: They could not support the TPP trade pact unless it had a robust, fully enforceable environment chapter addressing the core conservation challenges of the region.

To make matters worse, [another leak revealed](#) that the U.S. Trade Representative is actually trying to weaken language in the pact that deals with climate disruption and biodiversity. The U.S. negotiating position seeks to eliminate even a reference to climate change and the international forum designed to address the climate crisis — the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Desperate moment for the White House on trade

Why would the White House put out such a weak statement falsely implying environmental support? The administration knows that the environmental and labor impacts of the TPP and other deals are the two biggest areas of concern surrounding the deal. If there is opposition from the environmental and labor movements, it becomes very difficult to pass fast-track legislation. Yet the White House could not put out a stronger statement because there is no real support in the environmental and climate justice movements for fast track or TPP-type deals. Indeed, this misleading statement from corporate-environmentalists was the best they could do.

This is not the first time the White House has been caught attempting to mislead on an important fast-track or TPP issue. Indeed, dishonesty seems to have become a tactic:

- The U.S. Trade Representative has been making false claims that the TPP will create 650,000 jobs. For this claim, the Washington Post, which generally supports trade agreements, gave the Obama administration [four Pinocchio noses](#), the highest dishonesty score possible.
- The administration is building on the jobs lie, with some of [Obama’s political operatives creating a fake advocacy group](#), Progressive Coalition for American Jobs, to advertise the falsehood that TPP creates jobs.

- Regarding [the power of corporations to sue governments](#) when laws passed in the public interest undermine corporate profits, the administration dishonestly claims this is not a loss of sovereignty.
- And recently, when U.S. Trade Representative Froman met with Democrats in Congress to try to fudge the international trade deficit, Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI) described the dishonesty as attempts at [“baffling” Democrats “with bullshit.”](#)

Froman, appointed by President Obama, is negotiating three massive trade agreements in secret under the current administration. Now the president is pushing to rush thousands of pages of legalese through Congress without any congressional hearings and no real opportunity for citizen input — only brief arguments on the floor of Congress and then an up or down vote without amendments.

It is bad enough to secretly negotiate rigged corporate trade deals for six years, classify it as a secret so it can't be discussed and attempt to fast track it through Congress without any real debate, now to justify secret agreements with misleading statements shows it is time for President Obama to give up on passing fast track for corporate rigged agreements. The response is clear – the American people are not buying it. We need a completely new approach to trade, one that is transparent and participatory and that puts people and planet before profits.

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