



CENTER FOR FOOD SAFETY

March 25, 2014

RE: Comments on Docket number USTR-2014-0005 Concerning Proposed Public Interest Trade Advisory Committee

Dear Ambassador Forman,

Center for Food Safety is a non-profit, non-partisan, consumer and environmental organization with over 450,000 members. We focus on food safety, including the safety of genetically engineered crops and animals, and the use of pesticides, antibiotics, drugs and nanochemicals in food products. These issues are being heavily debated in the current trade agreement negotiation. Center for Food Safety has testified in front of USTR at several hearings, during which we called for greater transparency and meaningful public participation in the trade talks.

Center for Food Safety is writing to inform you that we will not nominate any candidates to your proposed Public Interest Trade Advisory Committee. While we support the need for an advisory committee that would listen to organizations with special knowledge of the public health, consumer and food safety issues raised by trade agreements, we do not support yet another body whose members must keep secret the provisions of the trade agreement being negotiated.

The United States has historically negotiated other trade agreements in a transparent way. These include the World Trade Agreement and Codex Alimentarius. We believe that the TransAtlantic and TransPacific trade agreements should be negotiated in a transparent manner as well.

One of President Obama's first acts as President was to issue a January 21, 2009 memorandum to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies on Transparency and Open Government. In this memorandum, President Obama laid out three principles of Open Government: Transparency, Participation, and Collaboration. The design of this Public Interest Trade Advisory Committee undermines all three principles. Those chosen to represent public organizations on this committee would be barred, under oath, from sharing matters under discussion. They would be prohibited from soliciting information from their colleagues who are not on the committee. Organizations not chosen by the USTR to serve on the committee would have no voice in these policy discussions at all. They could neither participate nor collaborate.

Other federal agencies frequently develop Federal Advisory Committees that deal with highly significant issues, yet hold public meetings and publish the texts of meeting proceedings. With this in mind, we believe that the USTR should develop a new proposal for its Federal Advisory Committee that reflects the Obama Administration's commitment to transparency, participation and collaboration. The current proposal does not meet those important standards. Center for Food Safety and its allies have called for the USTR to be more transparent in its negotiations.

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Inviting a few select groups behind a veil of continued secrecy is not the way to satisfy our call for transparency or the President's.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jaydee R. Hanson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J" and a distinct "R".

Jaydee R. Hanson
Senior Policy Analyst