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[Statement of U.S. Senator Phil Gramm, Senate Finance Committee Hearing, Fast Track Proposal
Totally Unacceptable - September 17, 1997] [loose]

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FAST-TRACK PROPOSAL "TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE"

Statement of U.S. Sen. Phil Gramm, Senate Finance Committee Hearing

"FAST TRACK IS AN EXTRAORDINARY POWER THAT WE HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE THE PRESIDENT. BUT WE HAVE GIVEN IT FOR ONE SPECIFIC PURPOSE AND THAT IS TO PROMOTE TRADE AND OPEN MARKETS. UNDER FAST TRACK WE GIVE UP OUR RIGHT TO UNLIMITED DEBATE, OUR RIGHT TO DELIBERATIVE CONSIDERATION, AND WE DO IT FOR A LOGICAL REASON, BECAUSE YOU CANNOT NEGOTIATE A TRADE AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND QUOTAS WHERE THERE IS GIVE AND TAKE AND ULTIMATELY A DEAL IS CUT, AND THEN HAVE CONGRESS COME BACK IN AND UNDO THAT AGREEMENT BY MAKING CHANGES. I UNDERSTAND THAT AND I SUPPORT IT.

"LET ME ALSO SAY THAT I DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THERE IS A MEMBER OF CONGRESS THAT HAS A STRONGER RECORD ON TRADE THAN I DO. I HAVE ALWAYS SUPPORTED FREE TRADE. I OPPOSED AN IMPORT FEE ON OIL IN THE MIDDLE OF AN OIL COLLAPSE IN MY STATE WHICH WAS VERY UNPOPULAR. IT GOT ME LABELED THE 'THIRD SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS' OF ALL PLACES BECAUSE I AM IN FAVOR OF FREE TRADE.

"NOW HAVING SAID THAT, LET ME MAKE IT CLEAR THAT I WILL NEVER VOTE TO LIMIT MY ABILITY OR ANY OTHER SENATOR'S ABILITY TO AMEND AN AGREEMENT THAT HAS TO DO WITH INTERNATIONAL LABOR STANDARDS. I WILL NEVER GRANT FAST-TRACK AUTHORITY TO THIS PRESIDENT THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO NEGOTIATE, IN ESSENCE, INTERNATIONAL TREATIES ON ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS AND LIMIT OUR ABILITY TO AMEND OR FULLY DEBATE THESE ISSUES.

"AS I READ YOUR PROPOSAL, IT IS TOTALLY AND ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE. IT WILL NEVER BE APPROVED BY THE UNITED STATES SENATE AS IT IS WRITTEN.

"NOW, I DO NOT KNOW WHO WROTE IT AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE THEY WROTE IT, BUT IT LOOKS LIKE A POLITICAL DOCUMENT AND NOT AN ECONOMIC DOCUMENT. THE PROVISION 5 ON PAGE 2 IS TOTALLY AND ABSOLUTELY UNACCEPTABLE - IT WOULD GIVE THE PRESIDENT LICENSE TO NEGOTIATE AGREEMENTS THAT WOULD IMPOSE LABOR STANDARDS IN THE U.S., NOT JUST AROUND THE WORLD, AND HE COULD BRING SUCH AN AGREEMENT TO THE FLOOR OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE WITHOUT OUR HAVING ANY ABILITY TO AMEND IT WHATSOEVER. THIS BILL GIVES THE PRESIDENT THE ABILITY UNDER CODE WORDS LIKE 'SUSTAINABLE GROWTH' TO SET LIMITS THAT WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF DOMESTIC LAW IN IMPOSING CONSTRAINTS ON AMERICAN INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE, WHERE WE WOULD HAVE NO ABILITY TO AMEND SUCH A PROVISION. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN BY THE PHRASE 'TRADE-RELATED' AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT YOU DON'T EITHER. IF BY TRADE-RELATED YOU MEAN IT EXPANDS TRADE, THEN THAT IS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT ARGUMENT, BUT OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING THAT REDUCES TRADE IS 'TRADE-RELATED,' TOO.

"I THINK IT AN OUTRAGE THAT THE WHOLE WORLD IS EXPANDING TRADE AND WE ARE SITTING ON THE SIDELINES BECAUSE THREE YEARS AGO THE PRESIDENT DECIDED THAT RATHER THAN TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES, HE WOULD LET FAST TRACK DIE. BUT I WOULD RATHER THAT THE U.S. SIT ON THE SIDELINES THAN TO SEE US DESTROY THE WORLD TRADING PROCESS BY INJECTING INTO IT LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS THAT WILL DISRUPT TRADE AND REDUCE THE VOLUME OF TRADE IN THE WORLD.

"I SIMPLY WANT TO SAY THIS - I THINK WE ARE OFF TO A BAD START HERE. THE WAY YOUR BILL IS WRITTEN, THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY THAT I COULD SUPPORT IT AND I INTEND TO VIGOROUSLY OPPOSE IT IN ITS CURRENT FORM.

"I THINK WHAT WE NEED TO DO IS GO BACK TO THE 1988 AGREEMENT - AND I THINK WHAT WE NEED FROM THE 1988 AGREEMENT ARE BASICALLY TWO THINGS. FIRST, THE TECHNICAL CHANGES THAT YOU NEED BECAUSE OF THE CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES IN LAW SINCE 1988. SECONDLY, WE DO HAVE A PROBLEM HERE THAT WE HAVE NEVER HAD BEFORE. NO PRESIDENT HAS EVER SUGGESTED THAT THEY WOULD INCLUDE LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN A FREE TRADE AGREEMENT - THAT IS TOTALLY NEW.

"I WOULD RATHER HAVE WORLD TRADE GO ON WITHOUT US THAN TO HAVE US, IN ESSENCE, CORRODE THE WHOLE PROCESS. THIS BILL COULD CLEARLY LEAD TO A DISRUPTION IN TRADE, A DECREASE IN VOLUME OF TRADE, AND CLEARLY COULD ALLOW THE PRESIDENT TO UNILATERALLY BYPASS THE WHOLE CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESS OF AMENDING AND DEBATE, AND CHANGE DOMESTIC LAW AS PART OF AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE AGREEMENT. WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE PROTECTED FROM THESE THINGS.

"FINAL POINT. IF THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO NEGOTIATE INTERNATIONAL LABOR AGREEMENTS, GREAT! BUT LET HIM NEGOTIATE THEM AND BRING THEM TO CONGRESS AND GIVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE DUE DELIBERATION AND TO AMEND THEM. IF THE PRESIDENT WANTS TO NEGOTIATE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL TREATIES, GREAT! BUT THEY OUGHT TO BE DEALT WITH AS TREATIES. THEY REQUIRE SUPER-MAJORITY VOTES AND I DON'T BELIEVE WE CAN, IN FULFILLING OUR CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY, GIVE THE PRESIDENT THE POWER TO DO ALL OF THESE THINGS IN THE NAME OF TRADE WHEN THE PLAIN TRUTH IS THAT THEY ARE TRADE DISRUPTING, NOT TRADE CREATING."