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June 12, 2017

The Honorable Robert E. Lighthizer
United States Trade Representative
Office of the United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20508

RE: Negotiating Objectives Regarding Modernization of the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico (Docket USTR-2017-0006)

Dear Ambassador Lighthizer:

Thank you for providing the opportunity for us to share our comments on the renegotiation objectives for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). As Members of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, we write specifically to underscore the importance of prioritizing and protecting the labor rights of workers at home and abroad through the negotiation process.

We emphasize that any trade agreement should create a more level playing field for American workers and businesses. Any changes to NAFTA must improve the lives of American working families and create jobs. Unfortunately, to date, NAFTA has left many American workers behind, in part due to substandard working conditions in Mexico that contribute to comparatively cheaper labor. We believe that improving the lives of American workers and improving the lives of workers abroad are not mutually exclusive goals, and that any agreement must ensure wages rise across the continent. The right to collectively bargain remains a centerpiece of achieving this shared prosperity, through better wages and improved health and safety on the job. Further, a principle objective of the NAFTA renegotiations should be robust labor rights and worker protections for all workers, including but not limited to, protections for migrant workers and enforceable rules against human trafficking and forced labor.

The key to making labor rights provisions meaningful is to make them enforceable. The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) has proven woefully insufficient in protecting workers' rights. At the core of promoting labor rights and international labor obligations is ensuring compliance and enforceability of those standards. We have seen that when standards are only words on a page, they do nothing to improve the lives of workers in America or abroad. These standards must not only be enforceable, but actually enforced. We recommend that the administration consider new enforcement provisions to ensure prompt action and decrease the discretion to ignore labor violations.

To this end, the administration must also ensure that negotiating partners are in compliance with labor rights obligations in practice before concluding negotiations and sending the agreement to Congress for approval. Compliance must be a condition, and not an afterthought, to advancing any trade agreement. We cannot lock ourselves into a trade agreement that could increase inequality and accelerate the global “race-to-the-bottom.”

In short, as elected officials concerned about creating a global economy that builds shared prosperity, we re-affirm that any renegotiation of NAFTA must promote a fair trade agenda that prioritizes and improves the lives of working families.

Sincerely,



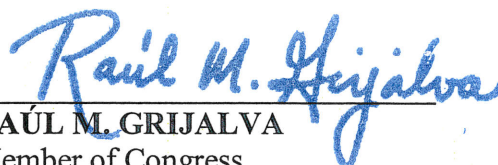
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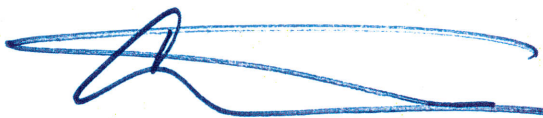
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