

WTO Ruling on Meat Labels Shows Free Trade Pacts Can Trump Safety Rules



Geneva, May 20 (RHC)-- In a blow to consumer advocates, the World Trade Organization has struck down U.S. labels on meat products indicating where an animal was raised and slaughtered, saying they put Canadian and Mexican products at a disadvantage.

The case was brought by Canada and Mexico alleging violations of NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement. The ruling validates the concerns of critics of another free trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, who say it would undermine food safety rules to benefit corporations.

In a statement, Food and Water Watch said the ruling "proves that trade agreements can and do trump U.S. laws. This is a chilling reminder that our very democracy is at stake in these trade deals," they said.

Last week, the U.S. Senate advanced a bill to give U.S. President Barack Obama fast-track authority to present the secretive TPP to Congress for an up-or-down vote with no amendments. But Obama faces opposition from fellow Democrats, including Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren, who issued a report Monday highlighting how the United States has broken its promises to enforce labor standards in past trade pacts, allowing child labor and violence against union organizers to continue abroad.

Meanwhile, another spat has shown how free trade pacts may undermine U.S. financial regulations. Canada's finance minister has alleged the Volcker Rule restricting U.S. banks trading foreign debt violates NAFTA, and has demanded an exemption for Canada.

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