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GOVERNOR BALDACCI SAFEGUARDS MAINE JOBS, PUBLIC SERVICES and DEMOCRACY FROM WTO SERVICES EXPANSION

Citing Concerns about the threat to Maine's sovereignty and public services, Governor Baldacci removes Maine from parts of WTO services agreement.

AUGUSTA, ME - As an intensified new set of World Trade Organization (WTO) services negotiations occurs this week in Geneva, yesterday Maine Governor John Baldacci took groundbreaking action to safeguard Maine jobs, public services and democracy from World Trade Organization (WTO) services expansion. In a letter to the United States Trade Representative Rob Portman, Governor Baldacci stated that Maine would not be covered by the WTO's far reaching service sector rules in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Citing concerns about the threat to public services and Maine's sovereignty, the Governor specifically safeguarded Maine's ability to set its own policies in the realms of health care, land use, education and libraries by removing Maine from coverage under these sectors of the WTO agreement.

"Trade issues are some of the most critical issues of the day. Maine cannot sit idly by and let the federal government negotiate trade agreements that undermine public services, good paying jobs, and our ability to make our own decisions at the state and local level. I'm going to do all that I can to promote trade that respects democracy and truly benefits Maine workers and businesses," said Governor John E. Baldacci (D -ME).

The WTO's controversial General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) sets down trade rules in the global service sector and requires that U.S. domestic laws must conform with commitments US trade officials make under the agreement. The agreement also threatens the privatization of public services and to undermine state and local decision making authority. It could impact a wide range of services and jobs in Maine.

"We are very concerned about the impact that the WTO services agreement could have on higher education in Maine," said Mark Gray, Executive Director of the Maine Education Association. "Committing higher education to the GATS rules would limit Maine's regulatory authority in this area and accelerate the privatization of higher education. Governor Baldacci did the right thing by ensuring that Maine's education system cannot be challenged or undermined by international trade deals."

Pamela Turner, President of the Maine Library Association, shared similar concerns, "The GATS rules could seriously threaten the ability of Maine's libraries to act as free and democratic institutions of learning and culture. We applaud the Governor's wise policy decision to protect Maine's libraries,"

"We've all seen how trade agreements like NAFTA have devastated manufacturing workers in Maine. The WTO's GATS services agreement would do the same thing to public sector workers," added Tim Belcher, Executive Director of the Maine State Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989. "This trade deals threatens the jobs, wages and occupational health and safety of all public sector workers. We commend Governor Baldacci for taking leadership on this issue and ensuring fair trade policies for Maine workers."

While trade policies are set at the federal level, states have the authority to decide whether they wish to be covered in areas such as services and government procurement, which are traditionally within the realm of state and local authority. Governor Baldacci joins Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski as the second Governor to remove his state from parts of the WTO services agreement.

Governor Baldacci's letter is available at:  
[http://www.maineairtrade.org/pdf/baldacci\\_gats\\_removal\\_ltr.pdf](http://www.maineairtrade.org/pdf/baldacci_gats_removal_ltr.pdf)