

Hello, my name is Dr. Sara Stalman. I live in Harborside Maine and work/volunteer full-time with the Maine People's Alliance. I was a member of the FTAA reality Tour that visited El Salvador 16 months ago. Like many people here, I worked hard to pass the legislation that established this commission and am so proud to stand before you now with testimony.

~~While in El Salvador I witnessed first hand the crushing effect of global trade agreements on the very existence of community and recognized that, here in Maine, we too have had vibrant stable communities (like Millinocket) crushed because of NAFTA. But I want to focus on the healthcare issue specifically this evening.~~

Living here in Maine, we are privileged to be watching universal health care evolve from an ideal, through DirigoHealth, to becoming a reality. The work, the struggle, the wins and losses have all taken place in the transparent arena of state government and citizen action.

Trade agreements and the rules in those agreements have the potential of undermining my work and the work of hundreds of Maine citizens as we push and pull, argue and applaud to move our healthcare agenda forward. No one has all the answers, we frequently disagree, but the democratic process – by definition – has us collaborating on policy that will affect us all.

Health care delivery is considered as service and, as such, can be regulated by trade agreements. There are services chapters in agreements like CAFTA and NAFTA. The GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services), as I understand it, is a whole agreement focused on service under the World Trade Organization.

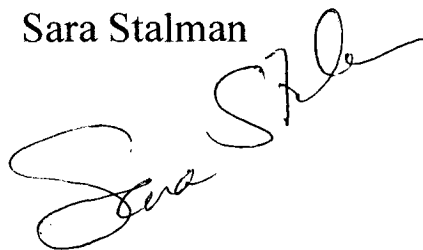
*Democracy has
nothing
to do with
Free Trade
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impose themselves
in services
like medical
and*

Service agreements, unlike border tariffs and quotas, can target ANYTHING that might be considered a “barrier” to free TRADE. And TRADE is defined ONLY in terms of market competition for financial gain. The worldview of this Monopoly Game is defined by Park Place, Water Works, Hotels and Electric Company. Living, breathing, dying people have no value in the game.

With the GATS and CAFTA’s services chapter, we are talking about corporate rights to profit infringing on our state’s ability to regulate the delivery of services to the public. And, in Maine, the “state” is us, the citizens, doing the messy work of democracy. These service agreements have the potential to undermine Maine’s citizens’ ability to define and deliver quality health care to ourselves, us, the citizens of the state.

I know that members of the commission are working to understand exactly what is happening in the ongoing GATS negotiations. Your understanding will be a human understanding -- with a human heart. As a citizen who helped to make this commission possible I ask you to insert Maine’s human voice in those negotiations wherever possible. Specifically, please investigate and raise questions about whether Maine people really benefit by having health care, including state healthcare services, covered under any specific trade agreement. Will Maine citizens benefit? Will doctors, nurses, and healthcare providers in general benefit? Will businesses and working people benefit? Will children benefit? If a trade agreement does not benefit Mainers, can we carve state healthcare policies out of these agreements? If not, what other avenues of recourse exist?

Thank you for your work, Sara Stalman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sara Stalman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S".