

Statement of Senator Paul D. Wellstone

Senate Finance Committee Hearings on Trade Adjustment Assistance

July 19, 2001

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today on this important topic. Trade Adjustment Assistance has been an essential resource to the workers, employers and communities of this nation as we confront the challenges of a global economy. I commend your comprehensive review and look forward to working with you to reauthorize an even stronger program.

I am very pleased that the Committee bill to be introduced today incorporates the provisions of the Taconite Workers Relief Act that Senator Dayton and I introduced earlier this year. That bill will ensure that all taconite workers in our state are eligible to receive full TAA assistance. I haven't read your new bill in its entirety at this point, but I intend to do so, and I fully expect to support it.

As the Chairman is aware, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Subcommittee on Employment, Safety, and Training, which I chair, has jurisdiction over the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration. DOL's infrastructure for youth, adult and dislocated worker job training programs also serves essentially as the delivery system for TAA benefits. We reformed those DOL programs in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and I am particularly interested in ensuring that we can successfully integrate the income support, job training, job search and other services available through the TAA program with the job counseling, training and other support services available under WIA. Together these two programs provide essential resources to states and localities for workers attempting to enter or re-enter the job market after losing their jobs.

Helping workers find and prepare for new jobs is critical for addressing the increasingly challenging "skills shortage" issue. Combined with the income support provided under TAA, these services are a lifeline for working families and a key to national competitiveness. We must ensure that these programs function effectively together. Any steps this Committee might take toward helping to provide needed health care, child care and other crucial benefits, are certainly a welcome start, as well.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I am delighted that the Committee bill being introduced today contains the provisions of S. 422, the Taconite Workers Relief Act. I appreciate the colloquy that the Chairman, Senator Dayton and I entered into on the Senate floor earlier this year. S. 422 makes taconite workers fully eligible for benefits under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act. Although I was gratified by the determination by the Secretary of Labor earlier this year, that the 1400 LTV workers in Hoyt Lakes who were laid off by the company were eligible for trade adjustment assistance, it is not clear that the Secretary's determination is applicable to all taconite miners in my state. The legislative solution incorporated in the Committee bill providing that taconite is directly competitive with imported steel slab, makes that eligibility clear and unambiguous. My understanding is that it also results in eligibility – as secondary workers – for employees of vendors and others who may be adversely affected by the impact of trade on the taconite mines.

This provision is essential to the well being of the hard working men and women of the Iron Range in my state. I applaud you for including the provision in your bill and pledge to do whatever I can to help move this important legislation.

Again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear here today. And thank you for the important work you are doing.