

Testimony of Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur

WTO: Will China Keep its Promises? Can it?

June 6, 2002

I would like to thank Congressman Bereuter and Senator Baucus for convening a third hearing for Commission Members. I understand that the staff-led roundtable discussions have been continuing and the future schedule holds some potential.

Today's hearing on World Trade Organization (WTO) regulation implementation is an interesting choice for a hearing topic. As we all know, our Commission was charged with examining and monitoring human rights and the rule of law in China. It is my sincere wish that China will live up to its commitments on implementation. To say that I am skeptical, however, may be an understatement.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this hearing, I will grant China great leeway. Let us suppose that China diligently works to come into compliance with WTO obligations. Will this lead to a new world of rights and freedoms for the Chinese people? I am doubtful.

Many proponents of Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for China purported that China's entry into the WTO would lead to great reforms within Chinese society, creating a near utopia. I did not support unconditional PNTR and I don't support this naïve, if not misleading, future-look. Let's be frank: rarely does commercial law lead to an expansion of human, labor and environmental rights.

I think it is safe to say that we all agree that any improvement in China's rule of law is a step in the right direction. Chinese officials must realize that rule of law means that all - including government officials - are held accountable and that the law can be used to protect, not just punish. Until now, the Chinese have been less than willing to keep their promises when it come to commercial trade agreements. If that nation truly wants to be a world player, I encourage them to prove us wrong, to live well beyond the pessimistic predictions.

Commercial transactions may have logic, but they have no ethic. Most importantly, the people of China deserve a sincere effort by their leaders to uphold internationally recognized human rights - not as a condition of a trade agreement, but as a moral right.