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### **1. FTA hearings open with union defiance**

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The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union has commissioned an independent economic study by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research to back up its case that the Australia-US free-trade agreement will cost thousands of jobs.

The union is lobbying against the trade deal, alleging the reduction in tariffs on auto components from 15per cent to zero means many Australian manufacturers will cease production or move offshore.

It was among those to address the bipartisan Joint Standing Committee on Treaties yesterday on the first day of its public hearings into the free-trade deal.

Australian Meat Industry Council national director Stephen Martyn told the committee the livestock sector appreciated the increased access to the US market for livestock producers under the deal.

But he criticised the 18-year time frame for the full benefit of the increased beef quotas to take effect.

The Australian Information Industry Association, representing 380 IT, communications, hardware and software suppliers supported the deal because its members would have access to the US government procurement market, worth \$US52billion (\$69.3 billion), said AIIA director Robert Durie.

Baxter HealthCare backed the deal because it would force a review of existing blood plasma production protocols by 2006, which could break Australian-owned CSL's monopoly of the industry.

But public-interest advocate Patricia Ranald, convenor for the Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network, which represents 85 community organisations, rejected the FTA on the grounds that it would raise drug prices.

Dr Ranald said the agreement would also influence the decisions of the taxpayer-subsidised Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme in favour of American drug company interests.

Film and television industry groups also opposed the trade deal, saying it limited Australia's ability to protect local content and gave the United States a much stronger say in determining Australia's cultural policy.

Labor continues to waver over whether to back legislation needed to implement the free-trade agreement.

The committee, chaired by South Australian Liberal MP Andrew Southcott, will hold a series of public meetings in Australian cities over the next few weeks.

It meets in Melbourne today and Hobart tomorrow.

Later this week the government will release a report containing fresh financial modelling on the free-trade agreement by Andrew Stoekel, executive director of the Centre for International Economics in Canberra.

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## **2. AFTINET rally: Sydney 4 May 12.30pm**

### **The US Free Trade Agreement is not in our interests! The Devil is in The Detail**

The Senate Committee on the US FTA is coming to Sydney to hold public hearings. This rally will be during the lunch break of the committee. Come and hear why this agreement needs to be blocked in the Senate.

Bring banners and placards.

**When:** 4 May, 12.30 pm

**Where:** Angel Place, 123 Pitt Street, Sydney

#### **Speakers:**

Senator Stephen Conroy (ALP): Shadow Trade Minister

Senator Kerry Nettle: Greens Senator for NSW and

xSenator Aden Ridgeway: Democrats Senator for NSW

Organised by AFTINET.

For more information contact Louise Southalan (02) 9299 7833 or email [lsouthalan@piac.asn.au](mailto:lsouthalan@piac.asn.au)

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## **3. Actors hold USFTA Kids Concert: Sydney 16 May**

**When:** Sunday 16 May, 11 am to 2pm.

**Where:** At Parramatta Park (Amphitheatre)

The event will be a free, family day that will focus attention on how the USFTA affects Australian culture and Australian childrens' television in particular. There will be a range of Australian T.V

stars present including cast members of Saddle Club, Playschool, Home and Away, Neighbors, All Saints and many more. Apart from T.V personalities there will be a range of other activities including a jumping castle, animal farm, face painting, sack races etc.