



LEGISLATIVE ALERT

June 22, 2015

Dear Senator,

H.R. 2146 Fast Track: Vote No

On behalf of the AFL-CIO, I write urging you to oppose H.R. 2146, the Hatch-Wyden-Ryan “Fast Track 2015” legislation. We also oppose moving Fast Track prior to any vote on Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and final passage of the Senate version of H.R. 644, the customs bill. Without assurances that TAA will pass the House, or that the customs bill will ever see the president’s desk, considering Fast Track prematurely could compound its expected negative impacts, leaving U.S. workers in the lurch and depriving the U.S. manufacturing sector of vital tools necessary to combat unfair trade.

The misnamed “Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015” is unfortunately another reincarnation of prior, failed “Fast Track” policy. It gives the executive branch the opportunity to negotiate—in secret and out of public view—as many trade agreements as it can through at least June 30, 2018 (and likely an additional three years), and send them to Congress, which may then only vote yes or no on each.

Fast Track 2015 fails to hold the executive branch accountable for achieving negotiating objectives, addressing the job-killing U.S. trade imbalance (which currently stands at \$505 billion), or ensuring that trade deals do not continue the current race to the bottom in terms of pay and benefits, worker rights, environmental protections, access to affordable medicines, food safety rules, and other vital protections for working families. In short, it will do nothing to prevent repeating the mistakes of failed trade policies that have contributed to stagnating wages, increasing inequality, and the closure of more than 60,000 factories since 2000.

The AFL-CIO has been clear that any new Trade Promotion Authority must include improved transparency, public participation and congressional oversight. Hatch-Wyden-Ryan fails on every single criterion.

America’s working families cannot afford more trade policy made by and for global corporations and economic elites—trade policy that does nothing more than shrink paychecks and further diminish America’s struggling middle class.

Trade Adjustment Assistance

The AFL-CIO will not support a TAA bill that is inadequately funded, fails to take into account job disruptions from massive trade agreements like TPP and leaves out certain workers. The Senate should be insisting on a minimum funding level of \$575 million and ensuring that public sector workers are

eligible for the program. The labor movement has strongly supported TAA for decades, but an inadequate version of TAA should not clear the way for a disastrous trade bill. We need a better TPA and a better TAA. In addition, TAA should be sent to the president's desk before consideration of Fast Track. By putting Fast Track first, there is no certainty the House will pass TAA.

H.R. 644—Customs Bill

The customs bill, which when it emerged from the Senate had bipartisan support and included enforcement provisions supported by both labor and industry, has been loaded by the House Republican leadership with numerous controversial and partisan provisions that weaken or unacceptably alter it and make it more difficult to negotiate agreements that are good for workers and the environment.

Stripped from the customs bill is a currency provision the administration opposes. This bipartisan provision, supported by labor and business, was potentially the *most* critical enforcement tool in the entire package. It would have allowed the U.S. to treat currency manipulation as a countervailable subsidy.

The customs bill also amends Fast Track bill in a way that prevents the United States from making commitments on climate change in trade agreements. Such provisions are important to creating a “21st Century” trade agenda and ensuring that trade policy does not thwart climate policy.

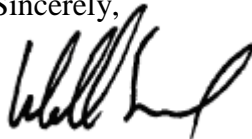
Also added to the customs bill is language weakening the Menendez trafficking amendment. Weakening this provision undermines the U.S. commitment to lead on human trafficking and raises doubt regarding the ability of the TPP to protect workers and ensure compliance by trading partners with internationally recognized ILO labor rights, including the right to be free from forced labor. This move is particularly troubling given the recent discovery of 139 unmarked graves in a Malaysian trafficking camp.

The enforcement package has also been weakened in a number of places, including Green 301 and the ENFORCE Act, undermining years of work by those standing for better, fairer trade policies. The bill also excludes other important provisions contained in the Senate bill regarding funding to enforce and monitor trade agreements.

We find it increasingly uncertain the customs bill will move through Congress should Fast Track be considered first. Simply put, it will lose all momentum, and no longer be part of the broader trade reforms many claimed were a necessary component of any trade package.

Senators should not be expected to vote on TPA until the customs bill is fixed and a revised version of both it and TAA are on the President's desk. Otherwise, the House will have no incentive to pass or improve these vital measures after the President has signed Fast Track.

Sincerely,



William Samuel, Director
Government Affairs Department