



House rejects trade package—but it ain't over

On Friday, the House of Representatives voted to reject a trade adjustment assistance (TAA) bill, a move that essentially shuts down legislation that would have granted the president the authority to approve trade agreements without first giving Congress a chance to review or amend such agreements.

A procedural move in the House earlier this week required representatives to first consider TAA. Only if it had been approved would the House have been able to consider the more contentious Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill—better known as “Fast Track.”

TAA was voted down by vote of 302 to 126, even after President Obama personally visited Capitol Hill to lobby for its support. Afterward, House leaders approved a stand-alone trade promotion bill, but under House procedures, the combined TAA-TPA trade package had already received Senate approval, so it could not advance to Obama’s desk unless the House approved the entire package.

Republican leaders in the GOP-majority House had also worked with Obama to pass the trade bills. But enough Republican defections, coupled with a general lack of support from Democrats, helped scuttle the measures.

“We want a better deal for America’s workers,” said House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

Rep. Sander Levin (D-MI) added that the trade package had included “no meaningful protections whatever against currency manipulation” by some of the nations with whom America trades—manipulation that, in the past, “ruined millions of middle class jobs.”

What does today’s vote mean?

“Today’s vote represents a clear victory for all of this country’s workers,” NALC President Fredric Rolando said. “Trade agreements should be negotiated out in the open,

where Congress can be scrutinize and amend them if necessary.

“If this entire package of reforms had passed,” Rolando said, “not only would it have allowed this and future presidents to review and approve trade deals in secret, it could have opened the door for a whole host of new threats against the U.S. Postal Service.”

The importance of today’s vote

Today’s vote also was important because, if the package had been approved and eventually signed into law, it could have paved the way for approval of a number of potentially dangerous trade agreements:

- Under the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) that’s now being negotiated, corporate banks could use the deal to get the governments that sign on to it to ban the ability to offer financial services. This would prevent USPS from generating new revenue by using its vast postal retail network to offer low-cost banking services for the tens of millions of Americans who are unbanked or under-banked.
- During negotiations for an agreement called the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) deal, for example, European Union nations have been calling on the U.S. to follow their lead and phase out the Postal Service’s monopoly on the delivery of letter mail—a direct threat to all postal workers’ jobs and to our system of affordable universal service.
- The Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) that is now being negotiated with the World Trade Organization contains language that, if approved, could threaten our ability to keep package delivery service as part of USPS’ universal service obligation. Package delivery has been crucial to the Postal Service’s financial recovery in recent years.
- Language in TiSA also could ultimately result in calls to privatize our Postal Service, potentially affecting the viability of a service that’s older than the United States itself and that has its roots in the Constitution.

“Thanks in part to the many calls from members of the NALC and our fellow AFL-CIO unions over the last few days,” Rolando said, “these particular threats have been set aside for now.”

But there’s plenty more to do

“While we know that our work on Capitol Hill is far finished,” Rolando said, “we can take pride in knowing that organized labor still has a voice, and a say, in how things work in Washington. We will need to stay just as vigilant, and just as vocal, as new postal reform measures get introduced in the coming weeks.”

What's next?

As previously mentioned, House leaders have until Tuesday to bring up TAA to again try to advance the package of bills.

If your House member voted against these bills, thank them for supporting letter carriers.

Most importantly, please thank those who opposed TAA and ask them to maintain their position, if a vote comes up again by Tuesday.

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