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Contact: Arden Manning (202) 454-5108

Congressional Democrats Escalate Criticism of Substance, Process of Obama's First Trade Pact – the Trans-Pacific Partnership

On Eve of TPP Summit in California, 132 House Democrats Demand Access to TPP Text, New Senate '21st Century Trade Agreement Act' Provides TPP Alternative

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The combination of unprecedented secrecy during three years of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) “trade” agreement negotiations and recent [leaks of TPP chapters](#) revealing that U.S. negotiators have approved extreme, troubling terms has sparked a veritable tsunami of congressional criticism and action in recent days, Public Citizen said. The 13th round of TPP negotiations will be held next week in San Diego.

On Wednesday, an overwhelming majority of House Democrats, led by U.S. Reps. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and George Miller (D-Calif.), sent a letter to the administration criticizing the secretive TPP negotiating process, demanding public release of the TPP text and raising alarm about TPP proposals that replicate past pacts and could [increase drug prices](#), undermine [Buy American policy](#) and expose U.S. [laws to attack in foreign tribunals](#). The letter, sponsored by two members of the House Democratic leadership, was signed by almost every Democratic full committee ranking member and Appropriations Committee ranking member, as well as many Ways and Means Committee members and a dozen lawmakers who supported last fall's free trade agreements with South Korea, Colombia and Panama.

“The message to President Obama from his own party is clear: Neither the public nor members of Congress will tolerate more of these NAFTA-style trade agreements, and the text of this deal must be released because there are major concerns about where it is heading,” said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. “Last week's leak of the TPP investment chapter sent shock waves through Congress because it showed that U.S. negotiators had totally abandoned Obama's campaign pledges to replace the old NAFTA trade model and in fact were doubling down and expanding the very Bush-style deal that Obama campaigned against in 2008 to win key swing states.”

Simultaneously, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) will introduce new legislation to reform the U.S. trade policymaking process and set binding standards for future agreements. The bill, The 21st Century Trade Agreement and Market Access Act, translates Obama's 2008 trade reform campaign commitments into practical public policy.

“The bill presents critical reforms to trade policymaking procedures and new rules for what every U.S. trade pact must and must not include to make sure we can harvest the benefits of expanded trade without repeating the mistakes of the past,” said Wallach. “U.S. trade officials have dubbed their TPP the 21st Century Trade Agreement, but the current TPP agenda hails from the robber baron era. U.S. negotiators would be less likely to get crossways with congressional Democrats and the public if they followed the new bill's guidelines.”

Today's major congressional letter and the new Senate bill follows a letter to the administration from a group of senators earlier this week demanding that the TPP text be released. It also follows legislation introduced in May by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) that calls for the same.

While more than 600 official U.S. trade advisors from the corporate section have full access to TPP texts, Wyden, who chairs the Senate subcommittee with jurisdiction over the TPP, has been denied access even to the U.S. proposal to the negotiations.

TPP negotiations were begun in 2008 by the George W. Bush administration. The San Diego round of talks next week will include Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. But last week, the U.S. okayed Mexico and Canada to join TPP.

“The only thing worse than NAFTA-on-steroids with any old country is NAFTA-on-steroids with NAFTA countries,” said Wallach. “What’s worse, the administration appears to have abandoned its leverage and greenlit Mexico and Canada joining the TPP without an agreement to drop their previous trade pact attacks on U.S. consumer labeling of meat and dolphin conservation policies. The American public is desperately waiting for President Obama to show some negotiating savvy, and to start fulfilling his campaign pledges and reconsider the so-called ‘trade’ model that his administration is pushing with the TPP.”

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