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## Trade and the Tea Party: Washington insiders remain clueless

By Judson Philips

Regrettably there are some in the conservative movement that have an almost Pavlovian reaction to the words “free trade.”

If something is branded as “free trade,” some will support it without thinking, and without examining what’s behind the label.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership is a so-called free trade agreement currently being negotiated behind closed doors. The Republican establishment is stepping up to favor the agreement that remains secret and whose contents are not even available to debate.

**Last week in this space**, Bill Watson of the Cato Institute claimed that the Tea Party supported so-called free trade. It is always amusing to have people who are not a part of the Tea Party movement tell people who are in the Tea Party movement what the Tea Party movement believes and supports.

The Tea Party movement does not support the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Why? There are two separate issues here. The first is giving Barack Obama fast track authority to negotiate this so-called “free trade” deal and the second is the deal itself.

The TPP is another example of the Pelosi Principle: The Pelosi Principle says Congress must pass legislation in order to find out what is in it.

That is the story of the TPP.

When you look behind the “free trade” label slapped on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, you find this is not a magic elixir that cures all ills, but a noxious brew of unsavory ingredients.

It starts with something called Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) or fast track. TPA was explicitly designed to enable the president to bypass Congress – that’s what its *supporters*

say. Conservatives are supposed to give President Obama fast track to go with his pen and phone.

Fast track allows Obama to negotiate a trade agreement in secret, sign it and then present the fait accompli to the Congress. Congress is only given a limited time to vote yes or no on the treaty and under TPA Congress cannot amend the treaty.

What conservative or Republican is willing to trust Barack Obama?

How many times has Barack Obama lied to Republicans and to the American people? Conservatives and Tea Party activists who oppose fast track authority for Obama have started referring to the Transpacific Partnership as “Obamatrade” and using the slogan, “If you like your job, you can keep your job.”

Conservatives and Republicans complain loudly and often about Obama’s unconstitutional actions, such as unilaterally rewriting a law that has been passed or not enforcing existing laws that he does not like. Why would any sane Conservative or Republican give Obama any extra powers, particularly those that are reserved to the Congress by the Constitution.

And then there’s the fact that the Trans-Pacific Partnership is not free trade. It is at best special interest and corporatist managed trade.

The Trans-Pacific Partnership treaty is being negotiated in secret. While those negotiations are being conducted in secrecy, special interests and big corporations are being given a seat at the table. Real Americans only know what has been provided through Wikileaks.

Traditionally trade agreements have dealt with two issues, taxes and tariffs. Less than a quarter of the TPP agreement, at least what we know of it, deals with taxes and tariffs. The rest of it is special deals for special interests. The rest of it is crony socialism.

Free trade does exist. We have it in the United States. There is free trade across the borders of the states and conservatives and Tea Party activists like this form of free trade. Tea Party activists like free and fair trade. They also like national borders and our nation, unlike global corporatists who have no loyalty to the country of their birth but sure know how to use big government to get taxpayer-funded bailouts and special favors.

Perhaps the only thing worse than Barack Obama’s record for openness and honesty is his track record on negotiating good deals for the United States. Every international accord he has negotiated since he has been in office has been a disaster.

Why should anyone expect the Transpacific Partnership to be any different?

The Trans-Pacific Partnership might turn out to be a good deal. Who knows? America doesn’t because the negotiations are being done in secret.

Does anyone really trust Barack Obama to deliver an international agreement that is good for America?

Does anyone really want to play Russian roulette with another bill that Congress must pass before America can find out what is in it?