



64 Unions Sign Letter Opposing Obama On Trade Authority

By Connor D. Wolf

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Sixty-four labor unions have reaffirmed their opposition to the president's unilateral trade authority in a letter to Congress dated March 2.

"As the leaders of almost 20 million U.S. workers and their families, we share your commitment to strengthening the middle class," the letter noted. "To rebuild our economy for America's hardworking families, we ask you to join us in opposition to 'fast track' trade promotion authority (also known TPA)."

Though labor unions and the president agree on many policy areas, unions have continuously opposed the White House on fast-track authority. Also known as Trade-Promotion Authority (TPA), if granted by Congress, the president would have the authority to make trade deals with other countries without them being amended or filibustered.

Leadership from the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, APWU, IBEW, CWA, ILWU and many other unions signed onto the letter to express their opposition.

"Fast track trade deals mean fewer jobs, lower wages, and a declining middle class," the letter went on to argue. "Fast track has been used since the Nixon Administration to advance deals, like NAFTA, that are sold to the American people as job creation measures."

"But these deals, written largely by and for the world's largest corporations, don't create jobs: their main purpose isn't even related to trade, it's to enshrine rules that make it easier for firms to invest offshore and increase corporate influence over the global economy," the letter continued.

While the president argues the current trade deals could open up the international market and help America promote their interests abroad, labor unions say such deals will have vastly negative consequences for American workers.

AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, one of the main signatories, warned that the trade authority will only result in lost jobs.

“The people who want fast-track, that is no debate, they want to tell you how complicated it is,” said Trumka in a video. “They want to tell you that globalization and tariffs and market share are so complicated, you can’t understand it. I understand it; let me tell you, here’s what it means, it means lost jobs and lower wages, that’s it.”

The White House has said that current trade negotiations, with the backing of fast-track authority, could vastly benefit American workers and the middle class.

“The president does continue to believe that there should be some bipartisan common ground around Trade Promotion Authority,” White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters recently. “That the idea that we can make it easier for the President to negotiate an agreement that he clearly believes would be in the best interest of American workers and American middle-class families and American businesses is something that Congress should support.”

“And so he’s certainly going to be a part of making that case to Democrats and Republicans on the Hill,” Earnest continued. “And it certainly is going to be the responsibility of members of the Republican leadership who share the President’s view of the benefit of some of these policies — that they’re going to have to spend some time making the case to their own members about why they should support Trade Promotion Authority as well.”

A paper from the libertarian Cato Institute argued that though international trade agreements can help the free market system, fast-track is not necessary to achieve it.

“Free trade agreements are an important tool to improve U.S. trade policy, and ‘fast track’ trade promotion authority has been helpful in securing the completion and passage of those agreements,” the paper said. “But, contrary to the assertion of many trade advocates, trade promotion authority is not a necessary prerequisite to passing trade agreements.”

A Heritage Foundation report hedges, coming short of voicing opposition to fast-track, but saying it should come with certain restrictions if granted by Congress.

“At a minimum, any new TPA should impose no more protectionist restrictions on trade agreements negotiated under it than were imposed in the TPA passed by Congress in 2002,” the report detailed. “Preferably, new TPA would contain explicit negotiating objectives that are designed to promote economic freedom more effectively than the 2002 TPA did.”

“If Congress decides in principle to grant new TPA for the purposes of negotiating the TTIP, it should ensure that TPA contains clear redlines that will guarantee that the TTIP is a high-quality agreement that advances economic freedom and respects U.S. sovereignty,” the report added.