

JAY AMBROSE: Commentary ... Obama treats unratified trade treaties very badly

Staff Reports

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You believe in this president, right? You still think Barack Obama, if not exactly the saint you once venerated, is way ahead of the Republicans, which is to say, you have missed the kiss-the-unions joke of tying highly needed trade treaties to a job-training boondoggle.

Consider, first off, that the Obama administration has sat on these treaties for two years, tinkering with them while saying, yawn, there's no hurry and only lately seeming to get it that, wow, they will bring \$13 billion in exports and 250,000 jobs to this beleaguered economy.

A special nudge to reality came in a report that unemployment is up to 9.2 percent. Not only is this a terrible tragedy for millions of families, it could also have dire consequences for Obama and friends in the 2012 elections.

So, says an awakened Obama to Congress, pass these treaties with Columbia, South Korea and Panama and pass them now. There was little need for urging. Both parties are more than ready to go.

But Obama is up to something else. He is not going to send the treaties over for ratification until Congress first renews Trade Adjustment Assistance, and some Republicans have said wait a second, we want to consider that program separately. Obama replied there they go again, trying to halt economic progress.

The purpose of this training program is to help people who lose their jobs because of trade (as opposed to new technology, unsupportable union demands and other reasons), and maybe you love that idea. You shouldn't. Costing a billion dollars a year, the program adds to spending that must go down — and it doesn't work.

How do we know? One way is to read a Wall Street Journal story that tells how the slumping venture was revamped in 2002 with the understanding that a comprehensive study would demonstrate new vivacity.

The study was due four years ago, but incredibly doesn't exist. My theory is that department probers, who have in fact been tracking outcomes at a cost to date of \$8.9

million, found it as disappointing as ever and their bosses have not come up with a way to make the numbers say what they don't say. Call me cynical, but as a Cato Institute study showed, much of the history of failed job-training programs has been to marry them off to "statistical shams."

Why, then, would we get such a move by Obama? Because it is also crucial to him to please unions. They hate trade, which can hurt some businesses even as it boosts many more, spurs entrepreneurship and saves the average consumer thousands a year.

According to the Wall Street Journal, half those who get the training are union members while just a third of those eligible are in unions. The jobless not in the program are limited to 99 weeks of unemployment benefits. Those in it get as much as 156 weeks.

But if jobs are what you want, you ought to visit analyses showing the president is scaring businesses away from expansion with regulatory overkill, EPA's energy-diminishing phantom chasing, the Obama-snare health plan and a berserk National Labor Relations Board now headed by a wild-eyed radical.

None of that produces jobs, and neither will imperiling the economy with too much federal debt. Although Obama now says he will go along with genuine austerity goals if he can get recession-reviving tax hikes, he has lately been pushing for an unaffordable high-speed rail system.

It would come on top of such other inanities as an original budget this year that hiked the debt over the next decade by \$10 trillion, enough money to reach to the moon and back and then halfway up again if stacked as \$1 bills. Do they make debt ceilings that high?

Obama finally seemed to be coming through on trade, but not really, not when he insisted on linking the vote to the job-training con. I hope the public is paying attention.

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