



Lawmakers exploring ways to rein in Trump on trade

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Congressional lawmakers are exploring ways to rein in President-elect Donald Trump, who has threatened to impose high tariffs on countries and companies that could cause trade wars.

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) is spearheading the legislative effort on how to ensure that Congress has a say in trade decisions by the president-elect if he tries to make good on his promise to punish countries like China and Mexico for what he views as violations of trade rules.

Trump also has said he would slap duties on U.S. companies that off-shore their businesses and sell back to American customers, a major shift in U.S. trade policy.

Trump has floated a tariff of 35 percent for businesses that move overseas, but it's unknown whether he would seek congressional input.

He also has vowed to withdraw the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership and renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico.

“We’re looking at putting brakes in the system, so that there are ways for Congress to assert its authority,” Daniel Bunn, a Lee aide, said at a trade-focused lunch on Wednesday at the Cato Institute.

Any plan would be designed to give Congress more authority but would not change existing law that would shift the balance of trade power back to Congress, Bunn said.

Bunn said they are talking to other lawmakers about who might be willing to stand up against any abrupt moves by Trump.

Lee never endorsed Trump for president, although his name has been floated as a possible Supreme Court nominee.

Lawmakers have said they would prefer that Trump consult with Congress before making any major moves on the trade front.

Although the authority to levy tariffs on individual companies does not appear to fall into the tariff authorities given to the president, trade experts say that Trump could probably act

unilaterally against countries he thinks are skirting trade rules and companies that want to move out of the United States.

Thomas Donohue, president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, cautioned Trump earlier on Wednesday against erecting new trade barriers.

Lawmakers and trade experts have expressed concern that Trump's tactics could disrupt key trading partnerships and hurt the U.S. economy.

Bill Reinsch, a trade expert at the Stimson Center, said there has been a long understanding for the White House to consult with Congress on a broad range of trade issues, and he doesn't see that changing under Trump.