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# New House chairman has strong ideas on trade



**Doug Palmer - Analysis**  
**WASHINGTON**  
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(Reuters) - An abrupt change in the leadership of a powerful tax and trade committee in the U.S. House of Representatives is unlikely to have much impact on stalled trade agreements with South Korea and Colombia.

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But it does give one of Congress' deepest thinkers on trade policy a much more prominent role.

Representative Sander Levin, a 14-term Democratic congressman from Detroit, Michigan, will take over the House Ways and Means Committee pending the outcome of ethics probes against Charles Rangel, a New York Democrat.

Levin, who has been chairman of the Ways and Means trade subcommittee, believes the United States should "shape globalization" by negotiating trade deals that protect worker rights and improve environmental standards.

He also is one of Congress' staunchest defenders of U.S. anti-dumping laws against unfairly traded imports and has criticized the World Trade Organization for adverse rulings on that issue against the United States.

"I don't see this as a big wrench in policy," said Ed Gresser, director of the trade and global markets project at the Democratic Leadership Council, a centrist Democratic Party group. "There won't be a drastic change."

Dan Griswold, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Trade Policy Studies, agreed.

"Levin and Rangel have an almost indistinguishable voting record on trade," Griswold said.

Both voted against the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993, but supported China's

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Levin, in fact, worked closely with former President Bill Clinton's administration on a compromise that led to approval of "permanent normal trade relations" with China.

He and Rangel fought former President George W. Bush on a number of trade initiatives, including a free trade pact with Central American countries and the Dominican Republic strongly opposed by labor and environmental groups.

But they supported other trade pacts with Chile, Singapore, Morocco, Australia and Bahrain.

### STALLED TRADE DEALS

Levin takes charge of the panel at a time when President Barack Obama says he wants to resolve problems blocking long-delayed trade deals with South Korea, Colombia and Panama and finish eight-year-old world trade talks.

The 78-year-old lawmaker has been at the forefront of criticism of the South Korean and the Colombian deals. He says Seoul needs to do more to open its market to U.S. autos and other goods, and Bogota has to stop murders of trade unionists and prosecute the killers.

In the end, the decision whether to allow votes on the three trade agreements rests more with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi than with Levin.

On that point, Griswold said he was pessimistic of action on any of the deals this year because of the strong opposition of labor groups.

Gresser said he thought it was too early to predict what would happen.

"So much depends on what happens with healthcare," a legislative priority for Obama, Gresser said. "Once that's done, we'll see what the administration wants to do next and how Congress reacts to that."

On the Doha round of world trade talks, Levin has followed the U.S. line that advanced developing countries like China, Brazil and India must make better offers to open their markets before a deal is struck.

(Editing by [Eric Beech](#))

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