

New Congress Likely to Favor Trade Pacts, Dismiss Proposed Treaties, say Analysts

Analysts say the new US Congress is likely to favor free trade agreements with foreign partners, but less likely to support new international treaties and other multilateral initiatives. In November, the opposition Republican Party won a majority of seats in the 500-seat House of Representatives and fell four seats short of a majority in the Senate. The gains will likely make it more difficult for President Barak Obama to push his initiatives through the legislature.

William Eagle | Washington, DC04 December 2010

When the 111th Congress ends within the next few weeks, many international initiatives will be left behind. Among them are several UN conventions thought to have the support of the administration, including the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Rights of the Child, and the Law of the Sea.

Analyst Brett Schaefer of the Washington-based Heritage Foundation doubts they'll be taken up by the new more conservative Congress.

In the 100-member U.S. Senate, 67 votes are required to ratify a treaty. But that number has been hard to reach - even with a large Democratic Party majority during the first two years of the Obama administration.



White House

The President meets with national security experts on the New START treaty, White House Photo, Chuck

Kennedy, 11/18/10

Schaefer says it will be even harder when six new Republican legislators take their seats early next year in the Senate.

"The prospect for the US Senate to give its advice and consent necessary for ratification of those treaties was rather high under the previous make up of the US Senate which had 60 Democrats and a number of moderate Republicans," says Schaefer. "But some of the moderate Republicans have been replaced and the number of Republicans in the Senate has increased, reducing the prospects for any kind of treaty ratification over the next two years."

New START

The best known of the proposed accords is the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia.

The administration would like to have it ratified by the current Senate. [According to the New York Times](#), if the vote were taken today, the president would need the help of at least 9 Republicans. If he waits for the new Congress to meet early next year, he will need at least 14).

Senator [Jim DeMint](#) (R-SC), a strong supporter of the Tea Party movement, which aims to reduce the size and expense of government, opposes the new treaty. In mid-November, 10 new Republican Senators publically announced their desire to participate in the debate. Among them are [Marco Rubio](#) (of Florida), [Ron Johnson](#) (of Wisconsin), former US trade Representative [Rob Portman](#) (of Ohio), and [Rand Paul](#) (of Kentucky).

Among the Republican supporters of the New START treaty is the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, Richard Lugar.

CLIMATE CHANGE

One treaty likely to receive little or no support is the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is currently holding its annual meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

President Obama favors reducing US greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 17 percent below 2005 levels.



World Bank

Parched soil by the White Nile in Sudan. Some scientists say drought brought on by climate change contributes to such cases of land degradation

But an effort to introduce a so-called cap-and-trade deal to limit emissions failed to gain support in the US Senate last year. And, the Washington Post says nearly half of the incoming Republican legislators to the House have doubts about that climate change is caused by human activity.

Energy analyst Nick Loris of the conservative Heritage Foundation says that view is reflected in the desire by some new legislators for a new direction for the House Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.

"They want to get to the root of the science behind global warming," says Loris, "and create more of an objective platform to allow different climatologists with dissenting views to bring their expertise to the table and create an honest and transparent debate, rather than one that says the science is settled, which is what happened in the past with the committee in the past."

Loris says many conservatives are also concerned that multilateral efforts could restrict US decision-making, and economic growth.

"There is concern," he says, "that with regard to [the Kyoto Agreement and other] climate change treaties, the US Government would not be making decisions any more with regard to these policies. [They] would be [decided] by the UN Framework.

"There was a large concern if we enter into one of the treaties where the US is one of 192 countries (involved), there [would be] a lot of sovereignty lost to big economic decisions that could significantly regulate the (US) private sector."



Conservatives say free-market incentives can help stem deforestation, which contributes between 20 to 25 percent of the carbon emissions that cause climate change.

Some say President Obama may have to settle for smaller initiatives like helping poor countries adapt to climate change or paying for measures to reduce deforestation. They say the president and Congress might agree on subsidies for reducing the pollutants in coal, and for improving the development of nuclear energy and other forms of energy supported by conservatives.

However, Loris says Republicans are against using tax payer money to subsidize any technologies used to combat climate change. He says fostering free trade between nations is a better way to get needed technology to the developing world, rather than government-to-government financial support which is likely to be wasted. He says even deforestation has a free-market solution.

"If you privatize some of these areas," says Loris, "the businesses or private owners of the forests have the incentive to keep them grown and sustainable and the incentive when they are cut down to re-grow those areas. It is a matter of establishing private property rights in countries where [they are not well established]."

TRADE PACTS

Despite differences over multilateral treaties and conventions, observers say there may yet be common ground between the administration and the new Congress.

Dan Ikenson, the associate director of trade policy studies at the Washington-based CATO Institute, say the new Congress and the administration could compromise on trade deals with Colombia, Panama and South Korea.

[According to Bloomberg News](#), a deal with Seoul would create \$68 billion in trade, and would boost Obama's goal of creating US jobs and doubling US exports over the next five years.

Ikenson says the prospects for trade are much better now with the Republican Congress.



Observers say the Obama administration and the new Congress are both likely to favor bilateral deals to boost trade, and jobs.

"Another agreement in the works with Obama is the Trans Pacific Partnership, which was originally between Brunei, New Zealand, Chile and Singapore. It now includes the United States, Vietnam, Peru and Malaysia.

"The reason the administration likes it is it does not have to defend a Bush era trade agreement, and it gives them time to work with congress to figure out what they want. That's the next great hope in terms of trade agreements."

Among Senate Republicans said to favor the pact are Jim DeMint (of South Carolina), former US trade representative Rob Portman (of Ohio), and Mark Kirk (of Illinois).

DEVELOPMENT

The House may also be inclined to support new trade agreements, according to Sarah Jane Staats, the director of policy outreach at the Center for Global Development in Washington, DC.

"[Dave Camp](#) (R-Michigan) is likely to be the head of the House Ways and Means Committee and [Kevin Brady](#) (R-Texas) the (likely) chair of the Trade Subcommittee (of the Ways and Means Committee), says Staats. "They've been extremely good on the role of the US in the world and the importance of trade to the domestic economy and to global development. So I am hopeful there."



Development experts are concerned budget cuts could affect administration initiatives to curb global hunger and promote good health


Staats also sees continued cooperation on foreign policy issues including two administration priorities: the [Global Health Initiative](#) for fighting malaria, HIV and neglected diseases, and the 3.5 billion dollar initiative to boost the production of small farmers and agricultural industries in the developing world, [Feed the Future](#).

"In the past, there has been enormous bipartisan support for global health," says Staats, "and we saw huge increases in combating AIDS under Bush... Feed the Future is newer and has not received the attention it needed in past years, but again builds on some sentiments shared across the aisles [of Congress]."

Analysts say there will likely be budget cuts in some foreign assistance and humanitarian programs. However, Staats is hopeful budget pressures will also force much-needed reforms to the government's strategy for overseas development. That could mean the better use of trade and other policy tools to support development, and changes in how, and where, the US focuses its efforts.

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