



## Anti-trade Dems not reaching out to Republican counterparts

By [Sean Higgins](#)

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The leader of the House Democrats who oppose the White House's trade agenda said Thursday that the party has made few, if any, attempts to reach out to Republicans who also are opposed.

The admission by Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., cast doubt on the coalition's ability to stop the Obama administration's push for Trade Promotion Authority, aka "fast track," and the Trans-Pacific Partnership deal.

"I haven't had [any] direct conversations but I believe there will be Republican votes against fast track," DeLauro said at a Capitol Hill [press conference](#). The event featured Democratic lawmakers and representatives from organized labor and environmentalist groups, but no GOP representatives.

Rep. Frank LoBiondo, R-N.J., a leading Republican opponent of fast track authority and the Pacific trade deal, said there has been no communication between the sides. "They have not reached out to us. We have not reached out to them," said LoBiondo spokesman Jason Galanes.

Aides to other trade-skeptic Republicans also said they were not aware of any efforts to build a coalition. "We haven't heard of any overtures from anyone on the other side of the aisle," said Ken Grubbs, spokesman for Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Calif.

An aide to another trade-skeptic GOP lawmaker said his boss was working with organized labor groups on the issue, but was not aware of any contact with Democrats.

"Politics makes strange bedfellows, but I think there is just so much distrust between ultra-conservative Republicans and progressive Democrats that there aren't many issues that they can work together on," said Dan Ikenson, director of trade policy studies for the free-market Cato Institute.

TPP is a trade deal involving 12 Pacific Rim countries: the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico, Chile, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Peru. The deal would lower taxes on imported goods and other barriers to trade as well as offer legal protections for people investing in those countries, creating common standards for trade rules.

TPA would grant the White House the authority to submit deals such as TPP to Congress for straight up or down votes, with no opportunity for amendments, which the administration says is crucial for trade deals. International talks regarding TPP are wrapping up, and lawmakers expect the both issues will be brought before Congress soon.

Democratic lawmakers are the main opposition. Most argue that previous international trade deals boosted outsourcing and hurt domestic industries as well as the environment. In 2013, 151 lawmakers signed a letter to President Obama opposing both Free Trade Agreement and TPP. On Thursday, several blasted the administration, saying it had been too secretive regarding the TPP talks.

"If this deal is as good as they say, then let's hear the deal," said Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis. "There's a reason this was negotiated in secret."

The U.S. Trade Representative's office refuted the Democrats' claims: "Our trade agenda is about supporting jobs through expanding Made in America exports. TPP will be the most progressive trade agreement in history, breaking new ground on labor and environmental protections. We are going to be making that case to Congress and the American people."

This is the rare issue where the White House is allied with the Republicans. With Congress under GOP control, trade skeptics have little hope to succeed if they cannot get a significant number of rank-and-file Republicans to buck their leadership.

There are at least some who will. In addition to LoBiondo, 20 other Republicans signed a letter to Obama in late 2013 opposing fast track. Of them, 16 remain in Congress.

More than that would be needed, though. Even if all 188 House Democrats opposed the trade deals, the opponents would need the votes of 30 Republicans.

DeLauro noted that there was a precedent for large numbers of Republicans coming out against a trade deal, pointing to a 1998 vote when 71 voted against an earlier version of fast track, delivering a surprise defeat to President Clinton. Democrats are evidently hoping that enough Republicans will warm to the idea of delivering a blow to the current Democratic administration.

"We have every reason to believe that we can defeat fast track," she said, crediting the coalition with having already delayed votes on the issue.

But other opponents conceded that they face an uphill battle. "This is the president. This is [Senate Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell. This is [House] Speaker John Boehner. We are humble about what we face," said Larry Cohen, president of the Communication Workers of America.

The administration is expected to pressure Democrats to fall in line, which is creating further turmoil. DeLauro said the Democratic House caucus has not formally discussed the issue.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Thursday the White House could win over a substantial number of Democrats: "I don't know that most people in our caucus have made up their minds — many have, yeah, but what they have made up their minds to is that they want to see transparency, they want to see consultation, they want to see fairness, they want to see what this means to the American paycheck."