



Senate Fast-Track Failure Doesn't Presage The Death Of Free Trade

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The Senate failed to break a filibuster on a trade facilitation bill today and anti-trade groups broke out the champagne.

If they think the Senate vote rang the death knell for the bill and the Trans-Pacific Partnership, though, they're probably in for disappointment.

The Senate vote represented an inter-party disagreement on procedure, not widespread dissatisfaction with the trade promotion authority, or fast-track, bill.

"This (vote) clearly shows the strength of the growing movement to stop Fast Track and the TPP, thanks to activists across the country who have been fighting for years against corporate-centric trade deals," MoveOn.org said in a statement.

They flatter themselves.

There are four trade-related bills awaiting Senate approval. Democrats wanted them all brought to the floor together and voted on as a package. The Republicans only brought two of them, so pro-trade Democrats voted against a motion to end the filibuster, known as a cloture motion.

"It's not the end of TPA or the TPP," said Gabe Horwitz, director of the economic program at the pro-trade think tank Third Way. "What we saw was Senate Democrats coming together to see what concessions they could get."

"There's a group of Democrats that want this (TPA bill) passed, but they want other things passed, too," said Simon Lester, a trade policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute.

The two sides will have to negotiate a way to bring the fast-track bill back to the floor in a way that both sides can accept. With the TPP negotiations approaching the finish line, they'll have to hurry.

The four bills the Democrats wanted the Senate to lump together are TPA; a bill renewing the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program for displaced workers; a customs enforcement bill; and a bill extending preferential tariff treatment to certain developing countries.

However, "that was never the agreement," said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, where the four trade-related bills originated. He said he and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., the committee's ranking Democrat, had agreed to send the TPA and TAA bills to the floor together and to send the other two later, because they had problems that might prevent their passage.

Hatch said it was "astounding" that all Senate Democrats except Tom Carper of Delaware voted against cloture, given that passage of the TPP was "President Obama's top legislative priority. . . . I still believe we can get something done, work something out, and so I told the president," he said.

"We need a program to discuss all these bills at the same time," said Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nevada, the Senate minority leader. "Everybody needs to take a deep breath."