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Pearson: Obama's trade efforts appear headed for failure

*By Eric Bradner
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A longtime U.S. trade official is predicting that President Barack Obama will whiff on his ambitious second-term free trade agenda.

Daniel Pearson, who spent 10 years on the International Trade Commission, said he's not sure Obama will "invest a whole lot of political capital to round up the required votes" in Congress for authority to "fast-track" trade deals for up-or-down votes without amendments, as well as for the deals themselves, the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

"Although free traders very much want all of this to happen, hard-headed experience indicates it's most likely that the administration will accomplish none of this," Pearson, a senior fellow in trade policy studies at the Cato Institute since leaving the ITC last year, wrote [today](#).

In his piece, Pearson compared President Bill Clinton's efforts to secure North American Free Trade Agreement passage, and said President George W. Bush was more committed to free trade than Obama, but also struggled with Congress.

"So far the Obama team has not developed a compelling and economically sound argument on behalf of open global markets. Perhaps no official of Cabinet level or higher has the experience, understanding, and commitment required to make a vigorous case in favor of trade liberalization," Pearson wrote.

He went on to say the Obama administration has been "out-organized" on the issue of trade by constituencies usually loyal to Democrats, such as labor, environmental and consumer protection groups.

"Democratic opposition in the Congress appears to be forcing a delay in considering fast track at least until after the November 2014 election," Pearson wrote. "This administration has provided no precedent in which it has fought and won a similar battle against important parts of its political base," Pearson wrote.

Free-trade advocates should take a "long view" and push for liberalization with their eyes on 2017 and beyond, when Obama will have left office, he said, adding that TTIP, in particular, might be able to survive the changing of administrations.

