

On Promoting Trade

By Ramesh Ponnuru
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There has for decades been an established way of enacting trade agreements, and it involves going to Congress to get “trade promotion authority” before negotiating trade deals. [Maybe it's time to change that.](#)

[T]he old argument for trade-promotion authority has lost some of its force. K. William Watson, who studies trade for the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group, [argued](#) in December that passing the trade-promotion authority just to conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership didn't make sense. Talks were already well under way, and could be slowed down by the new negotiating demands Congress would make as a condition for passing the authority.

Watson points out that the standard procedure for freeing trade requires winning two votes in Congress: First the authority has to be granted, and then the final deal passed. “Why have the same debate twice?” he asks. It's actually worse than that, because it's harder to get the trade-promotion authority than to enact a deal.