



## **These House Republicans are bucking their party leaders — and Obama — on trade**

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May 22, 2015

The Senate is poised to grant President Obama expanded authority to negotiate trade deals after [62 senators voted Thursday](#) to force a vote on the issue. But the real challenge for Obama's trade agenda will come in the House of Representatives.

The legislation, known as [Trade Promotion Authority](#) or "fast track," would guarantee that Obama's controversial [Trans-Pacific Partnership](#) deal gets a prompt up-or-down vote from both houses of Congress once it is negotiated. Most House Democrats — like their Senate counterparts — are expected to oppose the legislation. But with Democrats in the minority in the House, that won't be enough to kill the bill. A big question, then, is how many House Republicans will join them in opposition.

"There are wildly different estimates," said Bill Watson, a trade policy analyst at the Cato Institute (where I worked from 2003 to 2005), earlier this week. Watson thinks that when the legislation comes up for a vote in the coming weeks, as few as 15 Republicans or as many as 50 could buck their leadership and oppose the trade bill. And those figures could be the margin between success and failure.

### **Why some Republicans do not want fast track**

Unsurprisingly, Republican TPA skeptics have different concerns than Democrats. Watson says some are old-fashioned protectionists who believe trade deals are bad for American workers. But more of them have procedural or constitutional concerns about the fast track process.

"Our nation's founders wisely gave Congress exclusive authority over trade in the U.S. Constitution," [20 Republican members of Congress wrote](#) in an open letter opposing TPA in 2013. Critics worry that fast track gives the president too much influence over trade deals, leaving Congress with too little.

And of course it doesn't help that passing a fast track bill today would confer that enhanced authority on Obama, who is widely despised by Republicans.

In recent years, Republicans have raised the alarm at what they saw as self-aggrandizing behavior by the Obama administration. Some Republican fast track foes have sought to tie the issue to other perceived power grabs by the president.

In an [April interview](#) on the *Laura Ingraham Show*, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) complained that TPA would "give this President the authority to negotiate a trade deal after the last seven weeks when we've criticized him for the pathetic deal he got with Iran."

### **Republicans aren't as focused on specific provisions of TPP**

Republicans' focus on broad concerns about the Constitution and executive power is a contrast to Democrats, who are much more focused on specific provisions of the TPP.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), for example, has hammered away at an obscure provision called [investor-state dispute settlement](#) that she says would give too much power to corporations. Other Democrats have raised concerns about how the TPP could lead to [higher drug prices](#). And [labor](#) and environmental groups, which are closely aligned with the Democrats, have complained that the deal does not do enough on their issues. Republicans have rarely made this kind of argument.

And when Republicans do complain about the contents of the TPP, they sometimes focus on topics that almost certainly won't be part of the trade deal. For example, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) has warned that the TPP could lead to [increased immigration to the United States](#) — something Watson says is "not true."