



Border Trade Alliance Overview

Thoughts on the Trans-Pacific Partnership

There is an incredibly brief window to influence support for the Trans-Pacific Partnership on Capitol Hill.

The 2016 presidential campaign combined with a factious Republican-controlled Congress has created unrepresented opposition to trade though there is a desire to consider the package during the lame duck session.

It is imperative that any pro-trade allies and coalitions start an immediate, comprehensive campaign to ensure passage of TPP in 2016 or early 2017. There will be little time after the 2016 elections to work with lawmakers to address concerns with the expansive deal before the rush of a lame duck. Not to mention, opponents to TPP have already begun their lobbying campaign to defeat the measure.

The outcome for TPP depends heavily on the presidential campaign. If former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wins in November, there will be intense pressure to consider the trade package before she takes office. Clinton has spent months distancing herself from TPP – despite negotiating its early iterations – because of an anti-trade, anti-corporation ideology among Democrats promoted by her primary challenger, Sen. Bernie Sanders.

If Congress were to take up the trade package after she assumes office, progressives would demand concessions on labor and environmental standards from the White House. But if Congress moves forward before 2017, there will be fewer pressures on Clinton to disavow the legislation – and potentially influence on-the-fence Democrats to oppose.

Both leading Republican candidates, Donald Trump and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz are opposed to TPP. Trump's resistance stems from his support among blue-collar, middle income workers who felt harmed by previous trade deals such as North American Free Trade Agreement. But Trump has proved himself political flexible and could moderate his views during the general election or upon winning to support aspect of TPP. Cruz has ideological disagreements to the Pacific deal and wouldn't support the package coming up during the lame duck.

The demonizing of free trade on the presidential trail will make passing the Trans-Pacific Partnership an even heavier lift than the debate over trade authority in 2015.

Still, on Capitol Hill there is a muted but persistent desire among pro-trade Republicans and Democrats to see TPP taken up this Congress. And the political pressures against the package will ease after President Barack Obama's successor is decided.



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Speaker Paul Ryan have both expressed general support for trade and the Pacific deal despite some concerns about ancillary items included in the package. But both have also warned that Congress is currently lacking the votes to pass a trade deal and will not consider TPP until the lame duck.

Conservative Republicans in the House Freedom Caucus say privately they could support the basic tenants of the Pacific trade deal but don't trust Obama to execute or enforce it. That indicates there could be ground with some of the 34 Republicans who voted against Trade Promotion Authority in 2015 during a TPP vote.

There are 28 Democrats who supported TPA last July – many of whom are members of the pro-business New Democrat Coalition. It will be these Democrats that will provide the bulk of support among the left for any trade deal. But some members, especially from border states or blue-collar districts have expressed need for political cover after the TPA vote. Democratic lawmakers in California, New York and Texas faced political repercussions for supporting the trade authority legislation.

It will be vital for any pro-trade, TPP coalition to gain the support of the moderate Democrats who supported trade promotion authority, along with some of the conservative Republicans who voted against that package. Progressive Democratic lawmakers in both the House and the Senate are already preparing their campaign to sink TPP and will need to be effectively countered both with the public and on Capitol Hill.

Defeating TPP on the floor or stopping the package from even receiving a vote in either the House or Senate will be a major priority for progressive lawmakers and anti-trade coalitions this year. In the months before the TPA debate, lawmakers opposed to that deal meet weekly to execute a comprehensive campaign against the bill that included a specific lobbying effort for every Democratic member. It is assumed that an opposition effort among members and unions will be as equally powerful for TPP.

Unions – the major financial backers of the Democratic party – threatened to withhold both fundraising and grassroots support from lawmakers who supported the trade authority legislation and indicators suggest it will be a more aggressive effort for the Pacific deal.

That effort will be led by liberal thought leaders like Sen. Sherrod Brown and Reps. Rosa DeLauro and Sander Levin, the latter being the top Democrat on the influential Ways and Means Committee.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus – which counts nearly a third of House Democrats as members – has named TPP as a top policy issue for 2016.