

Fast Track Derailed? House Deals Blow to Corporate-Friendly Trade Agenda

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Though it wasn't the resounding rejection progressives had hoped for, the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday dealt a serious blow to President Barack Obama's corporate-backed trade agenda, while erecting a major stumbling block for proponents of Fast Track, or trade promotion authority.

After a tense showdown and multiple votes in the chamber, a final decision on Fast Track was ultimately deferred, affording a delay that critics say could further scuttle the trade authority.

"Today's votes to stall Fast Track and TPP are a major win for anyone who cares about climate change," [said](#) 350.org executive director May Boeve. "This disastrous deal would extend the world's dependence on fracked gas, forbid our negotiators from ever using trade agreements in the fight against global warming, and make it easier for big polluters to burn carbon while suing anyone who gets in the way."

She continued: "That message clearly broke through today, as House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi got up, bucked enormous pressure, and rallied against the deal, specifically citing concerns about its impact on climate change. Today was a big win, but the thousands of climate activists across the country who stood up and linked arms with fellow progressives to get us here won't rest until Fast Track and TPP are dead for good."

A bill on Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), which would provide aid to workers displaced because of so-called "free trade" agreements, had been packaged with Fast Track

authority, and a vote against either doomed the total package. Legislators opposed to Fast Track sought to derail the entire package by voting against TAA.

And derail it they did, voting [126-302](#) against TAA.

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–Senator Bernie Sanders

Moments later, the chamber did pass a stand-alone version of Fast Track. But, as the *New York Times* [explains](#), because the [Senate version](#) linked TAA and Fast Track, the House vote “would force the Senate to take up a trade bill all over again. And without trade adjustment assistance alongside it, passing trade promotion authority in the Senate would be highly doubtful.”

Instead, the House will reportedly take up TAA again next week.

Still, progressives viewed Friday’s deferral of a final decision as a victory even as they cautioned against becoming complacent.

“I applaud the House of Representatives for the vote today,” [said](#) Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) in a statement after the vote. “While the fight will no doubt continue, today’s vote is a victory for America’s working people and for the environment. It is clearly a defeat for corporate America, which has outsourced millions of decent-paying jobs and wants to continue doing just that.”

Erich Pica of Friends of the Earth [added](#): “Today’s move to delay final decision on the trade package represents a significant victory in the fight to ensure that toxic trade

agreements like the TPP do not get bulldozed through Congress.” But he noted the victory “is not decisive. Friends of the Earth and others will remain vigilant to ensure that future efforts to pass Fast Track and climate-destroying trade agreements are defeated.”

As Lori Wallach of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch [pointed out](#) after the vote, “Passing trade bills opposed by a majority of Americans does not get easier with delay because the more time people have to understand what’s at stake, the angrier they get and the more they demand that their congressional representatives represent their will.”

This story is developing. Follow ongoing reaction to the votes, and their implications, on Twitter:

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The push to privatize government services

It is a marvel that during a time of budget crises and constraints and a steadfast refusal to raise taxes, or even spread them evenly, that privatizing public services is regarded as a cost saving measure. No business will undertake government services without factoring a profit into a business plan and if there is enough room in government budgets for profit then there must be enough room to keep providing the services already. The argument is always that governments are wasteful and employees are lazy but even the most anti government members of the structure committee acknowledge that Coos County has been cut to the bone and that staff do more than their fair share of work and are not lazy so how would

privatizing these services and adding profit to the cost of payroll burden improve services to the taxpayer?

One committee member has suggested that Curry County will soon privatize many of its departments and be a “model” for other Oregon counties. In 2008, Governor Ed Rendell [sought to transfer control](#) of the Pennsylvania Turnpike to a Spanish consortium, Albertis.

Rendell is not the first governor to trade off common property to private firms but the \$12.5B, 75 year lease is considered the largest privatization deal in US history.

The deal was promoted as a way to bring in badly needed cash and to save the state money but the first thing Albertis planned was a 25% toll increase, giving rise to the question of why didn't the state just raise tolls in the first place? In effect, Pennsylvania outsourced political will to a private entity whose primary mission is to its shareholders, not the taxpayer. Similar results have played out elsewhere, including Indiana, with the net result to the consumer being a rise in service costs without any improvement in the service.

Several states, including California, have established what is known as a [“benefit corporation”](#). Theoretically, status as a benefit corporation enables the directors to redirect some funds to socially responsible investments or causes that might otherwise be mandated to shareholder returns. But even if Oregon had such an option for businesses, which it doesn't, the only way a company can provide the same level of service without raising rates is to cut back on labor costs thereby reducing spending capacity and further damaging the local economy.

Theoretically, public assets should be managed for the public good rather than private gain and the complications associated with faulty government work performed by private companies, whose loyalties do not lie with the taxpayer may leave

taxpayers wondering where they go for recourse. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see if Curry County does become a model of privatization that could run side by side Coos County for long term comparison of both systems. After three years we can measure quality of life, cost of services, poverty levels, population, unemployment and income levels, and overall customer satisfaction amongst other measurement criteria.