

LOU DOBBS TONIGHT

U.S. Free Trade Agreement with Oman About to Go Before Congress

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LOU DOBBS, CNN ANCHOR: Tonight, elected officials at all levels of government are giving away critical American assets. We have two reports tonight.

Bill Tucker on a so-called free trade agreement that will literally turn over our seaports to foreign owners. Sean Callebs reports tonight from the Gulf Coast on plans to rebuild after Hurricane Katrina using thousands of foreign workers.

We begin with Bill Tucker on the U.S.-Oman free trade agreement -- Bill.

BILL TUCKER, CNN CORRESPONDENT: Lou, the U.S. free trade agreement with Oman is about to go before Congress for approval. Congress should look twice, though, before giving it their traditional rubberstamp of approval.

(BEGIN VIDEOTAPE)

TUCKER (voice-over): The United States is on the verge of further compromising its port security in the name of free trade. All for Oman, a small Middle Eastern country which shares borders with Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

LORI WALLACH, PUBLIC CITIZEN: Under the Oman free trade agreement, foreign port operators would have a right, an absolute trade agreement right, to establish operations, to acquire, to operate, to run port facilities within the U.S.

TUCKER: Specifically, the agreement allows for "landside aspects of port activities, including operation and maintenance of docks; loading and unloading of vessels directly to or from land; marine cargo handling; operation and maintenance of piers; ship cleaning; stevedoring; transfer of cargo between vessels and trucks, trains, pipelines, and wharves; plus waterfront terminal operations."

The free trade agreement with Oman expected to come up on the Senate floor Thursday.

SEN. BYRON DORGAN (D), NORTH DAKOTA: Listen, this is an outrage. But it's one more symptom of trade agreement that sell away this country's interests. We have seen it time and time again. And what could happen here is a circumstance where the United Arab Emirates simply buys a company in Oman, and all of a sudden they're managing America's docks and ports.

TUCKER: Few in Congress were aware this provision even existed. It's prompted Congressman Sherrod Brown to renew his call for a national security study on all free trade agreements before they're agreed on.

REP. SHERROD BROWN (D), OHIO: This is again a perfect example of why before we negotiate the trade agreement we need to know what in fact its national security implications are for the United States of America. I hope that Congress learns its lesson.

TUCKER: But there is another free trade agreement just like Oman's waiting in the wings. The free trade agreement with Peru, already approved Wednesday by the Peruvian legislature. Once approved by Congress, there is little recourse in these agreements.

(END VIDEOTAPE)

TUCKER: That's because under the terms of the agreement, Congress cannot restrict any agreed upon commercial activity. If it does or tries, those foreign companies can sue the United States of America, drag it before an international tribunal, and demand payment from U.S. taxpayers for being denied their commercial rights, Lou, under the free trade agreement that Congress approved.

DOBBS: And under the terms of the World Trade Organization, further -- a simple giveaway of our national sovereignty. This is -- it's almost impossible to express the ignorance being displayed by the United States Congress. Forget the administration's pursuing these free trade policies, but to abrogate their constitutional responsibilities through fast track authority and not to understand these free trade agreements and the impact, it's unconscionable.

Bill Tucker, thank you very much.