

The Charlotte Observer

N.C. split on CAFTA

Rep. Hayes, what caused last-minute change of heart?

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Last week U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes told the Observer he was "flat-out, completely, horizontally opposed to CAFTA." Earlier this month he said, "There is no way I could vote for CAFTA." Before the vote, he told a radio reporter "a 'no' vote on CAFTA is the right vote for me."

It's hard to be any more firmly committed than that, right? But Wednesday night he voted "yes." He provided the edge in the 217-215 House vote.

As Sen. Jesse Helms might have said, "Where do you stand, Robin?"

He says he intended to vote "no" Wednesday night but changed his mind after House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., promised, "You tell me what you need and we're going to do it." Rep. Hayes says he voted "yes" in return for the promise of benefits that were "really, really significant for the people back home, to improve their lives."

What benefits? He says the list is a work in progress. Well, Rep. Hayes, when you've got it, we'd like to share it with your constituents.

This is the second time Rep. Hayes, a Republican whose 8th District stretches from Charlotte to Fayetteville, has had a

last-minute change of heart on a trade vote. He cast a similar tie-breaker in 2001 to give President Bush so-called Fast Track trading authority.

As for CAFTA, as trade pacts go it's a small deal, and it contains both costs and benefits for North Carolina. Many in the textile and apparel industries opposed it, but many others didn't. Many N.C. farmers and food processors supported it, seeing the Central America-Dominican Republic area as a potential new market.

The state's congressional delegation was similarly split. U.S. Sens. Elizabeth Dole and Richard Burr, both Republicans, voted for it (though Sen. Burr in his 2004 campaign said he opposed it). In this state's 13-member House delegation, only Rep. Hayes and Rep. Sue Myrick of Charlotte, also a Republican, voted "yes." Overall, 202 out of 231 Republicans but only 15 Democrats voted for it.

What puts Rep. Hayes on the spot is not that he voted "yes" but that he'd promised -- and promised and promised -- to vote "no." Constituents thought they knew where he stood. Then, late in the night, he suddenly moved. They're entitled to ask what the heck happened.

Rep. Hayes, send us 800 words or so explaining exactly what benefits your district will get for your vote, and we'll tell them.

How they voted

YES: N.C. Republicans Robin Hayes and Sue Myrick. S.C. Republicans

Graham Barnett, Henry Brown, Bob Inglis and Joe Wilson.

NO: N.C. Democrats G.K. Butterfield, Bob Etheridge, Mike McIntyre, Brad Miller, David Price and Mel Watt. N.C. Republicans Howard Coble, Virginia Foxx, Walter Jones, Patrick McHenry. and Charles Taylor. S.C. Democrats John Spratt and Jim Clyburn.

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