

April 20, 2015

RE: Fast Track process at heart of the Ryan-Hatch trade bill

Dear Senator:

The undersigned organizations strongly oppose the Fast Track process that is at the heart of the Ryan-Hatch Fast Track trade bill (S.995) that was introduced last week.

The Fast Track mechanism eliminates the right of the public and our elected representatives in Congress to have a meaningful role in the development of trade deals that will affect every American. It would allow a president to sign and enter into any and all trade agreements he or she may initiate at his or her sole discretion before Congress approves the contents of such agreements, and then limit Congress' role to a 'yes' or 'no' vote on completed deals within 90 days with no amendments allowed and limited debate. This process also greatly limits the ability of the public to influence the outcome.

Such a process greatly diminishes the ability of Congress to effectively shape trade pacts during negotiation or offer strengthening amendments during congressional consideration so as to ensure these agreements do not jeopardize public health and safety, privacy, labor rights, our financial system, or the environment.

These deals are being negotiated largely in secret, with even members of Congress given limited access to documents by the U.S. Trade Representative. Until recent weeks, most congressional staff members have been denied access altogether.

Such unprecedented levels of secrecy would be regrettable for any trade agreement. But the current trade negotiations are even more sensitive and important. The current deals being negotiated with Pacific Rim nations and with the European Union are focused not mainly on tariffs, but on regulations, which major corporations call "trade irritants" and what our community – and the public – define as crucial public protections.

These trade deals could make it far more difficult for federal, state and local governments to protect us from unsafe chemicals, tainted foods, dangerous drugs and devices, an unsound financial system, or a polluted environment. The deals could give tens of thousands of foreign companies doing business in the U.S. and investors seeking a profit here the chance to sue in extra-judicial tribunals over rules they contended unfairly harmed their bottom line.

Fast track allows a president to unilaterally select trade partners, initiate negotiations, set the pact's terms and sign and enter into them all before Congress has an opportunity to approve the countries or contents. It gives Congress only a limited time to consider these trade deals, bans amendments, does away with committee oversight, and requires an up-or-down vote that can't be delayed or filibustered. In the Senate, a simple majority of senators would be sufficient to approve a far-reaching trade agreement with serious consequences for the American people.

This process violates our core democratic principles, and may endanger our future.

We urge you to vote No on this harmful bill.

Sincerely,

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

Blue Ridge Environmental

BlueGreen Alliance

Center for Digital Democracy

Center for Effective Government

Center for Food Safety

Center for International Environmental Law

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

Coalition for Sensible Safeguards

Consumer Federation of America

Consumers Union

Earthjustice

Food & Water Watch

Natural Resources Defense Council

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Protect All Children's Environment

Public Citizen

Sciencecorps

U.S. PIRG

Union of Concerned Scientists

United Steelworkers