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New Public Citizen Report Documents Systematic Bipartisan Betrayals on ‘Deals’ Made by Presidents, Congressional Leaders in Exchange for Trade Votes

Broken Promises, Lost Elections: Goodies Promised in Exchange for Trade Votes Don’t Materialize, Don’t Shield Representatives From Voters’ Wrath

WASHINGTON, D.C. — As the Obama administration and GOP congressional leaders resort to promising special favors in attempt to entice members of Congress to buck [majority opinion](#) and support Fast Track, a [report](#) released today by Public Citizen reveals that such promises to extract controversial trade votes consistently have been broken, exposing representatives to angry constituents and electoral losses.

Facing bipartisan congressional opposition to Fast Track trade authority and polls showing majority U.S. public opposition, the Obama administration has moved beyond trying to sell Fast Track on its merits and is now offering rides on Air Force One, promises of infrastructure legislation and pledges to help representatives survive the political backlash of a “yes” vote on Fast Track. GOP congressional leaders are promising post-hoc policy fixes to trade laws and more. A comprehensive review of the past two decades of such trade vote deal-making shows that promises of policy changes, goodies for the district and political cover for unpopular trade votes rarely materialize, contributing to electoral upsets for representatives of both parties who trade their votes.

“Members of Congress should know better than to trust an exiting president’s promises of political cover or to rely on vote-yes-now-goodies-later deals for voting ‘yes’ on such a controversial, career-defining issue as Fast Track,” said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. “Our research of scores of deals over the past 20 years shows no matter who the president or congressional leadership is, almost all of the promises made in the heat of a trade vote go unfulfilled, and representatives who vote ‘yes’ are repeatedly left in political peril.”

Already the first promise of the 2015 Fast Track battle has been broken. U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) and colleagues cast deciding Senate votes after obtaining commitments that Congress would have votes to reauthorize the Export-Import Bank before its June 30, 2015, sunset. Now GOP leaders have made clear this will not occur. Whether Ex-Im will ever be reauthorized is in doubt.

Members of Congress repeatedly have endured such [trade vote-swapping deals gone wrong](#) as pledged import safeguards have not materialized, promised funds for community development or worker assistance have proven illusory, and dreams of new infrastructure projects have remained dreams. Among current members of Congress featured in the report who experienced deals for trade votes gone bad are:

- U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt (R-Ala.) and the Empty Sock: Aderholt still awaits changes to the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to protect his district’s now-devastated sock manufacturers. President George W. Bush promised this in 2005 to obtain Aderholt’s “yes” vote for CAFTA.

- U.S. Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.) Flower Deal Wilts: Farr voted for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) after the Clinton administration promised to safeguard the California cut flower sector from import surges. After four years of ballooning flower imports from Mexico displaced California producers, Farr voted against giving President Clinton Fast Track in 1998.
- U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Fla.) Tomato Wipeout: Hastings and other Florida representatives voted for NAFTA on the basis of the Clinton administration's promises to protect Florida's tomato growers from destabilizing surges in tomato imports from Mexico. But the Clinton administration did not honor its pledge when, within two years of NAFTA, tomato imports multiplied, Florida's tomato revenues dropped more than 40 percent, and the number of Florida tomato growers fell 60 percent.

“Even in the rare case where a promise to ‘fix’ a controversial trade deal has been upheld, the acclaimed tweak has failed to offset or outlast the damage wrought on local communities,” said Ben Beachy, research director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. “Voters do not tend to remember boasts of finite safeguards or worker assistance funds, while mass layoffs, farm foreclosures and news reports on inequality provide fresh, ongoing reminders of how their member of Congress voted on Fast Track and Fast Tracked deals.”

For some members of Congress, the decision to cast controversial trade votes in exchange for empty promises of political cover has exposed them to such constituent ire as to lead to electoral defeat:

- Former U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes (R-N.C.) provided the final votes to pass Fast Track in 2002 and CAFTA in 2005, after telling his constituents he would oppose both. He flip-flopped on the basis of promises that failed to prevent thousands of trade-related job losses in his district, many of them at textile factories. In the 2008 election, a former textile worker, Larry Kissel, decisively beat Hayes after hammering him for his trade vote swaps.
- Former U.S. Rep. Matthew Martinez (D-Calif.) stated support for Fast Track in 1997 as an apparent quid-pro-quo for President Clinton’s promise to approve a highway extension project in his district. Martinez never got the highway, but he did lose his job. In 2000, Martinez, an 18-year incumbent, lost 29 to 62 percent to a primary challenge by Hilda Solis, who ran against his support for Fast Track.

“This report provides a somber warning to members of Congress who may be approached by the Obama administration or GOP congressional leader to vote for Fast Track in exchange for promised new programs or policies to ameliorate feared damage or in exchange for unrelated goodies for the district,” said Wallach. “The trade votes and the damage wrought by bad trade agreements last forever, with voter ire only escalating over time, while our research shows that few deals made for trade votes are met and the few that are often fail to remedy the feared problems.”

[Today’s report](#) includes an annex of 92 promises made for trade vote support. Only 17 percent of these promises were kept, even though many were memorialized in the text of trade agreements’ implementing legislation. The overall finding of the report is that if appropriated funds are not locked in an account and if the policy change or amendment to a trade pact is not made *before* the trade vote, funding and follow-through is not likely to be forthcoming after the vote. Promises to seek future renegotiations of trade agreement provisions or to take action in future negotiations were broken most of the time. Of the past 64 *policy* promises designed to put a gloss on a contested agreement and give political cover to members of Congress, just seven were kept and 57 broken. Public Citizen also documented 28 *pork barrel* deals made in exchange for “yes” votes on trade agreements, of which nine were kept and 19 broken.

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