



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on May 14, 2015

ObamaTrade “Fast Track” Still Alive Despite Senate Smack Down

Opponents of the [Trans-Pacific Partnership \(TPP\)](#) and the [Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership \(TTIP\)](#) rejoiced over the [Senate’s May 12 thumbs-down vote](#) on Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), but another [TPA/Fast Track](#) match is looming, as lobbyists, the White House, the GOP, and Dems work out backroom deals.

The [52-45 cloture vote](#) in the Senate on Tuesday fell short of the 60 votes needed to cut off the Democrats’ filibuster and bring the Trade Promotion Authority bill to the Senate floor. The vote, which pitted the Obama White House and Senate Republicans against the president’s own party, has been reported in most of the establishment media as a “stinging defeat” for President Obama on one of his top agenda items. However, all is not as it seems on the surface, and some analysts who have been following the TPP/TTIP negotiations and legislation very closely warn that unless opponents keep up the pressure — and increase it — the next Senate Fast Track vote (which may come before the Memorial Day break) is likely to flip in the other direction.

Larry Greenley, who tracks legislation for [The John Birch Society](#), says the May 12 cloture vote is positive in the sense that it has delayed Fast Track and shows that there is sufficient public opposition to the pseudo-free trade agenda to make many Democratic politicians nervous about voting for it. But, he told *The New American*, the “Nay” votes include Democrats who have already committed to supporting TPA and TPP, and who will likely switch to the “Yea” side on the next TPA vote. He points, for instance, to Senators Bennet (Colo.), Cantwell (Wash.), Feinstein (Calif.), McCaskill (Mo.), Murray (Wash.), Nelson (Fla.), Warner (Va.), and Wyden (Ore.) as likely flip votes in the next round. “Opponents of the TPA and TPP/TTIP should not read too much into this vote, or think that it means we’ve defeated Fast Track” and the ObamaTrade bills, Greenley said. “The real tests on these issues are yet to come.”

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Why, then, did the Democrats vote en masse against giving President Obama Fast Track authority? Leverage, for one thing; protective coloration for another. The Democrats that favor the Trans-Pacific Partnership want to expand it, to wrap several more features into it. They insist that the TPA must





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contain Trade Adjustment Assistance, to provide government assistance to workers and businesses adversely affected by the TPP; a customs bill; and measures against foreign currency manipulation.

Also, many of the Democrats who intend, ultimately, to vote for the TPA and TPP know that doing so will cause a large chunk of their base — particularly organized labor — to retaliate against them on election day. To soften that backlash, they need to have a vote they can show to union voters indicating that they opposed TPA. The May 12 vote has provided them with that cover; they can point to that roll call and declare that they fought to make the TPP/TTIP work for the little guy, not just for the big corporate interests.

The Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) bill, as we have explained in more detail in previous articles (see [here](#) and [here](#)), is essential for passage of the TPP and TTIP. Virtually all of the pseudo-free trade agreements have depended on the TPA/Fast Track process to rush the complex agreements through Congress on an up-or-down, high-pressure vote, with very little time to examine or debate the text, and with no amendments or filibusters allowed.

The truly bizarre element in the TPA battle is the fervor of the Republican leadership in Congress demanding that their supposed arch-enemy, President Barack Obama, be given TPA powers to ram through, on the Fast Track, the secret TPP/TTIP agreements that he won't even allow members of Congress full access to. With ObamaTrade, they would be handing him far more power than they did with ObamaCare. Republican Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader who has led this strange and destructive effort, sounded like an Obama White House sock puppet after the vote. "This is not a game," McConnell said after the vote. "This is about trying to accomplish something important for the country that happens to be the president's No. 1 domestic priority."

McConnell and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) will be [leading the GOP charge](#) in this odd "bipartisan" effort to help President Obama round up the Senate Democrat votes he needs. Expect another vote on TPA very soon.

Editor's note: On May 14, just hours after this article was published, the Senate agreed to invoke cloture and proceed with the TPA measure by a vote of 65 to 33.



Photo of Sens. Tom Carper (left, D-Del.) and John Cornyn (R-Texas) promoting TPA on May 12: AP Images

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