

NAFTA-style trade pact with Colombia unlikely to pass Democratic Congress

WASHINGTON (PAI) — Leading congressional Democrats plan to withhold ratification of President Bush's "free trade" agreement with Colombia, at least until aid is renewed to workers who lose jobs to unfair foreign imports.

Even then, Dems say, approval is unlikely for the Colombia pact and similar treaties with South Korea and Panama.

The Democratic statements came after Bush, in his State of the Union address, put the Colombia pact first in line. He did not mention the murder of thousands of unionists by right-wing government-backed "paramilitaries." The deaths are among the key reasons unions oppose legislation implementing the Colombia trade pact.

Instead, Bush said passing the Colombia pact would send a signal

the U.S. is willing to aid Latin American democracies via trade pacts that he said would benefit Latin American workers.

But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) said Democrats had "widespread concern" about the murders of the unionists.

Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.), who chairs the Senate committee that looks at trade agreements, said renewing the government's Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program must come first. The program expired Dec. 31, and new Senate Minority Whip John Kyl (R-Ariz.) was able to block its renewal. U.S. workers are anxious about the impact of trade and globalization on their jobs, Baucus told the National Press Club Jan. 30.

Last year, the House approved legislation extending and expanding the TAA program, opening it to service workers who lose their jobs to unfair foreign competition and to workers who lose jobs when their services are no longer needed by workers who lost their jobs to unfair imports.

So, for example, TAA would become available to workers at a diner next to a textile mill that closes due to imports. Right now, only the textile mill workers, and factory workers in general, are eligible for TAA.

Baucus also wants to double annual TAA money for retraining to \$440 million, expand a tax credit to help trade-dislocated workers pay for health insurance, and extend TAA to workers who lose jobs regardless of whether the imports come from a nation with a free trade pact with the United States.

... PPS: One union still without contract

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and-a-half-year contract that covers the period Jan. 1, 2006 to June 30, 2010.

It's also a better deal than the one ATU members rejected last year, said Local 757 Vice President Sam Schwarz. It contains 2.5 percent annual pay increases; right now, the drivers earn \$12.66 to \$16.51 an hour. The employee share of monthly health insurance premiums would go down to \$160 a month from the current \$200, though doctor's visit co-pays would rise from \$5 to \$20. The school board is scheduled to approve the deal Feb. 25; the

union hasn't scheduled a contract ratification vote yet, but the bargaining team will recommend approval.

Incredibly, the two sides have been negotiating since December 2005.

The school board is scheduled to approve the SEIU and ATU contracts at its Feb. 25 meeting.

Meanwhile, negotiations will continue on a new contract for PFTCE — the classified employees union. Informal bargaining sessions are scheduled for Feb. 15 and 22, and if no agreement is reached, a state-appointed mediator will work with the two sides Feb. 26.

After two years of 1.5 percent raises, PFTCE wants cost-of-living adjustments tied to increases in the Consumer Price Index — and an end to a freeze on step increases. The district's wage counteroffer hasn't gone above about 2 percent. Members currently make \$12.50 to \$19, depending on classification and experience.

The union has begun conducting informational pickets at least a week. Thus far, pickets have gone up outside Benson High School, Cleveland High School and Pioneer Middle School. But PFTCE President Tom Smith is hopeful the district may be ready to settle.

Negotiations are expected to begin in March on the next contract for the district's largest bargaining unit — the Portland Association of Teachers, an affiliate of the Oregon Education Association.

"At the banquet of nature, there are no reserved seats. You get what you can take and you keep what you can hold. And if you can't take, you can't get. And if you can't hold, you can't keep. And without organization, you can't take."




— A. Phillip Randolph (1889-1979)
Civil rights and union movement leader, and founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters

Local Motion

January 2008

Union activity in Oregon and Southwest Washington, according to the National Labor Relations Board and the Oregon Employment Relations Board

Election results

Company	Date	Union	Location	Results:		
				Union	No Union	
Kaiser Foundation Health Plan (print, copy, mail ctr)	1/3	SEIU Local 49	Portland	2	0	
Kaiser Foundation Health Plan (materials specialists)	1/3	SEIU Local 49	Portland, Salem	9	1	

Representation petitions

Company	Union	Location	# of employees
McKay's Market (deli) (decertification)	United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555	Bandon	5
McKay's Market (grocery & produce) (decertification)	United Food & Commercial Workers Local 555	Coos Bay	106
Wildish Sand & Gravel (decertification)	Teamsters Local 206	Eugene	57

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