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Rep. Schrader opposes TRADE Act; wants U.S. to hurry free trade agreement with South Korea

Oregon's 5th District Congressman Kurt Schrader told the Northwest Oregon Labor Council Executive Board Feb. 22 that he doesn't support a bill aimed at reforming U.S. trade policy, and that he wants the United States to quickly sign a free trade deal with South Korea.

During his first term in Congress, the veterinarian and former state senator from Canby has compiled an interim Committee on Political Education (COPE) voting record of 94 percent, based on 17 worker-related issued tracked by the national AFL-CIO. None of the bills tracked dealt with trade.

Asked about Rep. Michael Michaud's (D-Maine) Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act, which would create a new U.S. trade agreement model that benefits America's workers, consumers, farmers, and businesses, Schrader said he would "have a tough time getting there (supporting it), the way it is worded." He didn't indicate the specific language in the bill that bothered him, although he did point out that he supports inclusion of environmental and labor standards in any and all free trade deals.

A total of 134 members of Congress have cosponsored the TRADE Act.

The bill also has strong support from organized labor.

The TRADE Act establishes a process for the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review existing trade agreements; sets criteria for what must be included in future trade agreements, such as bans on Buy American provisions and new rights and privileges for foreign investors; and reasserts congressional authority in the trade policymaking process. Issues covered by the legislation include labor rights, the environment, food safety, human rights, financial regulation, national security and more.

Schrader went on to say that the U.S. needs to quickly ratify a trade deal with South Korea, "because if China beats us to it, we'll be in a world of hurt."

He said the U.S. needs to export more goods in order to ramp up the

economy. "The federal government is tapped out on what it can spend, and it's unlikely the American consumer will come back and buy and spend the way they used to. This means a longer and slower recovery," he said.

Schrader said at this juncture he is opposed to the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, and is undecided on the Panama FTA.

At the NOLC Executive Board meeting, Schrader listened to a variety of labor concerns and ideas, including revising the Pension Protection Act of 2006, maintaining six-day delivery of the mail, and using stimulus dollars to replace aging fleets of mail trucks in Portland with U.S.-made electric mail trucks.

Schrader is facing a challenger in the Democratic primary in May and, if victorious, will have Republican opposition in November's general election.

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Piedmont Post Office dedicated in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

The Portland Post Office's Piedmont Station was dedicated in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during a special ceremony Feb. 17, attended by Congressman Earl Blumenauer.

The renaming of the facility at 630 NE Killingsworth St., Portland, was the result of a community effort led by Branch 82 Letter Carriers Jamie Partridge and Isham Harris. In 2007, Partridge and Harris collected employee signatures supporting the renaming, as well as letters of support from the Piedmont and Concordia neighborhood associations, and the Sabin Community Association. They presented the petition to Blumenauer, who drafted legislation to rename the facility, which is required by law. After some delays, the bill was passed — with support of every member of the Oregon delegation in both the House and the Senate — and signed into law by President Barack Obama on Nov. 30, 2009.

The Feb. 17 ceremony was highlighted by the unveiling of a plaque officially naming the facility in Dr. King's honor.

Stat of the Month

Between 1992 and 2007, notes Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist David Cay Johnston, the bottom 90 percent of Americans saw their incomes inch up by 13 percent, in 2009 dollars. Incomes for the top 400, over the same years, soared 399 percent.

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