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Wyden trying to pull a fast one on fast track

By **Don McIntosh**
Associate Editor

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) announced agreement with Republican leaders April 16 over the terms of a “fast track” bill introduced in the Senate and House. The bill would make it easier to pass the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a NAFTA-style trade deal that the Obama Administration has been negotiating in secret with representatives from 11 other Pacific Rim nations.

In a press statement, Wyden said the bill creates “unprecedented transparency in trade negotiations, and ensures future trade deals break new ground to promote human rights, improve labor conditions, and safeguard the environment.”

But a line-by-line analysis shows Wyden’s statement to be false. Wyden’s bill is almost identical to a fast track bill from the year before. The *only* differences are that the Wyden bill:

- Adds the word “account-

ability” to the name of the act;

- Establishes the position of “chief transparency officer” to advise about “transparency;”

- Gives Congressional staff “with the proper security clearances,” the right to see (but not take pictures of) negotiating texts;

- Requires the president to publish the agreement online 60 days before formally signing it; and

- Creates a narrow escape hatch to revoke fast track consideration: Agreements won’t be subject to the fast track rules if the House or Senate vote to declare that the president has failed to notify or consult Congress on trade negotiations—but they can only do that if the House Ways and Means Committee, or the Senate Finance Committee first do so.

In other respects, the Wyden bill is the same as previous fast track bills—Congress has to finish voting on a trade agreement

90 days after the president sends it to them, and can’t amend it in any way. The U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to “regulate commerce with foreign nations.” Through fast track, Congress abdicates that power, giving it to the president. In theory, the fast track bills instruct the president what to bargain for with other nations. In fact, Obama has been negotiating the TPP since he took office in 2009, so any fast track provisions telling the president what to bargain for can’t be taken seriously, since they’re coming after the fact.

With fast track, what’s really at stake is an agreement, the TPP, written substantially by and for U.S. corporations, which would obligate Pacific Rim countries to expand patent, trademark and copyright monopolies, and give foreign investors the right to sue governments for passing laws that reduce profits. That’s a conclu-

sion based on texts leaked to Wikileaks. Under the fast track bill, the final text of the secret agreement won’t be known until the deal is signed and sent to Congress for its rubber stamp.

On April 22, six days after Wyden’s bill was announced, the Senate version, S. 995, passed the Senate Finance Committee 20-6. It was supported by Wyden, Maria Cantwell of Washington, and five other Democrats, and all but one Republican. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Rob Portman (R-Ohio) tried to amend the bill to require the White House to include enforceable currency manipulation provisions in international trade agreements, but that failed 11-15, with Cantwell and four other Democrats joining 10 Republicans in voting against it.

The following day, the House version, H.R. 1890 passed the Ways and Means Committee

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MAY 19 ELECTION Endorsements of the NORTHWEST OREGON LABOR COUNCIL

CLACKAMAS COUNTY

Measure 3-466 (*Clackamas Fire District Local Option Levy*)
Support

HILLSBORO SCHOOL BOARD

Position 5: **LISA ALLEN**
Position 7: **JAIME RODRIGUEZ**

MULTNOMAH EDUCATION SERVICE DISTRICT

Position 6, at-large: **STEPHEN BEAUDOIN**
Position 7: **SIOBHAN BURKE**

PORTLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Board of Directors, Zone 3: **MICHAEL SONNLEITNER**

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Board of Directors, Zone 3: **BOBBIE REGAN**

PORT OF ST. HELENS

Position 2: **ROBERT KEYSER**
Position 3: **COLLEEN DESHAZER**
Position 4: **MIKE AVENT**

REYNOLDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Measure 26-164 (*Bond to replace and upgrade schools*)
Support

WEST LINN

Mayor: **THOMAS FRANK**

Authorized and paid for by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council,
9955 SE Washington, St., Suite 305, Portland, OR 97216



SAYING NO TO FAST TRACK. Protesters received a police escort through the streets of downtown Portland April 18 for a “No Fast Track” rally and march sponsored by the Oregon AFL-CIO. Approximately 500 people participated. Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden recently brokered a “fast track” deal with Republican leadership in the Senate. Fast-track, or Trade Promotion Authority, will allow President Obama to rush the secretly negotiated Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement through Congress, with little time for meaningful discussion and no possibility for amendments or changes, and only an up or down vote. Labor unions, environmental groups, and others are upset that Wyden, a Democrat, helped deliver the “undemocratic” fast track bill. They also are calling on Oregon’s Congressional delegation to oppose it.