

...Trump's new NAFTA: Is America's trade policy at a crossroads?

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“fast-track” rules that let presidents negotiate trade deals Congress can't amend. In response to that last vote, the national AFL-CIO sent a mailer to Blumenauer's constituents saying he “sold out,” and the local AFL-CIO stopped inviting him to its annual labor day picnic.

But Blumenauer was never a full-on free-trader. He voted against three NAFTA-style deals — the ones with Colombia, Oman, and Central America.

NAFTA and its children were never popular with the American public, not even with the Republican base. But it wasn't until Trump that any national Republican leader defied the party's free-trade, pro-NAFTA consensus. In office, Trump appointed Reagan-era trade negotiator Robert Lighthizer and sent him to Mexico and Canada to negotiate a re-write of NAFTA. The agreement they worked out — dubbed U.S. Mexico Canada Agreement (USMCA) by Trump — has yet to be approved by Congress. That's where Blumenauer comes in.

With Democrats back in

AFL-CIO trade policy specialist Celeste Drake, at Blumenauer's March 26 hearing on trade:



“America's working families support trade, but not unconditional trade. The rules of trade matter. These rules should be structured to promote good jobs, high wages, a clean and sustainable environment, responsible employers, and a responsive government. The trade deals and policies enacted in the United States over the past 25 years have generally missed this mark by a long shot. The corporate privileges enshrined in some U.S. deals create not free trade, but rigged trade, a set of incentives that promote outsourcing, higher drug prices, labor exploitation and environmental abuse, and limit the ways we can regulate banks and label food.”

charge of the House, Blumenauer won appointment to chair the trade subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee. The Ways and Means Committee will have a role to play whenever Trump sends the USMCA to Congress for a vote under the fast track rules.

Trump told Republican leaders March 26 that he wants a vote on it by summer; it's thought that he'll need at least 30 House Democrats to join with Republicans in order to pass it.

In his conversation with Chamberlain, Blumenauer said he wants to work closely with labor leaders on trade policy.

Blumenauer had lunch in early March with national AFL-

CIO President Richard Trumka and at least half a dozen national union leaders who are members of the government's official Labor Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and Trade Policy. The takeaway: The labor leaders see Trump's deal as an improvement over the existing NAFTA, but also say it's still not good enough.

To hear more about labor's perspective, Blumenauer invited a panel of labor's trade experts to the new subcommittee's first hearing, on March 26. Opening the hearing, Blumenauer said trade policy is at a crossroads. To regain public confidence, the United States must toughen enforcement of the labor and envi-

ronmental commitments America's trading partners made in the existing trade agreements.

Blumenauer told the *Labor Press* by phone April 9 that he and other committee Democrats will push the Trump administration to go back and negotiate tougher labor and environmental standards in the pending agreement. In USMCA, Mexico committed to improving its labor laws to end the institution of company-dominated unions, unelected by workers, that sign agreements workers had no say in. But the Mexican Congress hasn't passed the reforms, and Blumenauer wants them to do that before the House passes the USMCA.

Blumenauer and other Ways

and Means Committee Democrats said as much in an April 11 letter to Lighthizer, Trump's chief trade negotiator.

“More than 25 years ago, when Congress looked at taking up NAFTA, House Democrats had deep and abiding concerns,” says the letter. “They included apprehension that the elimination of duties, coupled with a lack of worker protections in Mexico, could lead to the deterioration of wages, competitiveness, and opportunities for American workers.”

Could USMCA be modified? You might think having been signed by Mexico and Canada that it's a done deal, and Congress tied its own hands with fast track, which says it can't amend it but only vote it up or down. But there's precedent for further tweaks, Blumenauer says — the so-called “May 10 agreement” which Nancy Pelosi crafted when Democrats took the House for the final two years of Bush Jr.'s second term. That agreement led Bush back to the bargaining table, where he got several trading partners to agree to further improvements.



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