



The Secret Trade Deal of 2007



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Friday, June 8, 2007

SECRET TRADE DEAL - DAY 29: Can the Clinton Machine Get Congress to Deliver Another NAFTA?

This is another in a [series of ongoing posts](#) following the announcement of a secret free trade deal on May 10, 2007 between a handful of senior Democrats and the Bush administration. That deal encompasses free trade agreements with Peru, Panama, South Korea and Colombia, and is designed to pave the way for the passage of presidential fast track authority - the authority that lets presidents eliminate all labor, environmental and human rights provisions from trade agreements.

Can the Clinton machine deliver another NAFTA? That is the question in Washington on trade these days, as dynamic similar to the NAFTA debate begins to take shape. The Colombian government, which has been tied to paramilitary gangs that execute union organizers, is spending lavishly to enlist top Clinton administration officials - including Hillary Clinton's top campaign strategist and President Clinton himself - to pressure Democrats on Capitol Hill to pass the Colombian Free Trade Agreement - an agreement that is part of the bigger secret deal. This campaign is being backed up by a wide array of businesses such as Wal-Mart and Citigroup. To date, the legislative language of the secret trade deal has still not been released - but that hasn't stopped the furious efforts to build a coalition of Clinton administration officials-turned-lobbyists, a handful of top Democrats in Congress and corporate interests to ram the secret deal through Congress. Here is today's report.

WSJ - COLOMBIA HIRING CLINTON-CONNECTED LOBBYISTS TO PUSH TRADE DEAL: In a situation eerily reminiscent of the merging of K Street and Democratic leaders during the push for NAFTA, the [Wall Street Journal](#) notes that currently, the Colombian government "is putting together a richly financed lobbying campaign piloted by ex-Clinton White House officials, complete with advertisements [and] a rapid-response media team," spending "about \$100,000 a month" on the campaign. This is the same Colombian government that the [Washington Post](#) reports regularly colludes with right-wing paramilitary gangs to execute union organizers, and whose "U.S. ambassador acknowledges that Colombia's trade-union murder rate is the highest in the world." Additionally, [Reuters](#) notes that "Colombia remains the world's largest producer of cocaine" with the latest U.S. government figures showing the country produced "8 percent more coca leaf used to make the drug than a year earlier." Nonetheless, the campaign to award Colombia with a free trade deal is being led by "the public-relations firm of Burson-Marsteller, headed by former Clinton pollster Mark Penn, who is also a top adviser to Sen. Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign." Penn's "firm has set up a campaign-style operation to respond immediately to any critical news about Colombia." Additionally, "Glover Park Group," which includes former Clinton White House spokesman Joe Lockhart and lobbyist Susan Brophy, works on Capitol Hill with the lobbying firm of Johnson, Madigan, Peck, Boland & Stewart Inc., including Republican Peter Madigan and another Clinton-administration lobbyist, William Danvers." Meanwhile, "a business coalition, headed by Caterpillar Inc, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Citigroup Inc., is making lobbying calls and is planning an advertising campaign to push the trade deal."

GORE REFUSES TO SHARE STAGE WITH URIBE, WHILE CLINTON ACCEPTS AWARD FROM HIM: The [Wall Street Journal](#) reports that former Vice President Al Gore "pulled out of an environmental meeting in April rather than share a stage with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe because of what a Gore spokeswoman calls the 'troubling allegations' in Colombia." By contrast, former President Clinton will accept an award from Uribe at a New York dinner in a move that is designed to serve as "a signal to Democrats that Colombia isn't politically radioactive." The [Financial Times](#) reports that Colombia's advances toward Clinton are a deliberate attempt to get him to use his political capital to steamroll Democrats in Congress as he did with NAFTA.

K STREET TARGETS SPECIFIC DEM GROUPS IN PUSH FOR SECRET DEAL: The [Hill Newspaper](#) reports that Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, who is under a cloud of scandal in connection to right-wing paramilitary gangs and ant-union violence, "will lobby members of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and the Democratic Blue Dog Coalition." He will also meet with Rangel, Ways and Means trade subcommittee Chairman Sandy Levin (D-Mich.), Senate Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and GOP Whip Roy Blunt (Mo.). His lobbying efforts are being backed up by, among others, Caterpillar, Citigroup and Wal-Mart. "The three companies chair the Latin American Trade Coalition, which will brief House staff Thursday on all three Latin American trade deals," the Hill reports. "The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is also preparing a campaign to push all three deals forward."

DEM FAIR TRADERS DEMAND CONGRESS STOP THE COLOMBIAN TRADE DEAL: Reuters reports that a group of Democratic lawmakers held a press conference this week saying "Congress should delay voting on a free-trade agreement with Colombia until President Alvaro Uribe proves he is serious about reducing violence and jailing murderers of trade unionists." Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) said, "Mr. Uribe has come back to Washington too soon. Come back next year, Mr. Uribe, and let's see what has actually been accomplished." Rep. Phil Hare, an Illinois Democrat and former union leader, said violence against Colombian trade unionists remains too high and two few perpetrators are brought to justice. "Twenty-one hundred labor leaders have been murdered in Colombia since 1991. There have been only 37 convictions," Hare said. "If I had been born in Colombia, there is a strong possibility ... I could be dead." Ways and Means Committee Charles Rangel (D-NY) "told Reuters the timing of a vote on the Colombian agreement was still unclear" but did not say he would stop his push for the deal.

CHI TRIB - FRESHMEN DEMS "TEAR AT PARTY UNITY ON TRADE": The [Chicago Tribune](#) reports that "first-term Democrats are leading a vocal charge against their own leadership over several proposed international trade deals." Most Democrats "remain largely skeptical" of the proposed South Korea and Colombia trade pacts, which were part of the secret deal. But "party leaders -- including Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), the caucus chairman, who helped shepherd NAFTA to approval when he worked for Clinton -- announced last month they would move ahead." Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) said of the secret deal: "It's not a good step forward, it's good lip service."

CONGRESSDAILY - PELOSI REFUSES TO MAKE COMMITMENTS TO PROGRESSIVES ON TRADE: CongressDaily reports that "the ultimate decision on whether to proceed with the Colombia trade agreement will be made by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), who late last week signaled that she is cool to demands from some members of the Democratic Caucus to advance trade bills only when they are backed by the majority of the party." Pelosi in May "refused to give union leaders a commitment that Peru and Panama would be the only agreements this Congress would consider."

BUSH TRADE REP AUTHORS OP-ED DEMANDING CONGRESS AGREE TO WHITE HOUSE DEMANDS: In a move that seems to signal fear that the secret deal will be defeated, Bush U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab penned an [op-ed](#) in *The Politico*, the Beltway newsletter targeted at Capitol Hill staff. In the piece, she says passage of the secret deal "should set the stage for a new allocation of trade promotion authority" - the authority that allows presidents to eliminate all labor, environmental and human rights provisions from trade agreements.

RANGEL OUTRAGED THAT ANYONE WOULD SUGGEST STRONG LABOR STANDARDS WILL BE IN THE DEAL: Though Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charlie Rangel (D-NY) is trying to sell the secret deal to fellow Democrats by telling them it definitely includes strong labor protections, [The Hill newspaper](#) reports that he is simultaneously outraged that K Street front groups would dare say the deal includes strong labor protections - as if that was an awful proposition. That's right, Rangel issued a written statement saying the National Association of Manufacturers "incorrectly suggested that Rangel and other Democrats want ILO conventions included in trade deals."

BAUCUS TAKES STEP TO MAKE PASSING FAST TRACK MORE DIFFICULT: [Congressional Quarterly](#) reports that Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D) now says "Congress needs to expand government aid to workers displaced by trade and globalization, but it should not tie that to renewal of the president's trade negotiating authority." This is particularly good news for those fighting against President Bush's request for fast track renewal, because attaching that authority to aid for workers is one legislative trick being considered to attract more votes for fast track than it would get as a stand-alone measure. Earlier this Spring, the [Montana State Senate passed a resolution](#) demanding Baucus use his position to block reauthorization of fast track, and a few weeks later the group [They Work For Us aired ads in Montana](#) asking Baucus to respect that resolution.

DEM STRATEGIST URGES PARTY TO REJECT FAST TRACK AS "GOOD POLITICS AND GOOD POLICY": Appearing on CNN before the Democratic presidential debate on June 3, Democratic strategist Robert Zimmerman said opposing fast track "is not just good politics [for Democrats in Congress] it's good policy." He said: "If in fact the Democrats give up their fast track authority and don't take it back, they're missing a great opportunity. I think it would be a very unfortunate situation."

NEW HAMPSHIRE BECOMES LATEST STATE TO DEMAND CONGRESS CHANGE TRADE POLICY: New Hampshire and Pennsylvania are the latest to join a growing number of states demanding Congress seriously reform America's trade policies. [Public Citizen](#) reports that last week, the New Hampshire Senate and House passed a resolution urging Congress to stop usurping state power through lobbyist-written trade agreements. "The arcane language of trade provisions covering investment, government procurement, and regulation of the service sector takes a direct aim at areas which have historically been under the authority of the state and local governments," said New Hampshire Rep. Susi Nord. "We are telling the trade negotiators not to agree to provisions which affect our state unless we tell you to." Pennsylvania State Rep. Robert Belfanti (D), chairman of the House Labor Relations Committee, said "Our companies cannot compete with countries where workers are paid a fraction of what U.S. workers are paid and where companies don't have to worry about protecting the health and safety of their workers and the environment." Pennsylvania AFL-CIO President William George said there is bipartisan support in Pennsylvania's congressional delegation to oppose fast track and that "nobody gets a free ride on this issue from the labor movement - we are holding them accountable, Democrats and Republicans."

Posted by David Sirota at 6:13 AM