

With the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) on Ropes, It's Corporate Power vs. People Power on Capitol Hill

By [Deirdre Fulton](#)

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Statements from Sen. Orrin Hatch suggest lame-duck Senate vote is not off the table

As President Barack Obama [gathered](#) high-profile supporters of the [Trans Pacific Partnership \(TPP\)](#) for a meeting at the White House on Friday, the corporate-friendly trade agreement was dealt a blow as Vietnam's parliament deferred its long-expected ratification.

Reuters [reported](#) from Hanoi Friday that Vietnam will not include ratification of TPP on its agenda for its next parliament session, which begins October 20.

This adds "to uncertainty over the future of...Obama's signature trade deal," the news agency wrote. "As arguably the biggest beneficiary of the deal covering 40 percent of the global economy, Vietnam was expected to be among the first to ratify the TPP, the prospect of which helped spur record foreign investment last year in its booming manufacturing sector."

According to Reuters, Vietnamese newspaper *Thanh Nien* cited Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan, the parliament chairwoman, as saying Vietnam's ratification would depend on the ruling Communist Party, "the global situation," and the outcome of the U.S. election.

Both major party nominees are opposed to the trade deal, along with many Democrats, some Republicans, and wide swaths of civil society.

But Friday's meeting "is an effort by the White House to show that support for the agreement also crosses party lines," *The Hill* [wrote](#), and "the latest effort by Obama to [generate support for the pact](#), which would be the largest free trade deal in history and is a centerpiece of his administration's so-called 'pivot' to Asia."

Among those scheduled to be in attendance: failed Republican presidential candidate John Kasich, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, former George W. Bush administration Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed, and others. A press briefing is expected to follow the meeting.

CNN [reports](#) that Kasich "defended the prospect of Obama pushing the TPP toward passage in a 'lame duck' session of Congress"—a possibility that TPP opponents are [actively working](#) to prevent.

"Frankly, if I have to come down here and spend some time lobbying my Republican

colleagues, I'm more than glad to do that," Kasich said.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell [declared](#) last month that the Senate would not vote on the current agreement this year, and House Speaker Paul Ryan has said: "As long as we don't have the votes, I see no point in bringing up an agreement."

But watchdogs have [warned](#) that the TPP "is not dead, unfortunately." Indeed, Public Citizen's Lori Wallach argued earlier this month that GOP leaders are in fact "negotiating for changes to obtain even more corporate goodies—longer monopoly protections for pharmaceutical firms' high medicine prices, elimination of an exception protecting some tobacco regulations from TPP attack, and more."

She wrote:

The GOP leaders are not only trying to pressure the White House to meet their demands, but are trying to scare the other TPP countries off of their current positions that no changes are possible.

If the GOP leaders get what they want, they will be pushing hard to pass an even more damaging TPP in the lame duck session, despite their insincere political posturing over the unpopular agreement leading up to the elections.

Sure enough, news outlets reported this week that Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) "is working with the Obama administration to resolve several lingering issues that could ultimately pave the way" for lame-duck passage of the TPP, as *The Hill* [put it](#).

Inside U.S. Trade [reported](#) Friday that Hatch "said the Obama administration has promised to satisfy his demand of including 12 years of market exclusivity for biologics in the implementing bill for the [TPP], but noted that he is waiting to receive that pledge in writing."

"They said they'd satisfy me," Hatch told the publication on Friday.

However, Glyn Moody [explained](#) for *TechDirt*: "The final TPP text specifies eight years, and because of the Fast Track authority that [Hatch] worked so hard to put in place, there is no way for Hatch to get the text changed now that it has been finalized."

That has not seemed to deter Hatch, who has floated a number of work-arounds including "[binding side agreements](#)" with TPP countries or development of a "[methodology](#)" he believes "honorable" countries will follow.

"That's really pretty extraordinary," Moody wrote.

"After nearly eight years of tough negotiations, concessions were made and a final text agreed by all the countries involved. And now Hatch says it's not good enough, that the U.S. has some special right to ask for yet more, and that countries refusing to up their protection for biologics data to 12 years won't be part of the TPP deal."

In turn, environmentalists, public health advocates, and labor groups aren't going to sit idly by.

“Why are we nervous? Well, we’re nervous because we’ve been here once or twice before,” Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) [told](#) reporters Wednesday on Capitol Hill. “When you have the Business Roundtable and virtually every multinational corporation saying they want this, we understand that’s real power.”

Still, as *Common Dreams* [reported](#) Wednesday, people power was also on display this week, when a coalition of progressive organizations coordinated a national call-in day to voice their TPP opposition.

“While the president is cloistered with corporate chieftains planning how to use a lame duck session to try to pass a TPP only they love,” Wallach said, “Congress’ phones are ringing off the hook with anti-TPP calls.”

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Articles by: [Deirdre Fulton](#)

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