

# Sen. Brown calls for trade 'time out' to make changes in policy

By Jonathan Riskind  
The Columbus Dispatch  
June 4, 2008

WASHINGTON—Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, helped unveil legislation today that would mandate sweeping changes in U.S. trade policy.

Brown, a leading Senate critic of the North American Free Trade Agreement and other pacts, says a trade "time out" is needed while a new framework is developed for how U.S. and foreign trading partners should do business.

The legislation is not expected to pass this year before Congress adjourns for the presidential election, and opponents such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce made it clear yesterday that they will vigorously fight against it ever becoming law.

Democratic leaders who took control of Congress last year essentially put on hold several pending trade deals pushed by President Bush. Brown and other trade critics say many trade pacts result in American workers losing jobs to countries where wages are cheaper and labor and environmental standards are weaker.

Brown's bill, whose co-authors include Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., and Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine, would require a review of existing trade deals and a potential renegotiation of current agreements. It also sets out new labor, environmental and food and product safety standards for future pacts.

The legislation also seeks to give Congress more power over what goes into trade deals before lawmakers vote on the agreements. Currently, so-called fast-track authority gives more power to the president.

"It's clear the public wants a different direction on trade," Brown said before attending a Capitol Hill news conference to unveil the bill. "This bill begins to change the debate on trade."

Ohio has lost more than 200,000 manufacturing jobs since 2001, Brown said, blaming trade deals for many of those job losses.

He said he would like to see more foreign trade by American businesses. But it needs to happen in a way that benefits workers on the ground in the United States and abroad, Brown said.

But proponents of current and pending trade pacts say that foreign trade and exports are bright spots in volatile economic times, both nationally and in Ohio, and that Brown's bill would hamper efforts to expand international trade. They cite statistics such as a Ohio Department of Development report that found 308,500 Ohio jobs related to manufactured exports in 2005, the most recent year available.

"This (Brown's bill) is an awful, awful idea," said Christopher Wenk, a U.S. Chamber of Commerce official. "This is the wrong approach at the wrong time."