

# Trade Critics On The Offensive

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Democratic trade critics from both parties today said they have a firm commitment from the now-presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Sen. Barack Obama that he'll reopen the North American Free Trade Agreement if he wins in November.

I think that's a pretty good sign that he'll oppose Colombia, that he's not going to push Colombia, said Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), referring to a controversial trade agreement between the United States and that country that is currently stalled.

The comments came at a press conference on new legislation sponsored by Brown, Rep. Michael H. Michaud (D-Maine) and other congressional trade skeptics that would require the president to review all existing trade agreements and renegotiate those that do not meet standards set forth in the bill. The president could negotiate no new trade agreements until the process was finished, putting in place a moratorium that would likely last for two years or so.

The sponsors don't expect the bill to pass this year. Rather, it's a vehicle to draw attention to the issue as the presidential and congressional campaigns progress - and to make sure the issue, and the legislation, is front and center when a new president enters the White House.

The bills sponsors see the 2006 election - in which the progressive Brown defeated a Republican incumbent for his Senate seat and a number of other Democrats won races in which trade was an issue - as a mandate to change trade policy. The attention trade has received in the presidential primary (almost entirely on the Democratic side, the Crypt notes) is taking that discussion to the next step, Brown said.

The public...has spoken so loudly and clearly, we'll see a different trade policy with a President McCain or a President Obama, he said. President Obama will take it faster, will move in the direction the public absolutely is crying for; President McCain will need to be dragged by the public. . I think he's going to have to listen.

The bill's supporters talked with staff for both Obama and Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) about the legislation, Brown said. He doesn't know if Obama will sign on as a co-sponsor, though.