

## **Snowe May Co-Sponsor Bill That Would Overhaul U.S. Trade Policy**

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Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) is considering co-sponsoring legislation introduced by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) last year that would require an extensive review of existing U.S. free trade agreements and would place new conditions on future trade negotiations.

If, upon review, existing trade agreements did not meet certain criteria on a range of topics including job losses and access to medicines, the bill would obligate the U.S. government to renegotiate those agreements, according to the text of the *Trade Reform, Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act* as introduced last year.

Snowe has not made any final decisions on the legislation, and is currently reviewing it to ensure that no “unintended consequences” would result from endorsing the bill, according to a Senate aide. However, Snowe is not at this point demanding that certain changes be made as a condition for signing on, the aide said, although the bill will likely not be identical to the version introduced last year.

Endorsement by Snowe could be a major coup for supporters of the bill, which is backed by unions and consumer groups. Not only is Snowe a member of the Senate Finance Committee, but she also wields influence in Congress due to the fact that she is a moderate Republican willing to vote with Democrats on certain key issues.

When Snowe supported the economic stimulus package earlier this year, she was one of only three Republicans to do so. At the time, observers highlighted her importance to Senate Democrats and may give her more influence on trade issues (Inside U.S. Trade, Jan. 30).

**One supporter of the legislation said that endorsement by Snowe would also help highlight the fact that dissatisfaction with the current model of U.S. trade policy as manifested in trade deals with Panama, Colombia and South Korea is widespread and not limited to a small number of Democrats.**

**This source also said that her endorsement could signal that Snowe will oppose the trade deals with those three countries, as they represent the Bush administration trade policy that the bill intends to reform.**

In the House, similar legislation last year was sponsored by Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME), who is currently in the process of gathering signatures for co-sponsors and hopes to introduce the bill soon, sources said.

Michaud is hoping to gather 100 co-sponsors for the legislation in order to highlight the depth of opposition to the current trade model, and has already amassed roughly 80 co-sponsors, sources said this week. By contrast, the bill had 52 co-sponsors when introduced last year.

The legislation “serves the important function of shifting the debate towards what we are for with respect to a new model for trade and globalization rules that can deliver the benefits of expanded trade while avoiding the damage caused by the status quo NAFTA-WTO model,” according to a dear colleague letter Michaud sent in an effort to increase support for the bill.

Last year, the House bill counted five committee chairmen among its co-sponsors, although Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY) was not a co-sponsor (Inside U.S. Trade, June 6, 2008).

**Sponsoring the bill were Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson (D-MN), Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers (D-MI), Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall (D-WV), Veterans Affairs Chairman Bob Filner (D-CA) and Administration Committee Chairman Robert Brady (D-PA).**

Sources said both the Senate and House versions, when they are introduced, will likely contain some changes from the versions as introduced last year, although the essential elements of the bill will remain the same.