

# Free trade pacts prospects 'not good': top US lawmaker

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WASHINGTON — Prospects for reviving and approving US free trade pacts with Panama, Colombia and South Korea are "not good," Senate Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell warned Thursday.

And US President Barack Obama "is sending all the wrong signals to the rest of the world in terms of trade, that America may be contemplating going protectionist," McConnell told AFP.

The top Senate Republican said prospects for approving the three stalled agreements were "not good" and that the Obama administration had yet to take any formal steps to resubmit the accords to the US Congress for approval.

"If there's any efforts to do the Panama, Colombia or South Korean treaties I'm unaware of them," said the lawmaker, whose home state is Kentucky.

The agreements with the three US allies were clinched during the administration of Obama's Republican predecessor George W. Bush but had been held up due to opposition from the Democratic-controlled Congress.

McConnell expressed concern that Democrats had let lapse a law that binds the Congress to an up-or-down vote on trade deals, and that the resubmitted accords would therefore be subject to amendments -- which could require renegotiating with the countries involved.

So even if the president resubmitted the pacts, "I don't know how you could get them through anyway," he said.

The senator also noted the inclusion of a "Buy American" restriction in the giant economic stimulus bill US lawmakers approved in early 2009, saying that also sent a message that Washington was turning its back on global trade.