

House passes Murphy currency reform bill

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Proponents of legislation cosponsored by Rep. Tim Murphy are celebrating a victory in the House, where the Currency Reform for Fair Trade Act cleared on a 348 to 79 vote Wednesday evening.

The bill has support from the American Iron and Steel Institute, with members including [United States Steel](#); the United Steelworkers; and the Coalition for a Prosperous America, whose members include local small and medium manufacturers.

It seeks to strengthen the Commerce Department's ability to use countervailing duties on imports that benefit from an exporting government's currency practice. The bill addresses some Commerce Department practices that have dismissed such claims, especially in cases involving Chinese goods.

Some small and medium-sized manufacturers in the Pittsburgh region have been working closely with Murphy's office to support the bill. At a manufacturing summit convened in April by the Coalition for a Prosperous America, attendees determined trade law enforcement, including supporting such laws as the Currency Act, and tax reform are the two biggest issues that need to be addressed in order to preserve a domestic industrial base.

Concerns with the bill were aired by Republicans on the House Ways and Means Committee, including ranking GOP member David Camp, who questioned whether the bill would pass World Trade Organization scrutiny. An amendment was added to address this concern, but the members said in a statement they still worry that it did not go far enough and the WTO could seek sanctions that would further harm the domestic industry. Additionally, there were questions about how the bill will affect U.S.-China relations.

After the House vote, Murphy called it a "truly historic moment."

For years, American manufacturers and workers have been pleading for Washington to stand up for U.S. jobs and enforce global fair trade," Murphy, R-Pa., said in a written statement. "Passage of the Currency Reform for Fair Trade Act sends a clear message that Congress heard those pleas and is taking a giant step forward to help revitalize the American manufacturing sector. We are not longer waiting for empty promises to come true. We took action."

Murphy noted that, by undervaluing its currency, China is subsidizing its manufacturers by up to 40 percent.

American Iron and Steel Institute President and CEO Thomas Gibson released a statement commending the vote and urging the Senate to follow suit.

“This legislation gives American industry a tool to take action to address the false trade advantage China is maintaining by its flagrant disregard of the rules — rules that it promised to abide by when it joined the WTO,” Gibson said.

The bill moves on to the Senate and during a speech earlier this week at a conference of southwestern Pennsylvania manufacturers, Sen. Bob Casey, D-Pa., said it is possible the Senate could take vote before the end of the year. He noted the administration has not been aggressive enough on this issue.

“Treasury and Commerce (departments) need to do more,” he said.