

Democrats Divided as House Passes Peru Trade Bill

By Steven R. Weisman
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WASHINGTON— Defying appeals from labor leaders, environmentalists and foes of free-trade, nearly half the Democrats in the House joined today with the Bush administration's backers to support a trade liberalization agreement with Peru that the White House hopes will lead to the approval of future trade deals.

The vote came this morning and followed several hours of debate that exposed a deep fissure among Democrats. On one side were veterans from declining industrial areas of the Northeast and Midwest and younger critics of globalization.

On the other was the House Speaker, [Nancy Pelosi](#), and other leaders arguing that trade brings benefits to many Americans and that the deal was worthy of Democratic support because it requires Peru to protect labor rights and the environment.

Voting for the trade agreement were 109 Democrats and 176 Republicans. Voting against it were 116 Democrats and 16 Republicans. (Eight members from each party did not vote.)

The Senate is expected to take up the agreement soon and is likely to approve it.

The Bush administration was elated by the outcome in the House.

“The conventional wisdom last fall was that the president and Congress could not come together to make progress on a pro-trade agenda,” said Susan C. Schwab, the United States trade representative. “Today, the hard work and risk-taking of many are bearing fruit.”

The large number of Democrats voting for the Peru deal does not necessarily pave the way for other agreements with Panama, Colombia and South Korea that President Bush is seeking. Ms. Pelosi and the Democratic leadership have not endorsed these deals, arguing that they have defects.

The House vote for the Peru deal was seen as significant because it came a year after Congress was recaptured by the Democrats following a campaign in which many Democratic candidates criticized the Bush administration's trade policies.

Since Mr. Bush took office in 2001, Democrats have been extremely reluctant to support trade agreements negotiated by his administration. Organized labor argues that since 2000, the United States has lost 3 million manufacturing jobs, though some labor officials

concede that it is difficult to tell whether these jobs were lost because of cheap imports, technology or other factors.

The labor movement also argues that trade and the export of jobs overseas has flattened American wages.

The administration, on the other hand, says that only about 300,000 unemployed Americans can trace their loss of jobs to trade and that wage stagnation cannot be countered by raising barriers to trade.

The requirement that Peru adopt labor and environmental protections was negotiated last May by Ms. Pelosi and two senior Democrats, Representatives [Charles B. Rangel](#) of New York and Sander M. Levin of Michigan, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee and the committee's trade subcommittee respectively.

While some Democrats concede that trade has cost some American jobs and perhaps flattened the wages of some workers, they also argue that it is impossible to reverse the trends of companies looking for cheaper labor overseas and that the United States must respond by trying to negotiating lower tariff barriers and exporting more overseas.

Democrats from the prosperous areas of the East and West Coast have become especially responsive, many Democrats say, to the desire of Wall Street and the high technology, health, pharmaceutical and entertainment industries to expand their sales overseas. These industries have also become major Democratic contributors.