

White House Makes Deals for Support of Trade Pact

By Edmund L. Andrews
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WASHINGTON- With promises of more trade protection for textile companies, President Bush coaxed as many as six Republican lawmakers on Monday to vote for the Central American Free Trade Agreement.

Three House Republicans from textile-producing districts announced they would support the trade pact, mainly because the White House promised to get commitments from Central American countries to maintain or increase their use of American fabrics.

Three more House Republicans from textile areas are expected to sign on as well.

White House officials and House Republican leaders are trying to pass the trade pact by the end of this week, sparing no effort to cut deals with reluctant party members.

The trade agreement, known informally as Cafta, is deeply unpopular in textile-producing states like North and South Carolina. With all but a handful of Democrats planning to vote against Cafta, Mr. Bush needs to prevent Republican defections wherever possible.

On Monday, Mr. Bush picked up the votes of Representative Bob Inglis of South Carolina, along with two Alabama congressmen, Spencer Bachus and Mike Rogers. Three other wavering Republicans, Representative J. Gresham Barrett of South Carolina, along with representatives Phil Gingrey and Lynn A. Westmoreland of Georgia, let it be known they were likely to come on board as well.

Mr. Inglis said he agreed to vote for the pact in return for three specific commitments by Mr. Bush.

One agreement would let Central American countries export trousers duty-free to the United States only if they are made with pockets and linings from American mills. The measure was important to several mills in Mr. Rogers' district in Alabama that employ about 2,400 workers.

Another side agreement would increase the amount of American fabric that Nicaragua agrees to buy in making clothing for exports. And a third would make it tougher for Central American clothing factories to rely on fabric from Mexico.

"With those three corrections, this Cafta is now a much better Cafta," Mr. Inglis told reporters on Monday.

Even so, at least a half-dozen Republicans from textile areas are expected to vote against the pact, White House officials concede.

Mr. Bush is seeking support on other fronts. On Tuesday, House Republicans plan to vote on a bill that could expose China to retaliation for government-subsidized exports.

The administration has resisted that measure, but it is expected to swing several votes by reluctant party members from manufacturing states. Representative Phil English, Republican of Pennsylvania, reversed his opposition to Cafta last week because of the bill. And Representative Don Manzullo, an Illinois Republican from the factory area around Rockford, is expected to sign on as well.

House leaders are dangling other incentives. They have threatened to delay a vote on a huge three-year highway-funding bill, which is packed with local projects, until after a vote on the trade pact.