

Peru Free Trade Deal Passes, But Some Democrats Have Reservations

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Under fire for accomplishing very little this fall, Congress cleared a free trade deal with Peru, but they did it without the support of Democratic leaders in the Senate.

The free trade agreement, requested by the president, passed the Senate on a 77-18 vote, so the roll call was never close. The House has passed the same agreement, so the United States is poised to have another free-wheeling trade partner in Latin America.

But what's notable about this debate was the objections of the most liberal Democrats in the Senate who voted against the trade deal, reflecting the mood of a Democratic base increasingly agitated about outsourcing, the decline in the manufacturing base and the impact of globalism on union workers.

"I remain concerned that U.S. free trade agreements have hurt many American workers and unwittingly caused problems in some of our free trade partners," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), who voted against the agreement. "The U.S. has lost about three million manufacturing jobs since 2001. Many of these jobs have gone overseas, replaced by imports from low-wage countries."

Every "no" vote on the Peru deal came from Democrats, with the exception of Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), who also voted against the measure. Every Democratic presidential candidate missed the vote because they are participating in a radio debate in Iowa.

Republicans backed the deal, describing it as a bipartisan victory.

"Not only will the agreement reinforce the free markets of Peru, it will help grow jobs here at home and continue to open the global marketplace to American products," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.)