

Plum jobs for US trade deal advisers

By John Garnaut and Marian Wilkinson
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Two senior United States trade negotiators who sealed the trade deal with Australia have accepted plum jobs representing US medical and drug companies.

Ralph Ives was promoted in April to assistant US trade representative for pharmaceutical policy after leading the trade negotiations with Australia.

Next month he becomes vice-president for global strategy at AdvaMed, an industry group that says its members produce half of the world's medical technology products.

Claude Burcky, who was Mr Ives's head negotiator for intellectual property trade issues, is now director of global government affairs at the pharmaceutical company Abbott Laboratories.

Mr Ives and Mr Burcky took their jobs after negotiating the trade deal. Neither returned calls from the *Herald*.

The trade deal has been praised in the US for strengthening the intellectual property rights of pharmaceutical companies, who say it will set a precedent for trade agreements throughout the world. The deal has been criticised in Australia and the US for the same reasons.

The Federal Government is adamant chapters of the agreement dealing with intellectual property and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme will not lead to higher medical costs for Australians. But the appointments of Mr Ives and Mr Burcky after negotiating the deal has raised question marks on both sides of the Pacific.

"This may help explain why the Australian trade agreement is designed to undercut access to affordable medicines for Americans and Australians alike," said Sherrod Brown, a Ohio congressman who has been prominent in a push to reduce the high cost of health care in the US.

Peter Cook, the Labor senator who is chairing a parliamentary committee examining the deal, said he was troubled about the impact the agreement might have on health costs.

"The ink isn't yet dry and these people have transferred to special interest groups that stand to benefit from the intellectual property rights they have negotiated," he said.

A small, influential and growing group of Labor MPs has argued that the agreement may not be in Australia's economic interest but must nevertheless be supported to avoid Labor being accused of being anti-American.

The Labor leader, Mark Latham, has said his party will decide whether to support or scupper the agreement after Senator Cook's report is tabled. The committee hopes to complete the report next week.

The president of the Business Council of Australia, Hugh Morgan, said yesterday that efforts by unions and the Greens to pressure Labor into rejecting the deal were short-sighted and reminiscent of efforts to prop up protectionism in the 1980s and 1990s.

The Australian Medical Association said no final verdict on the trade pact should be made until August 20, the deadline for public comment.