

Trade Fight: Edwards is Right, Obama's Wrong, Clinton's Useless

Another NAFTA-Style trade deal? That should be a no-brainer.

By John Nichols
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The Peru Free Trade Agreement fight that is coming to a head in Congress pits George Bush and Nancy Pelosi against the workers of the United States and Peru.

As such, it is a test of whether Democrats are satisfied with Pelosi's compromises -- on the war, presidential accountability and domestic policies -- or prefer to oppose the least popular president since Richard Nixon at the height of the Watergate scandal.

Illinois Senator Barack Obama is with Bush and Pelosi. He says he'll vote for the Peru FTA.

New York Senator Hillary Clinton is not sure where she stands. As the House prepares to vote, she could raise her voice to counter that of Pelosi. Instead, she says she's "undecided."

Fortunately, dozens of House Democrats -- including Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich -- know where they stand. They will break with Bush and Pelosi to oppose the trade deal. It won't be easy. Pelosi and House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer are whipping Democrats in the chamber to get on board with Bush's plan. And many are doing just that, claiming that the Peru FTA contains meaningful protections for the rights of workers.

The deal's backers are either confused or corrupted.

They are, as well, wrong.

As Illinois Congressman Phil Hare, a former textile union leader who has led the fight against the Bush-Pelosi line, notes: Peru is currently threatening striking miners with the loss of their jobs if they do not return to the mines. That's not protecting the rights of workers. Indeed, says Hare, "The striking miners were fighting for, among other things, an eight hour work day. In addition, we recently learned that there are 2 million children working in Peru, many in these very same mines."

"Is this the progress the supporters of the Peru FTA were referring to?" asks Hare, who adds, "Today's news should serve as yet another wakeup call that the best thing to do for workers both at home and in Peru is defeat this unfair trade deal."

Hare's right. But he needs some allies among the party's leading presidential contenders.

Obama's wrong and Clinton's of no use.

Thankfully, John Edwards is reading the issue right.

"The Peru deal will continue the trade policies that have long failed our workers and cost American workers their jobs," says Edwards. "It's time to show some guts and backbone, stand up and oppose this trade deal, and demand trade policies that put families and workers first. I urge members of Congress to vote against this deal."

Adds the 2004 Democratic presidential nominee: "The fact that the Peru trade deal is supported by a bipartisan group of insiders, including George Bush and senior officials from the first Clinton Administration – many of whom are now lobbyists, corporate lawyers, and business consultants – should be proof-positive of why members of Congress should join with me and oppose this deal. The benefit to corporate lobbyists from both sides of the political aisle will come only at the expense of hard-working families. Senator Obama has chosen to support this bad deal. I strongly disagree with his position, but at least he has taken one. Senator Clinton, on the other hand, has refused to take any position. I urge Senator Clinton to publicly announce, today, her opposition and join with me in encouraging members of Congress to vote against the Peru trade deal."

Edwards is right to stand with Phil Hare, as opposed to Nancy Pelosi and George Bush.

For those who suggest that there are not enough differences between the Democratic frontrunners, here's an example of where one leading contender -- John Edwards -- stands head and shoulders above the others.