

## Obama urges Democrats to back him on trade bills

By Jonathan Weisman

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President Obama pleaded personally with House Democrats on Friday to stand by him for one last push to secure his ambitious trade agenda, traveling to the Capitol to try to prevent his most stalwart supporters from torpedoing the top economic priority of his final months in office.

His message, delivered in what House Democrats called a rousing, impassioned speech, was “play it straight.” That is because liberal Democrats are preparing to vote down a program they have supported for decades — assistance to workers displaced by free trade agreements — to kill the president’s drive to expand trade negotiating powers.

“People have to step out of their party cloaks and say, ‘Is this the right thing to do?’” said Representative Mike Quigley, Democrat of Illinois. “We’re at an extraordinary divide right now.”

House Democrats appear ready to play hardball with the president. Mr. Obama needs trade promotion authority — the ability to complete trade accords that cannot be filibustered or amended by Congress — to complete the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a trade deal stretching from Canada to Chile and Australia to Japan. It would link 40 percent of the global economy in a complex web of trade rules.

But before legislation granting that authority can come to a final vote in the House, lawmakers must vote to provide \$1.8 billion over 10 years to help retrain and educate workers displaced by trade deals. That legislation has long been supported by Democrats, and its passage was supposed to be secured by them, even though many Democrats would vote against “fast-track” trade power for the president.

On Friday, Democrats were on the verge of killing the program they long fought for.

Representative Louise M. Slaughter, Democrat of New York and a leading opponent of trade promotion, emerged from the meeting with Mr. Obama saying she would vote to kill trade assistance, “because I don’t want trade to go through.”

That could mean the fate of the president’s trade agenda will rest on the willingness for Republicans to rescue a program they have long derided as an ineffective waste of taxpayer money. Republican leaders have vowed to do that, but it may not be enough.

Kevin Smith, a spokesman for the House speaker, John A. Boehner of Ohio, said: “Will Democrats support their president, or not? Republicans are going to do our part to get this done.”

Mr. Obama’s trip to the Capitol was extraordinarily rare. To rousing applause, he went through the long partnership he has forged with fellow Democrats — on environmental regulations, expanded health care access and strengthened labor organizing powers.

“He hit it out of the park,” said Representative Earl Blumenauer, Democrat of Oregon.

What was not clear was whether he changed anyone’s mind. Mr. Blumenauer and Mr. Quigley entered that meeting supporting the president’s position and left more supportive. Ms. Slaughter and Representative Gene Green, Democrat of Texas, entered opposed and left opposed.

“He gave a good speech,” Mr. Green said. “He didn’t change my mind.”

Passage of the trade package would be a huge victory for the president in his final 18 months

in office and could help secure a legacy-defining trade accord. But the trade bill's power is broader than that. The expanded trade negotiating power would extend for three years, with an option for Congress to extend it for three more years.

The president and his Republican allies of convenience say the globalization of economic forces is happening with or without such trade agreements. By taking the lead, the United States can set high standards for worker rights and environmental protection while protecting intellectual property and international investors and entrepreneurs, they say.

The Pacific accord specifically will form a bulwark against the rising power of China in the region. Most Democrats say that since Nafta, such trade deals have increased corporate profits and enriched executives and high-rolling investors while depressing wages and costing tens of thousands of jobs.

"Come to Poughkeepsie. Walk past the broken sidewalks and shuttered factories and tell the people how trade has helped them," said Representative Sean Patrick Maloney, Democrat of New York.

Ahead of the vote, Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew, Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez and the White House chief of staff, Denis McDonough, huddled with House Democrats on Thursday

afternoon, pleading for their support — at least for the trade adjustment assistance bill. Their case: If trade adjustment assistance, a program dating to 1962, is not extended and expanded on Friday, Republicans may let it die for good.

"We need to treat this moment for what it is: a life or death moment for T.A.A.," Mr. Lew told the group, according to a Democratic aide in the room.

On the Republican side, Representative Paul D. Ryan of Wisconsin, the Ways and Means Committee chairman, and other leaders were offering favors to win over conservatives one by one. A trade enforcement bill that is also part of Friday's package has been loaded with conservative wishes, including a measure prohibiting trade agreements from compelling United States action on climate change or expanding visas for foreign workers.

That, in turn, angered Democrats. "How can you in this day and age separate climate and commerce?" Ms. Pelosi said. "Impossible." Mr. Boehner expressed some optimism that the package would pass, but, he added, "I'm not in the guaranteeing business," not with the pressure being applied by organized labor. "After the unions locked down the Democrats, they turned their fire on conservative Republicans," he said.