

White House lobbies California Republicans on trade

By Michael
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Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin speaks during her state of the city address at the Fresno Convention Center on June 3, 2015. A Republican, Swearingin was in Washington, D.C. on June 10 to discuss trade legislation with the President's Export Council, as Obama administration officials prepare for a key congressional trade vote.

CRAIG KOHLRUSS — Fresno Bee

WASHINGTON — A feverish White House trade pitch is relying on support from California Republicans, in a cross-party lobbying campaign that reaches beyond Capitol Hill.

With a showdown congressional vote fast approaching, the Obama administration's touch has extended to [Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin](#). Though a stalwart Republican, Swearingin was the only mayor at a high-level White House trade session Wednesday alongside cabinet secretaries and corporate CEOs.

"It really has the potential to unify various interests, outside of the political squabbles that are happening," Swearingin said in an interview.

Billed as a meeting of the [President's Export Council](#), and drawing top executives from trade-dependent companies like Boeing, Xerox and Archer Daniels Midland, the two-hour long session convened Wednesday in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building next to the White House was also a tactically timed rally.

Obama is seeking the 218 House votes he needs for passage of what's called Trade Promotion Authority, a fast-track legislative procedure generally considered essential for approval of trade deals. A vote could happen as soon as

Friday.

[The Trade Promotion Authority essentially means](#) lawmakers must take an up-or-down vote on a trade package within a set period of time once it's been submitted to Congress. This avoids the potentially deal-killing congressional amendments and delays that would greatly complicate international negotiations.

With Trade Promotion Authority in hand, Obama would be in a position to complete and secure congressional approval for a trans-Pacific trade pact with Asian countries.

"Certainly, the main topic of discussion was getting TPA passed," Swarengin said, adding that "Fresno understands that exports and trade are the keys to moving the economy forward."

Swarengin, who was representing the [U.S. Conference of Mayors](#) at the White House event, joined the Democratic [Gov. Jay Nixon](#) of Missouri and Republican [Gov. Nikki Haley](#) of South Carolina in a panel discussion on trade and 21st century competitiveness.

As part of another orchestrated show of support, a dozen California mayors from cities including Sacramento, Woodland, Oakland and Livermore joined a [U.S. Conference of Mayors' letter to House Republican leaders](#) on Wednesday supporting Trade Promotion Authority.

This latest trade fight, like others before it, pits a Democratic president against many in his own party. The House's number-two Republican, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, and other trade legislation supporters know GOP lawmakers must therefore provide most of the support for the legislation to pass.

"We're working with both sides to get this done," McCarthy, whose district extends north into Tulare County, told reporters Wednesday, "and as soon as we have the votes, we'll be moving forward."

California Republican Reps. Devin Nunes, the former chair of the House trade subcommittee, and David Valadao also support the measure.

"Using Trade Promotion Authority to approve the Trans-Pacific Partnership will benefit California agriculture and provide for tremendous trade expansion," Valadao said.

Republican Rep. Tom McClintock, whose district includes a number of Sierra Nevada mountain range counties, is equally enthusiastic, as he joined a Capitol Hill news conference Wednesday afternoon to demonstrate support for the trade legislation. Underscoring the strange-bedfellows nature of the trade alliance, McClintock opposed Obama 94 percent of the time last year, according to the non-partisan CQ Weekly.

Trade legislation, though, can also incite lawmakers to play their cards close to the chest. Tea party conservatives, a potential force in GOP primary elections, are vilifying what they call "Obamatrade," while unions are equally critical from the left.

Democratic Rep. Jim Costa, who represents all of Merced and parts of Madera and Fresno counties, "would like to be in a position to support trade, but is still listening to the comments from various Valley groups," according to spokesperson Dianna Zamora. Republican Rep. Jeff Denham, who represents Stanislaus County, has voiced some concerns and is still studying the issue, his office says.

The Senate last month approved Trade Promotion Authority by a 62 to 37 vote, with California's two Democratic senators splitting. Sen. Barbara Boxer voted against the legislation, while Sen. Dianne Feinstein supported it.

"International trade and California's growth go hand in hand," Feinstein said at the time of the vote, adding that the measure will enable Obama to "finalize a trade deal that lowers other nations' barriers to our exports, while raising their labor, environment and human rights standards."

Boxer, who is not running for re-election, countered that “the last major deal Congress approved cost us hundreds of thousands of jobs, lowered the wages of American workers and increased income inequality.”

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