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Fast-Track Bill is Introduced in Congress and U.S. Trade Officials Breathe Sigh of Relief

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Today's introduction of a trade promotion authority – also known as fast-track – bill in Congress will make it easier for U.S. trade negotiators to end five years of arguing about a trans-pacific trade agreement, proponents of the agreement said.

“The fact of the matter is that we don't get the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) if we don't get TPA (trade promotion authority),” said U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi, R-Ohio. Tiberi chairs the House Ways and Means Committee's Subcommittee on Trade.

U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman said at a conference on the TPP in [Washington](#) today that the deal was almost wrapped up.

“We're down to a reasonable number of remaining issues with our trading partners,” he said. “I think we're very much in that neighborhood of being almost finished.”

The TPP is a 12-nation trade agreement that has been under negotiation for five years.

Froman and others have said repeatedly that the 11 other parties to the TPP would not put their best offers on the table without the assurance that trade promotion authority gives them. Under TPA, the House and Senate can vote on a free trade agreement, but they can't alter it beforehand.

Passing a trade promotion authority bill would give the other parties to the TPP “an indication that the U.S. is speaking with one voice,” Froman said.

The two most important unresolved issues in the TPP negotiations are Japan's insistence on maintaining some protection for its farmers, who say agricultural imports harm them, and its insistence on a rapid phase-out of the United States' 2.5 percent imported car tariff.

The tariff costs Honda, Toyota and other Japanese automakers \$1 billion per year, said Ron Bookbinder, general director of the Japanese Automobile Manufacturers Association's Washington office. Japan has no tariff on car imports.

U.S. Rep. Sandy Levin, D-Mich., said Japan had a history of discriminating against Ford, GM and Chrysler imports via so-called non-tariff barriers, although he couldn't name any that are now in use.

"There's no question that Japan has created a one-way street" where automotive trade is concerned, he said.

Bookbinder said the regulations that Levin and others refer to as non-tariff barriers had legitimate purposes and were not intended to discriminate against U.S. imports.

"Each country is entitled to its own fuel economy, emissions and safety standards," he said.

Officials from Ford's government relations office and the American Automotive [Policy](#) Council couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

As Froman spoke, anti-trade activists were mobilizing a massive public relations campaign to oppose passage of the TPA bill introduced today.

The AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club, MoveOn.org, the California Labor Federation and other groups, along with several Democratic members of Congress, said TPA would allow the Republican-controlled Congress to ratify a trade deal that they said would put thousands of Americans out of work. They vowed to pull out all the stops to keep the TPA bill from passing.