



# San Antonio Alamo Area Local Legislative Updates

Letty Alejandro – Legislative Director  
[LD0195@att.net](mailto:LD0195@att.net)



Alex Aleman – President, San Antonio Alamo Area Local

Volume 2 No. 1

January 12, 2016

## Fast Track and Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)

### An Undemocratic Path to Unfair "Trade"

After dogged, diverse grassroots pressure delivered major blows to Fast Track, proponents used procedural gimmicks to pass Fast Track through Congress by a one-vote margin. Anger about Fast Track's underhanded passage will fuel the unprecedented movement fighting to stop the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

Fast Track was an extreme and rarely-used procedure initially created by President Richard Nixon to get around public debate and congressional oversight. Fast Track is how we got into the job-killing, wage-flattening North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Thanks to Fast Track, NAFTA and the WTO included terms that promote the offshoring of U.S. jobs to low-wage countries.

Fast Track also empowered executive branch officials advised by large corporations to skirt Congress and the public and use secretive "trade" agreements to roll back a wide range of non-trade policies on which our families rely for safe food, a clean environment, affordable medicines, financial stability and more. Fast Track set up a system of more than 500 official corporate U.S. trade advisors who have access to secret trade agreement texts and who have set the "U.S." trade agenda whether we have Democratic or Republican presidents.

Under the U.S. Constitution, Congress is supposed to write the laws and set trade policy. For 200 years, these key checks and balances helped ensure that no one branch of government had too much power. But, starting with Nixon, presidents have tried to seize those congressional powers using the Fast Track mechanism.

Fast Track has only been used 16 times in the history of our nation, often to enact the most controversial of "trade" pacts, such as NAFTA and the establishment of the WTO. Meanwhile, hundreds of less controversial U.S. trade agreements have been implemented without resort to Fast Track, showing that the extraordinary procedure is not needed to approve trade agreements.

Fast Track allowed the executive branch to unilaterally select partner countries for "trade" pacts, decide the agreements' contents, and then negotiate and sign the agreements – all before Congress had a vote on the matter! Normal congressional committee processes were forbidden, meaning that the executive branch was empowered to write lengthy legislation on its own with no review or amendments. These executive-authored bills altered wide swaths of U.S. law unrelated to trade – food safety, immigration visas, energy policy, medicine patents and more – to conform our domestic policies to each agreement's requirements. And, remarkably, Fast Track let the executive branch control Congress' voting schedule. Unlike any other legislation, both the House and Senate were required to vote on a Fast Tracked trade agreement within 90 days of the White House submitting it. No floor amendments were allowed and debate was limited.

Passage of fast-track raised the White House's hopes that the TPP would face an easier road to becoming law. It ensured that the deal could pass Congress with a simple majority, removing the threat of a filibuster in the Senate. But the White House has encountered difficulty in building support for the agreement. Many Democrats and labor unions have said the agreement does not go far enough to enforce environmental provisions and workers' rights. Administration officials fear rewriting TPP would torpedo the agreement because the pulling at one string in the deal will likely unravel the entire pact.