

Slaughter Warns of Abuse of Power During CAFTA Debate

Ranking Democrat Raises Concern Over Controversial Trade Proposal, Sites Medicare Debate in 108th Congress

Washington, DC- Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, expressed deep concern today from the House floor that as debate on CAFTA progresses, Republican Leaders in the House will once again bend and manipulate the rules of debate to force their will on Congress and the American People, just as they did during the Medicare debate of the 108th Congress.

Rep. Slaughter's Remarks on CAFTA:

I am deeply concerned that as this discussion on CAFTA moves forward, the Majority will once again succumb to the temptation to twist, bend and break off the rules of debate and consideration in order to meet their objectives, just as they did during the Medicare Debate of the 108th Congress.

During that debate, the vote on final passage was held open for a shameful 3 hours while the Republican leadership twisted arms and cut deals to make up their vote deficit.

The events of that night constituted one of the worst abuses of power I have witnessed in my almost twenty years in this House.

In the aftermath, allegations of bribery were levied by a Republican Congressman and an Ethics Committee investigation followed closely behind; One that ended in the admonishment of the Majority Leader of this House.

It is no secret that, just like last time, the Republican Leadership is desperately scrambling to find the votes necessary to pass this bill which I and many of my colleagues strongly oppose.

But I would warn my friends in the Majority...

We dare not see a return to the underhanded tactics used by the Republican Leadership

during 108th Congress.

There should be no votes held open for three hours.

There should be no unethical arm twisting on the House floor.

The American people are watching this time.

Sadly though, we are already seeing evidence that this pattern of abuse will once again carry the day.

Last night in the Rules Committee, we were given a paltry one hour's notice by the Republicans that we would be considering the most controversial trade agreement this body has contemplated since NAFTA.

And of the three contentious bills we considered in Rules, not a single amendment was allowed.

It was a shutout of democracy.

And even though the House Rules clearly state that 20 hours of debate is appropriate for a trade agreement, we offered to accept only 8 hours as a compromise. But that was just too much Democracy for this Republican Leadership.

For the most contested trade agreement this body has considered in 12 years, we are going to have a whopping two hours of debate...Less time than it would take for you to watch Saving Private Ryan on DVD.

We were actually given more time to debate the renaming of 5 post offices this Monday.

Most high school debate teams spend more time considering the serious issues that face our country than we do here in the House.

But CAFTA clearly warrants our full and undivided attention.

This is a major piece of legislation that will affect the lives of millions of Americans.

CAFTA threatens to export even more American jobs and encourages American companies to relocate their factories overseas.

It fails to provide adequate protection for workers - turning back the clock on labor standards. And it doesn't provide any safeguards for improving environmental standards.

We need trade agreements that both expand our access to new markets, and raise the standard of living for American families.

This legislation falls far short on each of those standards.

As the arbiters of the rules of this hallowed institution, the Rules Committee has a special responsibility to ensure that the integrity of the democratic process is preserved.

That is why, last night, I asked The Republicans on the Rules Committee for their assurance that we will not again see the egregious abuses of power and the trampling of the Democratic process we experienced in the last Congress during the Medicare debate.

I asked them to commit that this time would be different...Because we should be having 8 hours of debate and a fifteen minute vote-not the other way around.

Their reply was that "rules would be followed..."

But they must not have meant the Rules of the House of Representatives when they made that promise because what actually followed was a shut down on any consideration of amendments to the Medical Malpractice Bill...

...The prevention of any "up or down" votes on amendments to the China Trade Act...

...And the restriction of debate and consideration on the CAFTA bill.

For the sake of the millions of American families who are depending on this Congress to spend the time and get it right on CAFTA...

I just hope that this time the debate lasts longer than the vote.