

Trade office would provide independent, nonpartisan information on trade agreements

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WASHINGTON, DC—U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio introduced legislation today to establish a Congressional Trade Office (CTO), which would provide Congress with independent, nonpartisan, neutral expertise on trade issues.

The CTO would be modeled after the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), which was created in 1974 by Congress to provide objective, timely, and nonpartisan analyses needed for economic and budget decisions. Congress created the CBO in response to concerns about the concentration of power within the executive branch at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). A similar concentration of power exists today with respect to trade issues. Given the complexity and broad economic and social impacts of today's trade agreements, it is critical to provide Congress with similar expertise on trade matters. Under the U.S. Constitution, Congress has the power to “regulate commerce with foreign nations.”

The CTO would provide Congress with independent, nonpartisan, neutral trade expertise, which will help in providing more effective and active oversight of trade policy, and more effective direction to the Executive Branch on trade issues.

The duties of the CTO include:

- Providing committees of Congress with information and analyses that will assist in the discharge of matters within their jurisdiction. This assistance is available to all committees with oversight of issues impacted by trade agreements.
- Monitoring compliance of other countries with major bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade agreements, including annual assessments on the extent to which those agreements comply with labor and environmental goals.
- Analyzing the president's annual National Trade Policy Agenda, the National Trade Estimate report (which documents trade barriers of other countries), and the overall trade balances of the U.S. with trading partners.

- Participating as observers in dispute settlement deliberations at the World Trade Organization, under the North American Free Trade Agreement, and subsequent agreements, and report to Congress on such deliberations.

- Participating as observers in bilateral, regional, and multinational trade negotiations, and report to Congress on such negotiations.