

## **Mexico trade official hits Dems for opposition to new NAFTA**

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Mexico's top trade negotiator said Friday that opposition to the revised North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) by U.S. progressives stems from a lack of understanding about recent labor reforms in the country.

"We have a grave communication problem," Jesus Seade, undersecretary for North American affairs, told The Hill.

He said he hopes congressional Democrats can "appreciate" what Mexico's reforms mean for labor rights throughout the continent.

"It's a complete agenda that could have been written by the most advanced labor leader at the WTO," he said, referring to the World Trade Organization. "It's a revolution in Mexican labor practices."

Mexico's Senate this week approved a sweeping package that focuses on labor law enforcement in the country.

The move follows the successful negotiation of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), which includes unprecedented labor and environmental provisions and is designed to replace NAFTA.

But many Democrats on Capitol Hill argue the USMCA doesn't provide for enforcement of the agreed-to labor standards.

"Clearly the vote [the Mexican Senate] took, the fact they did that is good for workers in Mexico, but we still have to have stronger enforcement," said Rep. [Mark Pocan](#) (D-Wis.), co-chairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

"This has been a problem in past agreements. When you don't have the enforcement language in the same language as the trade agreement, it makes it less likely to be enforced," said Pocan.

He added it "should be an easy lift" to add enforcement language before the USMCA is taken up by the House.

But there's no guarantee the agreement will make it to the House floor. Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#) (D-Calif.) said at a press conference Thursday that while she wants to add pharmaceutical and environmental provisions to the trade deal, "the overarching issue is enforcement.

"You can have all the good language in the world that you want, but if you don't have enforcement, you're just having a conversation. You're not having a real negotiation," she said.

Adding new language would mean reopening negotiations, something Mexico and the Trump administration are reluctant to do. Acting White House chief of staff [Mick Mulvaney](#) recently [rejected Pelosi's demand](#) to renegotiate the USMCA.

The USMCA cannot be implemented without congressional approval.

"I understand when you reopen a trade agreement there's a little risk to that, especially with a president with incoherent trade policy," said Pocan. "It's also our job to improve trade agreements."

Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Texas), who supports passage of the USMCA, said U.S. Trade Representative [Robert Lighthizer](#) "did a very good job on having the strongest [labor] provisions of any agreement I've seen."

Cuellar also pointed out that Pelosi voted for NAFTA, even though it didn't include labor or environmental chapters in its original text.

"It's a process that we have to educate members," said Cuellar. "We have to get to the part where we vote."

Seade compared the current state of the USMCA to NAFTA in 1993. At the time, then-President Clinton had just been elected after negotiations were concluded under his predecessor, former President George H.W. Bush. Congress had not yet approved the original agreement.

An impasse over the lack of labor and environmental provisions in NAFTA — and a reluctance to reopen negotiations — led to parallel agreements to the original deal in order to secure support from the White House and congressional Democrats.

Cuellar, who led a congressional delegation to Mexico City to meet leaders this week, said there's a risk that Mexicans will feel as if ever-increasing progressive demands stem from mistrust of the country.

"Mexicans feel like they did their part," said Cuellar. "We can't always look at Mexico through a lens of negativity."

Pocan said the criticism among progressives is not exclusive to a treaty with Mexico.

"It's how we write trade agreements, period. We include enforceability in trade agreements, it doesn't matter if it's Mexico or Vietnam or Canada," said Pocan.

But Seade sees things differently. He called the doubts over enforcement "a little particular."

"Whenever you and I sign an agreement ... if I have doubts that you will fulfill it, well then why did I make the agreement?" he said.

