

Trade rep sends responses on revised NAFTA deal to Democrats

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United States Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer. | Susan Walsh/AP Photo

U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer on Wednesday formally responded to House Democrats' concerns about the new North American trade agreement, marking a step forward in negotiations between the Trump administration and Capitol Hill.

Lighthizer first told House Minority Whip Steve Scalise (R-La.), House Ways and Means ranking member Kevin Brady (R-Texas) and other Republican members at a meeting of the USMCA whip group that he was planning to send his responses to House Democrats' USMCA working group on Wednesday, according to a source familiar with the matter. A House Democratic aide later confirmed to POLITICO that the working group had received the text and members were in the process of going through it.

Sending formal language to Democrats on Capitol Hill will provide a boost to stalled negotiations between Lighthizer and the nine-member USMCA working group, which House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has tasked with making changes to the trade deal to reflect the party's priorities.

Democrats have concerns over pact's labor, environmental, enforcement and prescription drug standards. They say they need to see USTR's counter-proposals before talks can continue.

At the whip meeting, Scalise called for quick passage of the deal and said the group is "in a strong position to deliver the needed GOP votes," the source said. Scalise also emphasized a desire to pass USMCA ahead of [Canada's election on Oct. 21](#) and said approving it is critical to move forward in bilateral trade talks with China and other countries.

Lighthizer also is expected to talk by phone later this week with House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal (D-Mass.) and to meet next week with the full working group, Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.) told POLITICO earlier on Wednesday.

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