

Politics

# McAuliffe fuels new distrust of Clinton over her position on trade



McAuliffe on Clinton: 'I love this woman'

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During his speech at the Democratic convention July 26, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe (D) spoke about his close friendship with the Clintons. (The Washington Post)

By Jenna Portnoy and David Weigel

Politics

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**PHILADELPHIA — Gov. Terry McAuliffe fueled new distrust of Hillary Clinton among liberal Democrats this week with a declaration that the presidential nominee was likely to reverse her position on the Trans-Pacific Partnership after the election.**

The Clinton campaign swiftly rejected the idea that she would waver on the TPP and called her longtime friend and chairman of her 2008 campaign “flat wrong.”

But Republican nominee Donald Trump seized the moment, saying that McAuliffe revealed Clinton’s true nature as a free trader — and a flip-flopper whom voters shouldn’t trust.

The incident forced the governor to spend the next 24 hours in cleanup mode, and it offered a potent reminder of the trust deficit among voters that has dogged Clinton throughout the campaign — most notably with her explanations of her use of a private email server while secretary of state.

*[Trump invites Russia to meddle in the U.S. presidential race with Clinton’s emails]*

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The flap came at an inopportune time for Clinton: just as many supporters of Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont were finally agreeing to support Clinton. It also came as many continued to agitate about their disappointment with the ticket, notably Clinton's choice of Sen. Timothy M. Kaine of Virginia as her running mate.

For some, McAuliffe's comments exacerbated emotions and confirmed fears, threatening to further alienate the constituencies Clinton needs to defeat Trump.

"Those comments emphasized that we're still fighting a kind of establishment orthodoxy," said Kendal Bernal, a Sanders delegate from California who has been trying to organize fellow progressives.

“And Tim Kaine should take back the notion that those of us who oppose the TPP possess, quote, a ‘loser’s mentality,’ ” he said, referring to a statement the vice-presidential hopeful made as Virginia governor in 2007.

Clinton’s path to total opposition to the trade deal took a circuitous route.

As secretary of state, she said the pact offered enormous economic, diplomatic and national security benefits and would expand U.S. ties with Asian partners.

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As a candidate, she initially reserved judgment, then said in August that she could not support it as drafted, with the implication that it could be acceptable with technical changes. But as the strength of Democratic opposition to the TPP became clear, and as Trump emerged as a powerful anti-trade Republican voice, she shifted again.

Scenes from the second day of the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia □ □



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McAuliffe triggered the uproar when he said she was opposed only to certain parts of the pact that could be easily amended.

According to Politico, he said that Clinton planned to change her stance after winning the White House. “Yes. Listen, she was in support of it. There were specific things in it she wants fixed.”

By Wednesday morning, McAuliffe was characterizing the exchange as a misunderstanding between the governor and a reporter.

“There are things in the agreement she does not agree with,” he told NBC’s Andrea Mitchell at a Virginia delegation breakfast. “Unless she can get those to the point where she’s happy with it, she’s not going to support it, plain and simple.”

A few hours later, the message had changed again, and McAuliffe walked the comments all the way back.

“First of all, Hillary is against TPP, and she’s always going to stay against TPP, let me be crystal clear about that,” he said at an AFL-CIO event in Philadelphia.

Sanders’s supporters in the labor movement reacted warily.

“We’ll have to wait and see and take Secretary Clinton at her word on the concerns she’s raised around it,” said Shane Larson, national legislative director of Communications Workers of America, the largest union that endorsed Sanders for president.

But Trump ran with McAuliffe’s comments, characterizing the episode as a rare moment of honesty that showed that Clinton is intentionally misleading voters.

“Terry McAuliffe said with a wink that if Hillary gets in, she’s lying and it will happen,” he said Wednesday during a Miami news conference. “And there is nobody closer — I know this for a fact, there is nobody, including her own husband — closer to Hillary Clinton than Terry McAuliffe, okay?”



Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook rejected the notion that as a longtime family friend and close political ally, McAuliffe has a window to

beliefs or plans that Clinton is keeping hidden for now.



“This is very cut-and-dried. She doesn’t support TPP now, and she’s not going to support TPP after the election,” Mook told reporters at a lunch sponsored by the Wall Street Journal.

“She has outlined that she has very clear standards for any trade deal and that it needs to create more jobs in our country, that it needs to raise wages and that it is in our national security,” Mook said. “Those are the tests that she’s going to apply to any trade deal.”

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**Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta put it bluntly Tuesday evening.**

“Love Gov. McAuliffe, but he got this one flat wrong. Hillary opposes TPP BEFORE and AFTER the election. Period. Full stop,” he tweeted.

The governor’s statements also reflect the dueling masters he serves as loyal friend to the Clintons and a governor who has made international trade the cornerstone of his term.

At the height of the fervor over his comments Wednesday morning, his administration sent out a news release announcing a new export deal — with China.

*Anne Gearan and Abby Phillip contributed to this report.*