

Politico **PRO**, January 7, 2015

### **Trading Away Our Future?**

Human history could almost be written as a story of trade. As far back as archaeologists can go, we find evidence that humans from one region would trade their local wares and goods with those of another region. This relationship would develop over time, so long as both parties felt like they were getting a fair shake.

And that notion – of getting a fair shake – is precisely what U.S. trade negotiators have lost sight of over the years as they have entered into a string of agreements under the assumption that increased trade and the elimination of trade and investment barriers was, in and of itself, a worthy goal. In fact, our nation has been so willing to sacrifice almost anything in its lust for more trade that the concept of fair and equal trade seems to have fallen into an abyss.

Trade is neither inherently good, nor bad, it's just trade. And for the U.S., it has become anything but fair. And that is why, moving forward, all U.S. trade agreements should be negotiated with the goal of reducing the U.S. trade deficit while ensuring that our trading partners are keeping up with their end of the agreement and abiding by U.S. standards.

Clearly, trade has benefited U.S. agriculture, which represents about 10 percent of net exports. And since 1960, U.S. agricultural exports have been greater than U.S. agricultural imports. This \$39 billion surplus helps counter the U.S. non-agricultural trade deficit.

But the good news stops there. In fact, since joining the World Trade Organization and entering into free trade agreements with 20 different countries, instead of promoting economic growth, the U.S. has seen its trade deficit increase. And as such, it has become a major net drag on our economy.

The U.S. had a \$43 billion trade deficit in September 2014. This deficit is not just an annoying number floating around trade talks. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, that represents a full three percent drag on the U.S. Gross Domestic Product. In other words, if the trade deficit didn't exist, our economy would be doing three percent better, generating good jobs for Americans and offering a future for our children.

Under free trade agreements, many important U.S. laws protecting investors, labor rights, the environment and our currency have been preempted in favor of — simply— more trade. The net result is that products are often produced in nations with the lowest standards in these areas, hurting U.S. workers who are competing on uneven turf and pushing the nation deeper into debt.

Instead, the nations' leaders – on both sides of the aisle – seem fully committed to rushing into yet more trade talks. The U.S. is currently negotiating two trade deals: the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an agreement with 11 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, an agreement with the European Union.

All in the name of more and freer trade, these agreements have actually become tools to preempt many important domestic laws, such as labor, public health, environmental, taxing and zoning ordinances. And Congress seems all too ready to grant Fast Track status to every new president, all but giving away Congress's constitutional authority to negotiate trade agreements and depriving U.S. citizens of the right to influence the very trade laws that are having a major impact on all of our lives, and those of our children.

The United States needs to take a new approach to trade. For one, all future U.S. trade agreements should have the goal of reducing and ultimately eliminating the U.S. trade deficit, not just increasing trade flows. Just like as individuals, we cannot always spend more than we make, as a country we cannot always buy more than we sell—and we have done exactly that for 39 years in a row!

Second, we must not enter agreements that will subvert the jurisdiction of our important and hard-fought domestic laws, protecting workers, the environment and our children.

Third, we need to stop thinking of trade as if it were a club by which we can single-handedly browbeat other nations into changing their behavior. It was this mindset that brought us the failed Cuban trade embargo, something National Farmers Union has opposed for years. Thankfully, the Obama administration has taken the first step. Now it is time for Congress to fully lift the embargo.

Moving forward, trade policies should be viewed and then negotiated in the context of sovereignty and fairness. Signing a trade deal is one thing, enforcing it is another. The American public can not be expected to play ostrich while our competitors manipulate their currencies to gain an advantage, or degrade the global environment in order to cut their production costs.

The time is now to open a new chapter on America's trade policies. Moving forward, let's make sure these deals have real, balanced and fair benefits for us, before we put our names on them.

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