

Open Letter to Congress: Free Trade Is Essential to American Prosperity

September 22, 2016

Members of Congress:

On behalf of the millions of members and supporters of our free-market organizations, we write to express our strong support for free trade. Though it has traditionally been a centerpiece of free-market economics and demonstrated vast benefits for American consumers and businesses, the value of trade has recently come under fire.

As a result, we stand at a crossroads. The United States can continue its support of international engagement through open commerce, which has done so much to increase our standard of living, or it can ignore the lessons of history and economics by turning to protectionism. At this critical juncture, your support of free trade is needed more than ever.

Since the publication of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, support for free trade among economists of all ideological persuasions has been nearly unanimous. Tariffs – or taxes on trade – were once the major source of federal revenue, but this had disastrous economic consequences. After the failure of the Smoot-Hawley tariffs at the onset of the Great Depression, a bipartisan consensus developed among policymakers in the United States in support of free trade.

Our 70-year embrace of trade liberalization has paid enormous dividends for American families and businesses: incomes, productivity, and purchasing power have all increased. Likewise, markets once closed to American exports are now open. Overall, this has dramatically improved our standard of living. At the same time, America's commitment to free trade has alleviated poverty for millions living abroad, which has improved our security. Simply put, free trade makes us wealthier and more secure.

Recent trade agreements have grown in scope and, as a result, become increasingly controversial. While no trade pact is perfect, they should primarily serve to reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers to international commerce. Additionally, they can deliver benefits to American interests by establishing reasonable protections for intellectual property and reducing market distortions caused by foreign state-owned enterprises.

To some, the false promises of protectionism may be politically alluring; however, as history has demonstrated, increased economic isolation and protectionism would be disastrous for American businesses and consumers. That is why we strongly urge you, as elected representatives, to stand by our organizations in advocating for free trade.

Sincerely,

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American Commitment

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American Conservative Union

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