

Ambassador Lighthizer Delivers Remarks at USMCA Signing

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Washington, DC – United States Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer delivered the following remarks today at a White House event where President Donald J. Trump signed the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) into law:

“The President was elected in large part on his promise to change the direction of U.S. trade policy—a policy that for too long had led to exploding trade deficits, the outsourcing of U.S. jobs, and the brazen theft of American intellectual property.

For many, NAFTA came to symbolize everything that was wrong with that policy. The agreement was highly controversial from the start and passed with a narrow majority in the House of Representatives. Many of those who cast votes in favor came to regret their decision. They did so because many of the promises that were made in order to procure their votes came to nothing. NAFTA’s weak, unenforceable labor side agreement did not raise wages in Mexico. The outsourcing fears of prominent anti-NAFTA voices came true and the situation got worse later in the decade when China joined the WTO.

This experience colored every subsequent debate over trade policy. And nearly every trade agreement after NAFTA passed with an increasingly narrow majority and often along party lines.

President Trump set out to chart a new course. The Trump trade policy is designed to create more manufacturing jobs, protect America’s competitive advantage in technology and innovation, secure greater market access for American businesses, farmers, ranchers, and, critically, to change the stale politics of trade by creating bipartisan consensus around a new model that works better for all Americans. The USMCA achieves each of these goals.

This great, historic agreement is truly the result of extraordinary effort by many, many people. It is multinational, whole of administration and bipartisan. It affects every sector, thousands of businesses and millions of workers in our economy. Of course, the President was our leader and inspiration. And the Vice President was intimately involved in this process in every single step and devoted an enormous amount of his first term to making sure that we succeeded. For that, I am very grateful.

The complexity of this effort is perhaps best shown by the fact that in the early rounds as many as a 1,000 negotiators from the three countries would be involved. We needed experts on agriculture, manufacturing, automobiles, banking, telecommunications, labor, environment, and I could go on and on.

I would like to thank my negotiating partners from Mexico—Secretary Ildefonso Guajardo, Ambassador Jesús Seade, as well as the absolutely essential Luis Videgaray, Secretary Marcelo Ebrard, as well as Secretary Graciela Marquez, and past and present Ambassadors Gutiérrez and Bárcena from Mexico.

On the Canadian side, I would like to thank Deputy Prime Minister and good friend Chrystia Freeland, Gerry Butts, Katie Telford and Steve Verheul. And again, the ambassadors there, past and present, McNaughton and Hillman. All were critical.

Mexico and Canada are fortunate to have such impressive public servants.

I would also personally like to thank the members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, who worked so hard on this agreement not just last year but during the course of the negotiations. They also were involved every step of the way. They made this a bipartisan success. I have been in town long enough to know that listing members at a time like this makes more enemies than friends so I'll only mention that I am grateful to the leadership of the House, the chairman and ranking member of the Ways and Means Committee and the Finance Committee, and of course, Leader McConnell. Many others also made immense contributions. Thank you also to Congressional staff. You were magnificent for two years.

Finally, and I apologize for the length of my remarks, I want to show my appreciation to the inspiring men and women of USTR, as well as the Departments of Commerce, Agriculture, Treasury, Labor, Transportation, EPA and other agencies that worked so hard. These people worked tens of thousands of hours for two plus years—many going home at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning or not at all.

Chief among the leaders of this effort is my deputy, Ambassador C.J. Mahoney. Since his confirmation two years ago, he has worked continuously on this effort, day and night, and seven days a week. Thank you also Ambassador Gregg Doud, our Agricultural Negotiator, and the long-suffering Jamieson Greer, who has the unenviable task of being my Chief of Staff. As I said 16 months ago, thank you also Jared Kushner, my friend and partner, for all your work and guidance and support. I said before from the heart and I mean it again now, thank you to the Cabinet members who devoted a substantial part of their terms to this effort, particularly the Secretaries of Treasury, Commerce, Agriculture, and Labor. And thank you, of course, Larry Kudlow and Peter Navarro.

The Chief Negotiator of the USMCA was assistant USTR John Melle. He was, throughout, the one who is responsible for the 350 or so people on our team. John is the best example of a career public servant. He retires this week and he will be missed.

In closing, let me just say that I mostly want to thank the President of the United States for allowing me to lead this special team, for his constant, steady leadership, and for always being supportive during very difficult times and to congratulate him on his magnificent achievement. To do this and to do it under these circumstances is a monumental part of your legacy, and I'm happy to be part of it.

I'll end where I began. The President ran and was elected on replacing NAFTA with an agreement that puts American workers first, American farmers, ranchers and businesses first, that will bring manufacturing back, help service industry workers and raise wages. All I can say, if you'll pardon the appropriation: Promise made—and 3 years later—promise kept."