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Wyden Statement at Finance Committee Markup of the New NAFTA
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This morning, the Finance Committee kicks off 2020 with the new NAFTA.

The last few years have delivered one trade gut punch after another to America's exporters, particularly farmers and manufacturers. In fact, it began when then-presidential candidate Trump talked about pulling America out of NAFTA. That set the tone. It's been followed by the administration driving away our traditional economic allies. Three years of chaos have hurt investment in America and caused farm bankruptcies to surge. Many foreign markets are more closed off to American exports today that they were on the day the president took office.

The Finance Committee now has an opportunity to provide a real measure of certainty and predictability to Americans who want to grow and make things here, add value to them here and ship them around the world. That's what's on offer today. The new NAFTA makes a few key changes to our approach to trade that I'd like to address today.

First, on enforcement. Year after year, decade after decade, presidents and lawmakers have been paying lip service to the importance of enforcing our trade laws. But all along, what this country did on enforcement was too weak and too slow to protect American jobs from trade cheats. And in my view, workers saw right through all that lip service.

When the Trump administration sent up the first version of this new NAFTA agreement, it was just more of the status quo. It didn't cut it. The language they wrote on enforcement didn't actually enforce anything. It was business as usual.

So I talked with Senator Brown, who's been a crusader for tough enforcement as long as anybody, and we decided to fix it. We reached out to colleagues on our side of the aisle, and Senator Brown and I developed a proposal that's all about putting more power directly in the hands of American workers and American businesses to fight back when they know they're getting ripped off by trade cheats. It's faster. It's stronger. What he and I came up with is about putting trade enforcement boots on the ground helping to identify when factories in Mexico violate labor standards. Then the U.S. can penalize the violators and protect the American jobs they tried to undercut.

The enforcement process will take a fraction of the time it has in the past. No more forcing American businesses and workers to wait around for action while trade cheats rip them off. We took it to our colleagues in the House and got their input and support. And we went to the Trump administration and said if you want our support on new NAFTA, this approach to trade enforcement we're proposing is going to be a prerequisite to getting NAFTA done right.

So when you combine this all-in approach on enforcement with new commitments on labor rights and environment, you shut down the corporate race to the bottom on cheap wages and lax standards. It's about raising everybody else's standards to ours – and taking action when they fall short.

I want to thank Senator Brown for all his leadership on this issue. And let me make clear that although he and I have our names on the enforcement language in the new NAFTA, it's a lot of work from several Democratic members that went into it.

Now let me turn to technology and digital trade. Digital trade wasn't a part of the original NAFTA because it basically didn't exist when NAFTA was negotiated. Everybody in this room carries around a smartphone that would have met the definition of a supercomputer back in the early 1990s. But when it comes to rules regarding digital trade and tech, our trade laws have remained stuck back in that mindset from decades ago. That's especially problematic because today, the internet is the shipping lane of the 21st century.

Obviously, technology and digital trade are right at the center of our modern economy. They account for millions of good-paying jobs in America. Technology is woven into just about every major American industry you can think of – health care, autos, farming, manufacturing, you name it. So when you talk about fighting for new rules on digital trade, you're talking about creating and protecting red-white-and-blue jobs in all those critically important industries.

The new NAFTA will fight back against trade cheats who want to eat the seedcorn of American innovation. It will do more to protect our intellectual property and prevent American companies from being shaken down for their data. By including established U.S. law, it will help guarantee that small tech entrepreneurs have a shot at building successful companies in a field now dominated by a few goliaths.

On agriculture, new NAFTA will help send more of our dairy to Canada. More of our wine will make it to shelves in stores abroad. It ends harmful discrimination against wheat grown here.

These are all big areas of improvement in the new NAFTA. In Oregon, it's what's called getting "Trade Done Right."

One in four jobs in my home state depend on trade, and those jobs often pay higher than non-trade jobs. More than 6,000 Oregon businesses are exporters. Almost 90 percent of them are small- and medium-sized. So Oregon shows that when people are in search of opportunities to get ahead, there's often a strong answer when you look at trade and exports.

Just a few final points, Mr. Chairman. In addition to Senator Brown, I could go up and down the dais on our side thanking members for their major contributions to this bill. After seeing that the original proposal the Trump administration sent us wasn't going to cut it, members brought significant ideas forward. And I'll have a lot more to say about them when it reaches the Senate floor.

I also want to thank Ambassador Lighthizer, who is the hardest working man in the trade agreement business. I talk with him a lot, and he's always forthright, and you can't ask for more than that.

I'll close on this last point. This legislation may be the most significant economic issue the Senate takes up in 2020. Obviously, the Senate will also be holding an impeachment trial in the days ahead. Both of these extraordinarily important matters that deserve to be handled by the Senate with the utmost seriousness. The new NAFTA agreement must not be used as a convenient excuse to shut down any other business before the Senate.

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