

# AFL-CIO

## LEGISLATIVE ALERT

May 6, 2025

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 63 affiliates of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), representing 15 million working people across our economy, I write to urge Congress to chart a path on trade policy that puts American workers, families and communities first. Such an approach must constructively push back on the Trump Administration's reckless, on-again, off-again approach, while also rejecting a return to the failed "free trade" status quo. A successful strategy requires both an immediate response and continued advocacy for systemic change. First, we must quickly act to mitigate the damage of certain elements of the Trump administration's flawed approach:

1. Support efforts, such as SJ Res 37, to terminate the national emergency that was declared to justify tariffs on imports from Canada under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Imposing large, across the board tariffs on Canada aimed at non-trade objectives will cause unnecessary economic pain for workers and businesses on both sides of the border and ignores our close economic and security relationship. When the administration overreaches, Congress should respond with this kind of targeted approach.
2. Replace Trump's reckless and poorly designed "reciprocal" tariff regime with a truly dynamic and targeted policy to support good jobs. Growing our domestic manufacturing base and strengthening critical supply chains requires policies which address complex issues such as differences in air and water quality standards, minimum labor rights, and respect for democratic values. Tariffs should be wielded strategically to support vital domestic industries and workers who face unfair import competition and not used erratically to punish countries for non-trade issues or strike shortsighted trade "deals."
3. Support efforts to stop price gouging, where multi-billion dollar companies use tariffs as an excuse to needlessly raise prices on consumers. This includes supporting the exercise of existing FTC authorities to fight price gouging as well as legislation to strengthen the FTC's ability to act in this area. As we saw during the COVID pandemic, unscrupulous corporations used inflation expectations to raise prices above their added costs, padding profits at the expense of working families.

### **Preserving Critical Trade Enforcement Tools**

A worker-centered response must also preserve existing trade enforcement tools, including Sections 232 and 301, to respond to unfairly traded imports that threaten our national or economic security. Our anti-dumping and countervailing duty (AD/CVD) laws are vitally important tools, but too often relief comes too late, leading to the loss of good, middle-class jobs and the erosion of critical domestic manufacturing capacity. Section 232 and 301 are essential, investigation-based trade enforcement tools that allow us to respond to trade threats that our normal AD/CVD laws are not fit to address.

1. We oppose blanket, untargeted legislation like the *Trade Review Act of 2025* (S. 1272 / HR 2665) and the *Stopping a Rogue President on Trade Act - SRPTA* (HR 2888). These bills would effectively gut Section 232 and 301 by requiring Congress to pass a joint resolution of support before trade enforcement measures could take effect. This approach would stymie trade enforcement investigations using these two tools, potentially giving China and unscrupulous corporations a free pass. All that would be required to halt a recommended trade enforcement action is Congressional inaction.
2. We also oppose the *Congressional Trade Authority Act* (H.R. 1903). This legislation undermines a key trade enforcement tool and applies retroactively, endangering the Section 232 trade action on steel and aluminum that has supported critical domestic capacity and good union jobs. The bill also adopts a narrow definition of national security that ignores the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic and the role critical supply chains play in keeping Americans safe.

Section 232 and 301 have been used successfully in recent years to support American workers and businesses from unfair trade practices and should be preserved. Protective measures adopted under these authorities have been taken after a thorough investigation and tailored to address the unfair trade practices or security matter at issue. We note that the across the board tariffs announced on April 2nd and the fentanyl-justified tariffs on Canada and Mexico were applied using IEEPA, a completely separate authority.

### **A Worker-Centered Vision for Trade**

The labor movement has spent years shaping and fighting for a worker-centered trade policy. Congress should not let the chaos of Trump's approach distract from a strategic, pro-worker agenda. This should include:

1. Support renegotiating USMCA to address the continued offshoring of good, union jobs, improve labor standards in Mexico, prevent China from using Mexico as a backdoor to circumvent our laws, and address any trade issues with Canada in a targeted manner.
2. Fight to restore the funding streams for federal investments into critical energy and transportation infrastructure and domestic manufacturing, and oppose efforts to repeal them altogether. These investments provide tax credits, grants, loans, and loan guarantees to support the construction of infrastructure and manufacturing facilities for the energy and production jobs of the future. The Trump Administration has randomly shut down, delayed, and clawed back funding for these projects. Further, fight efforts to gut the government's capacity to effectively implement and monitor these investments.
3. Support legislation that strengthens our trade enforcement laws, including: the *Leveling the Playing Field Act 2.0* (H.R. 1548 / S. 691), which makes much needed updates to our anti-dumping and countervailing duty laws; the *National Critical Capabilities Defense Act*, which would curb the practice of offshoring good jobs and critical capabilities to China; the *Protecting American Industry & Labor from International Trade Crimes Act* (H.R. 1869) which sets up a

structure to criminally prosecute serious trade crimes; and the *Closing the De Minimis Loophole Act* (H.R. 1840) and the *FIGHTING for America Act* (S. 1185) to close the De Minimis loophole, which has been abused by bad actors to undermine domestic manufacturing workers, consumer safety and facilitate the spread of deadly fentanyl to our communities.

4. Support the *Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Reauthorization Act* (S. 1449) to help workers who've lost their jobs due to trade. TAA is a vital program for workers hurt by trade with a long track record of success, providing resources and training opportunities to help them get back on their feet. Over 130,000 workers are on petitions currently awaiting review because of Congress' failure to reauthorize this program.
5. Stop giving tax breaks to companies that send good jobs overseas. The solution is the *No Tax Breaks for Outsourcing Act* (H.R. 995 / S. 409), introduced by Rep. Doggett and Sen. Whitehouse. Yet this bill has not been on the Trump Administration's budget reconciliation menu.
6. Fully fund the Department of Labor's International Labor Affairs Bureau (ILAB) which works to ensure that other countries comply with the labor standards contained in our trade agreements, including some as basic as preventing child labor or even slavery. President Trump has gutted the agency, canceling all its grants and removing its top career official while also making deep cuts to its professional staff. Funding for ILAB must be restored so that it can fulfill its mission to eradicate labor abuses in global supply chains and level the playing field for American workers and businesses.
7. Protect and promote the economic security of the more than 5 million people who work in the motion picture, television, and music industries and other parts of the creative sector. Many of these workers earn collectively bargained pay and contributions to their health insurance and pension plans from the sales and licensing of the copyrighted works they help create. A worker-centered trade policy must aggressively address the stolen or unlicensed use of copyrighted content, including the practice of companies training their AI models on copyrighted material without consent or compensation. U.S. trade policy should avoid replicating the outdated, overbroad copyright safe harbor exclusions that exist in some U.S. laws, while ensuring digital trade policies remain consistent with the G7 Hiroshima AI Process standards that respect copyright and other intellectual property rights and ensure transparency of data sets.
8. Ensure that workers' interests are front and center in any deal-making that is presumably taking place between the Administration and other countries in light of the "reciprocal" tariffs. Raising and enforcing labor standards and boosting domestic production should be a central component of any deals. Negotiations should be conducted with stakeholder engagement, not in shady backrooms where workers' interests can be ignored or sold out. Our trade policy should strengthen labor rights and human rights as a condition for access to our domestic market. Under unfettered global economic integration, imports from countries with weak labor and human rights undermine our domestic standards for labor and human rights, lowering our living standards.

9. Strengthen workers' freedom to organize and collectively bargain via labor law reforms, including the PRO Act. We should not fool ourselves that reindustrialization alone is the answer to the economic difficulties facing communities damaged by the unfair trade policies of the past. Manufacturing jobs are not magically good jobs. They are made into good jobs by collective bargaining. Strong unions are what gave production workers access to the American Dream, by lifting wage and benefit standards across entire industries.

The labor movement has been leading the struggle for worker-centered trade for decades. Our members are the first to feel the impact of bad trade policies – whether corporate “free trade” agreements, a failure to respond to unfair trade practices, or haphazard on-again, off-again tariff threats. Trump’s chaotic tariff policy warrants a thoughtful, targeted response that prioritizes American workers and supports strong labor markets for all segments of our economy. We look forward to working with Congress to enact trade policies that support good, union jobs, grow our economy and boost the resiliency of supply chains that keep Americans safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jody Calémine". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

Jody Calémine  
Director, Government Affairs