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Regional Business Leaders Agree: Free Trade and Increased Infrastructure Investment Can Help Rebuild the Middle Class and Improve National Economic Competitiveness

Key Takeaways from Conversation with Congress are Echoed in New USITC Report on TPP

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 20, 2016) – In an effort to rebalance the conversation on trade, pro-trade stakeholders and representatives from a variety of industries highlighted the advantages of free trade and increased infrastructure investment at a recent trade roundtable. Central to the conversation with Congress was an acknowledgement that commerce relies heavily on the ability to seamlessly move goods. Federal investment in America's freight infrastructure network will improve trade facilitation, giving U.S. businesses a competitive edge in the international marketplace, and creating well-paying jobs.

"We must understand that working-class Americans often see trade as taking away their jobs," said **Dan Glickman, former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President and Executive Director at the Aspen Institute**. "While trade agreements give businesses the opportunity to access previously unreachable markets and hire more workers, those jobs are not always visible. By tying trade to increased investment in infrastructure, Americans will be able to actually see the improvement in their lives through the creation of jobs on our own soil, putting people to work rebuilding and repairing our country's most critical infrastructure."

In a report titled *Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement: Likely Impact on the U.S. Economy and on Specific Industry Sectors*, released May 18, the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) found that the U.S. stands to gain from the passage of TPP. Echoing the testimony of panelists and speakers at the NAFTANEXT trade roundtable, the report finds that TPP would increase jobs, incomes, and the economy while also improving regulatory certainty and decreasing the cost for business investment in the TPP region. USITC reports that by 2032, U.S. annual real income would be \$57.3 billion higher than baseline projections while real U.S. GDP would be \$42.7 billion higher.

"Like it or not, virtually all markets are now global markets. We view our company's success or failure in export markets as an early warning signal about our company's global competitiveness," said **Mark Schuetz, President of Replex Plastics of Mount Vernon, OH**, speaking on the Trade in the Midwest panel. "If we are not globally competitive, then it is just a matter of time until some competitor in another part of the world steps in and takes away the market share we currently enjoy here at home. Therefore doing what it takes to successfully serve customers in other parts of the world not only grows total employment through increased sales, but also helps protect the jobs that are needed to produce goods and services for domestic markets. Exporting is our company's "canary in the coal mine," using the old metaphor."

"As one whom lives every day on the border it is important to understand that trade and open borders are not bad for America's workforce," said **Executive Vice President of the Corporate International Division of IBC Bank in Laredo, Texas Gerald Schwebel** while speaking on the Trade in the Southwest panel. "A secure country needs secure economic partners. Through trade we can build partnerships that ensure the United States' and our trading partners' economies flourish."

Elena Stegemann, Director of International Business at NuStep, Inc. located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, noted that “trade agreements give small businesses the resources to navigate laws, immigration requirements, and other complex rules in the international trade sphere without having to hire expensive lawyers or consultants. The agreements lay all the information out and make entering into and succeeding in international trade more accessible to small businesses.”

Dan Ujcz, Cross-Border Business Development Director for Dickinson Wright PLLC made the point that trade is often misunderstood and misrepresented in today’s public sphere. “We need to put a new face on trade in the 21st century,” stated Dan. “If all politics is local, then all trade is personal.”

“The **NAFTANEXT** roundtable continued the tradition started at the **NAFTANEXT** Summit in 2014 of highlighting the importance of the North American trading bloc through the prism of freight transportation, new energy sources, and the environment. It is vital that we champion trade’s positive impact on regional businesses to serve as an alternative to the negative misinformation that has saturated much of the trade agreement debate since the passage of NAFTA,” **said Leslie Blakey, President of the Coalition for America’s Gateways and Trade Corridors**, a sponsoring organization of **NAFTANEXT** trade roundtable. “This timely roundtable underscored the message from regional business leaders that free trade and increased infrastructure investment can improve prospects for the middle and working classes and increase our national economic competitiveness overall.”

“What’s in it for us?” – Trade’s Impact on Regional Business was sponsored by Dickinson Wright, PLLC, the Coalition for America’s Gateways & Trade Corridors (CAGTC), the North American Strategy for Competitiveness (NASCO), and the U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce.

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About NAFTANEXT

*The mission of **NAFTANEXT** is to raise public awareness of the benefits of trade in North America while mitigating the spurious claims that have proliferated unchecked since the implementation of NAFTA. **NAFTANEXT** aims to synthesize various sources of insight and support for trade agreements and publicize those sources to bring attention to the past, present and future value of both our tri-national North American relationship and trade generally. For more information on **NAFTANEXT**, please visit www.naftanext.com*