

As former members of the United States Congress, we understand the challenges Congress faces every day while striving to best serve the American people. Our collective experience and battle scars, have taught us that when it comes to important economic issues, the political and policy debate is challenging to overcome.

Combined, we have served sixteen states, represented nearly twenty-seven million Americans, and our service in Congress spanned five decades. We have seen first-hand the opportunities that a robust trade agenda has unlocked for our communities. We know the entrepreneurs who are selling “Made-in-America” goods to Korea and the farmers who are sending “Grown-in-America” crops to Peru.

Trade agreements are never easy. There are impassioned arguments, stacks of reports, hours-long-briefings, and countless meetings. But, when we rise above rhetoric, read the hard facts and understand the strategic benefits, including how trade makes life better for Americans – we have all concluded that creating a better trade infrastructure that includes improved trade agreements and strong enforcement is clearly the right decision.

Economically, there is no question that expanding trade would be a driver for a stronger middle-class. Over time, trade liberalization has raised America’s GDP by 10 percent. In today’s terms, that’s more than \$13,600 for every family in America, every year.

Trade’s contribution to the U.S. economy has been especially important in recent years. Over the last five years, the increase in U.S. exports has accounted for nearly a third of U.S. economic growth and, during the past four years, has supported 1.6 million new jobs. Better yet, those jobs typically pay up to 18 percent higher than jobs unrelated to exports.

Uncertainty about economic policy in general is understandable given the hardships faced by Americans during the last decade, but trade agreements in particular have too often taken the blame for what other global forces have wrought. In fact, trade policy is one of our best tools for addressing the challenges posed by technological change and globalization. If the U.S. is not writing the rules, then we’re allowing other countries with different interest and values to take the lead.

As we look to the future, once again our world-wide trading relationships will be dependent upon obtaining bi-partisan support in the Congress.

The first step to securing trade opportunities is for Congress to pass Trade Promotion Authority (TPA), through which Congress outlines rules for negotiating agreements, consulting Congress and the public, and voting on the agreement. TPA is how Congress asserts itself and controls the process.

Promoting trade has been one of America’s longest bipartisan projects, beginning with Congress’ decision to give the first TPA authority to Franklin Roosevelt nearly eighty years ago. TPA reaffirms Congress’ overall constitutional role in the development and oversight of

U.S. trade policy, while enabling the President to negotiate trade agreements with our partners without fear that America may backslide on its international commitments. From Eisenhower, to JFK, to Reagan, American presidents from both parties have received similar authority to increase our exports, create jobs at home, and exercise American leadership abroad.

As difficult as it can be to find common ground in this political climate, this Congress has an opportunity to play a critical part in expanding our country's economic prosperity.

It is time to update Congress' role in trade policy by passing a modernized TPA bill.

Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) 1979-2005

Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) - 1983-2013

Representative Ray LaHood (R-IL) 1995-2009

Senator Trent Lott (R-MS) - 1973-2007

Representative Cal Dooley (D-CA) - 1991-2005

Representative Jim Matheson (D-UT) 2001-2015

Senator John Breaux (D-LA) 1972-2005

Representative David Dreier (R-CA) - 1981-2013

Representative Jim Moran (D-VA) 1991-2015

Senator Chris Dodd (D-CT) 1975-2011

Representative Dan Glickman (D-KS) - 1977-1995

Representative Mike Rogers (R-MI) 2001-2015

Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) - 1993-2011

Representative Nancy Johnson (R-CT) 1983-2007

Representative Charles Stenholm (D-TX) 1979-2005

Representative Mark Kennedy (R-MN) - 2001-2007

Representative John Tanner (D-TN) 1989-2011

Representative Jim Kolbe (R-AZ) - 1985-2007

Representative Vin Weber (R-MN) 1981-1993