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U.S. Trade Policy

First off, let me make myself real clear, I think our country should be negotiating deals with our trading partners that provide for fair trade and not free trade. Ross Perot had it right when running for the 1992 Presidential election when he said that NAFTA was just going to cause a giant sucking sound of jobs leaving the country for Mexico. It did come to be and we all saw it; the numbers don't lie. Initially, it looked good. We had big exports for a few years. Even states like Ohio and Michigan in the rust belt, with a lot of industrial capacity and who built a lot of machine tool equipment, manufacturing equipment and factory machinery, saw large exports for a few years. These exports just fueled the machinery needed to set industry into motion in Mexico. Soon our factories closed up and the jobs went off to south of the border, where the labor rate was much lower than in our country and the cost of environmental regulations were very minimal. This did lower the cost for products manufactured there, but the prices charged to us did not come down. Corporate American manufacturers tended to stuff more money into their pockets as their costs dropped and only lowered prices when other competition dictated it necessary.

An unforeseen thing happened before we ever really saw the full effect of losing that many jobs to Mexico; China came on line with even cheaper labor rates and less regulations to offer the manufacturing markets. Why pay two dollars an hour to a Mexican worker when you could pay one dollar an hour to a Chinese worker? Our leaders again saw fit to sign trade agreements and set policies that pretty much allow them to just ship stuff in here with little or no tariffs and very little regulation. We are in effect aiding heavily a communist regime and treating them as an equal trading partner. We've since seen all kinds of tainted food and contaminated products with lead, arsenic, and other chemicals in them coming from China.

The problems with these agreements are that we are trading with countries that don't have regulations for consumer safety, environmental protection or employee rights. They offer cheap labor, mistreat their workers, mistreat the environment and just don't trade in a fair manner. In some cases, the governments of our trading partners have subsidized their manufacturers and producers to gain market share and purposely destroy the domestic competition here. How can we allow these products into our country at artificially low prices while our manufacturing base continues to erode dramatically? And this is done now without charging any tariffs or putting any sort of balance on the trade to protect our native jobs. There's no reason we can't manufacture these products in this country, for people in this country, with raw materials that are available in this country and with the infrastructure, such as transportation, roads, electrical, and water utilities already in place here. There's really no reason a worker in China should be making our toys, cars, clothing and tools. Most of the products you see in U.S. retailer chain stores now are coming from foreign markets with cheap labor. Workers there are getting paid very little, and still living on dirt floors while aspiring to the greatness that they see us Americans having in life. They do not even realize that the American standard of living is sliding so fast that we are being brought down to the levels of the rest of the world, and not the rest of the world being brought up to our levels.

As your Senator, I would work hard to set forth fair trade practices and not free trade policies. I would push to rework existing trade agreements and fashion new trade agreements to make us fair trading partners with other trading countries around the world. We can and should push them to protect the environment, treat their workers humanely and build safe quality products.

Eric Deaton