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Editorial: U.S. in the wrong by blocking Mexican trucks

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America is picking a food fight with Mexico over trade. Congress set it off by canceling a pilot program that allowed Mexican trucks to operate on U.S. highways - a blatant violation of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

Mexico responded Monday by announcing that it will jack up tariffs on 90 U.S. agricultural and manufactured products. About \$2.4 billion worth of exports from 40 states will be affected.

With the economy in tatters, it's no time to mince words: The United States is in the wrong. Under NAFTA, we agreed to give Mexican trucks access beginning in 1995, increasing efficiency and lowering costs for consumers.

But U.S. trucking interests and unions have been trying to block the move for years with scare stories about safety. Actually, thousands of Mexican trucks, which were grandfathered in, have operated safely here for years. The pilot program set high standards for vehicles and drivers. The real issue isn't safety but competition and profits.

President Barack Obama, who was cool to NAFTA during the campaign, must step up to ensure the United States finally follows its treaty obligations. The White House says he is working on a new version of the pilot program that responds to congressional concerns. It needs to happen quickly.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., is sounding a timely warning that this dispute could lead to more protectionist measures.

Around the world, countries are considering trade barriers that could have disastrous consequences for the world economy. The United States must put the brakes on trade restrictions, not fuel them.

Let the trucks roll.