

Arizona Daily Star

Editorial: US hurts itself by prohibiting Mexican trucks

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Our view: Trade war will result in loss of jobs if fewer American goods are sold

The United States has no one but itself to blame for tariffs that Mexico has imposed on U.S. products. By acting in a protectionist manner and prohibiting Mexican trucks on U.S. highways, the Obama administration might destroy more American jobs than it safeguards.

Mexico announced Wednesday that it was hiking tariffs on 89 American-made products in retaliation for the U.S. government ending a pilot program that allowed some Mexican trucking companies to operate in the United States. The tariffs went into effect Thursday.

Free access by foreign trucks is mandated by the North American Free Trade Agreement, which was signed by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Canadian trucks have operated in the United States without any limits for years. Mexican trucks were supposed to have gained full access by 2000, but partial entry wasn't granted until 2007 by the Bush administration.

Funding for Bush's pilot program ended last week when Obama signed a government spending bill into law.

Dropping the program will surely cost many American manufacturing workers their jobs because the products they make will be more expensive for Mexicans to buy.

Not only is the United States not living up to an agreement, it is doing so for political and imaginary reasons.

Mexican trucks have been opposed by the Teamsters union, some consumer groups and independent insurers, the Associated Press reported this week.

The Teamsters have been the most vocal, saying Mexican trucks are unsafe. What the union is really trying to do, however, is protect its members' jobs by ensuring that there is less shipping competition.

What's good for the Teamsters, is not necessarily what is best for our country, which has always prided itself on letting the free market decide winners and losers.

In 2007, Teamsters President Jim Hoffa went so far as to suggest that Mexican trucks could be used by terrorists to attack the United States. "The weapons of mass destruction George Bush is looking for could be in the backs of these trucks," he said.

The terrorist argument is simply a scare tactic as Mexican trucks are thoroughly inspected when they come into the United States. The safety argument, meanwhile, has proved unfounded.

Under Bush's pilot program Mexican trucks were checked in Mexico by U.S. inspectors. The vehicles were examined again at the border.

The Mexican government said Wednesday that under the pilot program about 46,000 Mexican trucks crossed into the United States and experienced few of the safety problems opponents suggested would occur, the AP reported.

The new Mexican tariffs will range from 10 percent on products such as onions and toilet paper to 45 percent on grapes. Those products will instantly become more expensive in Mexico, making it very likely that they won't sell as well.

If those products don't sell, American manufacturers won't produce — and they'll employ fewer Americans when the nation can least afford to lose more jobs.

In a roundabout way, even the Teamsters truckers may lose jobs because they'll be asked to transport fewer products headed to Mexico.

"This doesn't just hurt growers in the U.S., it hurts consumers in both countries," Alison Moore, a spokeswoman for the Nogales, Ariz.-based Fresh Produce Association of the Americas, told the Star's Brian Pederson.

Brian Black, a Texas Agriculture Department spokesman, told the AP: "In these challenging economic times, we need more open markets, not higher tariffs. We are asking President Obama and his Mexican counterpart to resolve this issue as soon as possible."

We agree.

With the economy becoming more global, the United States must encourage and engage in free trade. Protectionism will hurt the nation in the long run. If foreigners don't buy U.S.-made products, they'll buy goods made somewhere else.

The United States must abide by NAFTA and treat Mexican truckers fairly. The Obama administration should give Mexican trucks equal access to American highways. It's what's good for business, the economy and for American workers and consumers.