

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

February 2, 2017

Mr. President,

We write to urge you promptly to reverse course and end the Federal civilian hiring freeze announced on January 23 as it applies to Federal employees responsible for trade enforcement. During your campaign you described trade enforcement as “the center” of your plan for trade reform. Freezing hiring for the very agencies that will be essential to fulfilling this objective runs contrary to your own campaign promises and undermines long-running bipartisan efforts to enhance trade enforcement throughout the Federal government. While the freeze presents a host of serious challenges across the federal government, here we would like to focus your attention on its impact on trade enforcement.

It is critical that the United States has a robust workforce dedicated to addressing the nation’s trade enforcement challenges. For example:

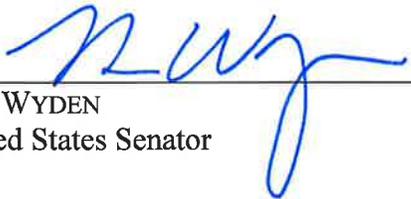
- Producers of steel, softwood lumber, and a range of other commodities are relying on skilled investigators and attorneys at the Commerce Department to address unfair trade that is harming American workers and devastating communities;
- American workers and businesses are calling upon trade specialists and border agents at Customs and Border Protection to identify and investigate companies that are failing to pay import duties, importing counterfeit merchandise, or otherwise violating U.S. trade laws;
- American companies facing barriers to trade in China and elsewhere, including U.S. aluminum producers, are relying on skilled lawyers and other staff at the U.S. Trade Representative’s office to investigate and bring legal challenges against countries that fail to comply with their international obligations;
- Investigators at the Department of Labor’s Bureau of International Labor Affairs are identifying cases in which foreign governments are violating labor commitments or foreign companies are producing goods using child or forced labor;
- The Office of Law Enforcement at the Department of Interior’s U.S. Fish and Wildlife service is investigating wildlife crimes, including illegal trafficking in endangered species and stolen timber that can end up costing U.S. manufacturers that abide by the rules; and
- Attorneys at the U.S. Department of Justice are defending U.S. trade remedy actions in U.S. court and bringing legal challenges against companies that violate U.S. trade laws.

The hiring freeze appears to impact all of the employees described above. The timing of the freeze is particularly problematic given that several of these agencies are implementing new enforcement tools included in the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015, and as

a result have been tasked with even more extensive trade enforcement responsibilities. Congress included a directive for more resources to be dedicated to trade enforcement as part of the Act, yet the freeze would have the effect of reducing such resources.

We look forward to your prompt response and to working closely with you and your Administration to maintain a robust trade enforcement agenda.

Sincerely,



RON WYDEN  
United States Senator



SHERROD BROWN  
United States Senator



ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.  
United States Senator



DEBBIE STABENOW  
United States Senator



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
United States Senator



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
United States Senator



THOMAS R. CARPER  
United States Senator



MICHAEL F. BENNET  
United States Senator



MARIA CANTWELL  
United States Senator