

September 15, 2009

<http://detroitnews.com/article/20090915/OPINION01/909150315>

## Expanding trade will create Michigan jobs

*THOMAS J. DONOHUE*

Michigan's workers and businesses are facing one of the harshest economic storms we've seen in nearly a century. These winds have blown away 800,000 jobs and left thousands of shop doors shuttered. In the eye of this storm, the first instinct is to turn inward, to protect the remaining businesses and jobs.

But the best way to protect these jobs and create new ones is to see the economic opportunities that exist in selling to 95 percent of the world's customers who live outside of our borders.

President Barack Obama says he shares this belief. He recently said, "We know that the success of American businesses, small and large, depends on their ability to sell their products across the globe." But we are still waiting and hoping for more assertive leadership from Washington on a forward-looking trade agenda to create good jobs.

The facts show that a majority of Michigianians and Americans derive great benefits from selling products abroad. More than half a million jobs in Michigan depend on trade. Across the country, one in five factory jobs depends on exports.

Unfortunately, just when trade is needed most, a sense of isolationism is stalling an economic recovery. The "Buy American" provision that snuck into the economic stimulus bill sounds good in theory, but it actually creates red tape for businesses and hurts job creation.

Michigan businesses are also being held back from selling their products competitively overseas by countries that are slapping steep tariffs on our exports. Trade agreements will help solve this problem.

In joining the Michigan Chamber of Commerce today to celebrate its 50th anniversary, I'm unveiling a study from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce on the lost jobs and sales resulting from the failure to move forward with these trade agreements and the "Buy American" rules.

The report shows that the combined effect is the loss of half a million American jobs -- a staggering number, and one that we just can't afford.

The U.S. Chamber believes our nation should set an ambitious goal of doubling our exports within five years. We can do this by assisting small businesses that look to sell their goods overseas. While a quarter million small and mid-sized companies currently export -- including more than 10,000 in Michigan -- many more should look for customers across the globe.

We're also calling on the White House to immediately send the three pending trade agreements -- with Panama, Colombia and South Korea -- to Congress. A global "Doha" trade agreement is long overdue as well.

Combined, these agreements will make trade fairer for Americans and provide a powerful economic stimulus

that costs the taxpayer nothing.

Despite the dark economic clouds hanging over the state, a brighter day is ahead of Michigan's workers if we choose to engage the competition, not hide from it. This choice is central to the future of our free enterprise system, the competitiveness of this state's economy, and the hopes of its hardworking citizens pursuing the American Dream.

*Thomas J. Donuhue is president and CEO of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the world's largest business federation. E-mail comments to [letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com)">[letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com).*