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Choice of Robert Lighthizer as USTR Strengthens Prospects for a New Approach to U.S. Trade Policy

Former Reagan Trade Official and Longtime Critic of Dogmatic “Free-Trade” Republicans Nominated to Join Trump Cabinet Packed With TPP Proponents

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The nomination of Robert Lighthizer to be U.S. Trade Representative signals President-elect Donald Trump’s interest in altering the trade policy approach that has prevailed through Republican and Democratic administrations for the past two decades. Lighthizer has consistently noted that [historically Republicans favored trade policies](#) designed to obtain specific national economic goals and criticized the Republican Party’s rigid support over recent decades of “free trade” ideology. His views put him at odds with most of Trump’s other high-level appointees who represent the very perspective on trade that Lighthizer has long critiqued.

“Lighthizer is very knowledgeable about both technical trade policy and the ways of Washington, but what sets him apart among high-level Republican trade experts is that for decades his views seemed to be shaped by the pragmatic outcomes of trade agreements and policies rather than fealty to any particular ideology or theory,” said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen’s Global Trade Watch. “I don’t know that he would agree with progressive critics of our status quo trade policies about alternative approaches, but he also has had quite a different perspective on trade policy than the Republican congressional leaders and most of Trump’s other cabinet nominees who have supported the TPP and every past trade deal.”

President-elect Donald Trump has filled many top administration posts with proponents of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a pact that Trump railed against during his campaign. Trump appointees who publicly advocated for the TPP include Wilbur Ross (Secretary of Commerce), Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson (Secretary of State), Gov. Terry Branstad (Ambassador to China), Gen. James Mattis (Secretary of Defense) and Goldman Sachs President Gary Cohn (Director of National Economic Council) – not to mention Vice-President-elect Mike Pence.

“Thankfully there was never a congressional majority for the TPP in the 10 months after it was signed so the TPP was dead before the election,” said Wallach. “But even so, most of Trump’s cabinet members will be inclined to grab the shovel from Trump’s hands before he can bury the TPP’s moldering corpse by formally withdrawing the U.S. as a signatory.”

Other prominent TPP supporters nominated to join the Trump administration include:

- Gov. Rick Perry – TPP supporter named Secretary of Energy
- Rep. Ryan Zinke – Supporter of Fast Track for TPP named Secretary of Interior
- Rep. Tom Price – Supporter of Fast Track for TPP named Secretary of Health & Human Services
- Dr. Ben Carson – TPP supporter named Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
- Elaine Chao – TPP supporter named Secretary of Transportation
- Mike Pompeo – TPP supporter named CIA Director

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