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OPINION

Greasing the Skids to Deeper Economic Distress

'Free Trade' and growing inequality

BY EDITH RASELL



Just as the country is finally beginning to recover from the Great Recession, Congress is set to deliver another blow to the economy. Over the past 20 years, so-called "free trade" agreements have sent hundreds of thousands of jobs overseas, harmed workers in the United States and around the world, weakened protective regulations, and exacerbated inequality.

But despite this history of destruction, Congress will soon consider two more free trade agreements: the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Trans-

Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership with the European Union. These agreements cannot be passed unless Congress first adopts special "Fast Track" procedures to grease the process. Fast Track legislation must be stopped.

Our recent economic history is a tragic story of deepening poverty, erosion of the middle class, and fabulous income growth at the highest reaches of the economic ladder. Many experts who acknowledge these trends claim they are the inevitable result of economic forces beyond our control.

In other words, there is nothing we can do about it. But this claim of impotence is false. Solid research shows that rising inequality is, in fact, the direct result of policy choices made

by politicians (federal, state, and local) on behalf of corporate interests and people with wealth and political power.

Which brings us back to "free trade" agreements. Economists identify these agreements as one important cause of the growth in inequality.

In the last 20 years, Congress has passed a series of trade agreements, each modeled on the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These pacts have not only been detrimental to the common good in the United States, they have also harmed our trading partners.

For example, corporations' global search for the cheapest workers has forced developing nations to compete against each other for the lowest wages. Our government-subsidized agricul-

tural output has put poor, unsubsidized farmers in other countries out of business. Prohibitions on a small country's ability to control money flows across its borders has led to financial instability and economic crises. In short, free trade agreements have benefited corporations around the world, harmed workers and the environment, boosted inequality in the U. S. and many other countries, and brought greater economic instability.

Before Congress considers these proposed trade agreements they will first seek to pass Fast Track legislation to markedly curtail the usual oversight process and ease passage. Under Fast Track, Congress would have just 90 days to study and vote on the hundreds of pages of the proposed trade

agreements. Policy makers could spend no more than 20 hours debating the legislation, would not be allowed to hold hearings to learn the opinions of experts, and would be prohibited from amending the proposed agreements. Just when careful scrutiny of proposed legislation would be especially important, Fast Track would severely constrain this process.

The proposed free trade agreements would impact millions of people around the world and the environment. Previous similar agreements have harmed, not promoted, the common good. Congress must thoroughly and carefully evaluate these agreements. Congress must not pass Fast Track.

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Giuliani's Words Do More than Hurt - They Divide

A horrible thing to say on many levels

BY MARC H. MORIAL



After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City, I brought a delegation of mayors to meet with the city's then-mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. The delegation's goal was to help restore confidence in the still-traumatized city and help rebuild what had been so inhumanly destroyed.

At the time, I was mayor of New Orleans and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and Giuliani – widely acknowledged and praised for his leadership after the attacks – catapulted onto the national stage to become "America's Mayor." How times have changed.

During a private New York fundraising dinner for Republican presidential candidate Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker last month, Giuliani popped onto the national stage yet again – not for the qualities he displayed as "America's Mayor," but for the unfounded accusation that President Obama does not love America.

"I do not believe, and I know this is a horrible thing to say, but I do not believe that the president loves America,"

Giuliani said in response to a question about the president's foreign policy and counter-terrorism strategies. He added, "He doesn't love you. And he doesn't love me. He wasn't brought up the way you were brought up and I was brought up, through love of this country."

Speaking in front of a 2016 Republican presidential contender and a mixed crowd of conservatives and business executives, Giuliani – who failed to win the 2008 GOP presidential nomination – attacked the patriotism of our nation's president, a man whose grandfather served in World War II, whose grand-uncle helped liberate the Nazi death camp at Buchenwald and who was the chief executive behind the operation to kill 9/11's mastermind, Osama Bin Laden.

Questioning the president's patriotism isn't just inappropriate; it demonstrates a complete lack of respect. It begs the question that as Giuliani continues to seek a prominent role on the national political stage, will he choose to rehearse only in

the Theater of the Absurd?

Giuliani's response was neither an honest critique of the president's foreign policy, nor was it a considered analysis of our nation's ongoing discussion on how to combat terrorism.

It was, however, a veiled attack on the character of our president. It was a better-left-buried relic from 2008 when candidates – including Giuliani – purposely appealed to a particular strain of the GOP base who viewed Obama, the Harvard-educated black man raised by his white family in Hawaii, as "the other" and "not like us." It was a rehearsal of the kind of divisive rhetoric that has no place in the 2016 race for the White House.

I am the first to assert that honest critiques of any president, administration and its policies are critical in a functioning democracy. But in this case, there is nothing constructive or relevant in maligning a man because of the way he was raised.

Further, Giuliani has yet to explain how the president's upbringing jeopardizes the national security of our nation. How can personal attacks ever have a constructive place in our conversations about degrading and ultimately destroying ISIL or creat-

ing jobs or energy independence?

White House spokesman Josh Earnest said, "It is sad to see when somebody who has attained a certain level of public stature and even admiration tarnishes that legacy so thoroughly."

Without hesitation, I can say that the Giuliani I met with that mayors' delegation in the smoldering aftermath of the terror attacks – a bridge-builder, a reconciler and a healer – was not the Giuliani I heard last week. It is quite unfortunate that his reappearance on the national stage recasts and squanders that legacy for a new one that limits

him to catering to groups animated by the rhetoric of division at best, and veiled hate-mongering at worst.

If I agreed with anything in Giuliani's statement, it is that, yes, it was a horrible thing to say on many levels. I would add, in a word of advice to the former mayor of New York, that whenever you feel compelled to preface a comment with "I know this is a horrible thing to say," it is likely a comment better left unsaid.

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