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OUR VIEW

Trump has torn down trade deals, but hasn't rebuilt

President Trump has been busy in recent months fulfilling campaign promises on trade, which might be a good thing for farmers and ranchers if he were fulfilling all of his promises on trade.

One of Trump's favorite campaign riffs was on trade, or more specifically how the United States in general and American workers and businesses in particular were being beat up by our trading partners.

"We don't make good deals any more. I say it all the time in speeches. We don't make good deals anymore; we make bad deals. Our trade deals are a disaster."

Candidate Trump said Mexico and Canada were getting much more from the United States under the North American Free Trade Agreement than they were giving. He promised to reopen negotiations and make a better deal.

President Trump reopened talks on NAFTA with Canada and Mexico. So

far there's no new deal, better or worse. Canada and Mexico are, respectively, the second- and third-largest importers of U.S. agricultural goods. They account for about \$41 billion in ag exports.

Farmers are understandably nervous. Do they want a better deal? Yeah. Can they afford to have no deal? No.

Trump promised to reopen talks on NAFTA and get a better deal. So far he's delivered half.

As a candidate Trump liked to talk about how foreign steel and aluminum makers were unfairly dumping under-priced goods in the U.S., hurting American steel workers. Earlier this month President Trump threatened to increase tariffs on foreign steel and aluminum. That made steel workers happy, but farmers are left worried that their products will bear the brunt of any retaliatory measures steel-exporting countries place on the U.S.

Then there's the Trans-Pacific Partnership. U.S. farmers had a big



AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

President Donald Trump waves as he boards Air Force One, Friday in Andrews Air Force Base, Md., en route to Palm Beach International Airport, in West Palm Beach, Fla.

stake in the multi-lateral trade pact with Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. But it wasn't very popular during the campaign.

Bernie Sanders said TPP was a "global race to the bottom" to boost corporate profits. As secretary of state, Hillary Clinton called TPP the "gold standard" of trade pacts, but candidate Clinton said that when she read the final text she couldn't support it. Donald Trump said the deal undercut American workers and companies.

All three said they'd walk away from the deal. Trump won, walked away from the deal and said he'd negotiate

better bilateral treaties with our biggest trading partners.

Last week the remaining 11 partners signed the TPP, sans many of the provisions insisted upon by U.S. negotiators and the U.S. itself. No word on any new bilateral agreements with countries that buy the bulk of farm exports from the Pacific Northwest. U.S. farmers export \$135 billion in products each year. They have a lot riding on trade.

Having walked away from "bad" trade deals, it's time for Trump to fulfill the other half of his promises and replace them with treaties that serve the interests of U.S. farmers and ranchers.

OTHER VIEWS

The growing college graduation gap

First, some good news: In recent decades, students from modest backgrounds have flooded onto college campuses. At many high schools where going to college was once exotic, it's now normal. When I visit these high schools, I see college pennants all over the hallways, intended to send a message: College is for you, too.

And thank goodness for that message. As regular readers of this column have heard before, college can bring enormous benefits, including less unemployment, higher wages, better long-term health and higher life satisfaction.

Now for the bad news: The college-graduation rate for these poorer students is abysmal. It's abysmal even though many of them are talented teenagers capable of graduating. Yet they often attend colleges with few resources or colleges that simply do a bad job of shepherding students through a course of study.

The result is both counterintuitive and alarming. Even as the college-attendance gap between rich and poor has shrunk, the gap in the number of rich and poor college graduates has grown. That shouldn't be happening.

The surge in poorer students going to college hasn't led to any meaningful change in the number of college graduates from poorer backgrounds. Among children born to low-wealth families in the 1970s, 11.3 percent went on to earn a bachelor's degree. Among the same category of children born in the 1980s, only 11.8 percent did.

The picture is very different for people who grew up in the wealthiest one-fifth of families, according to the study, by Fabian Pfeffer of the University of Michigan. The number going to college fell slightly over the same time period (which may just be statistical noise, given how high their attendance rates already were). But many more of them emerged with degrees.

This growing gap has big consequences, because the benefits of college come largely from graduating, not merely attending some classes. Graduation allows students to complete a program and be prepared for a job. Graduation has intangible benefits, too.

You can think of college as adulthood's first obstacle course. People who complete it learn how to overcome other obstacles as they go through life. People who don't finish suffer a blow to their confidence. They also typically have to repay college debt without the extra earning power of a degree. It's the worst of both worlds.

If anything, the consequences of failing to complete college seem to be increasing, as the economy becomes ever more technologically advanced. Since 2000, the



DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

average inflation-adjusted wage of workers with some college credit but no degree has actually fallen, by 2 percent, according to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute. The average wage of college graduates is up 6 percent.

There are surely multiple reasons the college-graduation gap is growing. For one thing, neighborhoods have become more economically segregated, which probably increases gaps in the quality of K-12 schools — and, by extension, academic preparation. Many colleges that serve poor and middle-class students have also suffered cuts in state funding. And tuition has risen.

Whatever the causes, the gap makes the United States a less fair country. Thousands of students who work hard, overcome tough neighborhoods or family situations and do well in school are nonetheless falling by the wayside. They're not failing so much as the rest of society is failing them.

Doing right by them would require a lot of changes, in tax policy, housing policy and other areas. The Trump administration clearly has no interest in these changes. Instead, it's pushing an agenda that will worsen inequality.

But improving college graduation rates does not, for the most part, depend on the federal government. It's an area where people who want to help fix our economy — people in the nonprofit sector, in state and local government and, obviously, on college campuses — can play a meaningful role.

Some colleges have started to make impressive changes. Georgia State has raised its six-year graduation rate sharply. A network of 11 universities, including Kansas, Michigan State and the University of California, Riverside, are working together — imagine that — to share student-success strategies. In New York, community colleges in the CUNY network have created a program that nearly doubled graduation rates.

I'm convinced that the college-graduation problem is one of the big barriers to economic mobility — and yet also one on which we can make real progress. In the coming months, I will be telling some of the unknown success stories in higher education. I'll also look at campuses that should be doing better.

There are few things I find more inspiring than listening to teenagers from difficult backgrounds talk about their future, usually with optimism and ambition. The rest of us owe them a little urgency.

David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.



YOUR VIEWS

President Trump's silence speaks volumes

I think President Donald Trump's decision to take refuge at his Florida resort while hundreds of thousands of students marched on Washington speaks volumes about the person he is and his presidency.

Rather than stay in Washington to at least display deserved respect to the student organizers of the march, Trump chose once again to exemplify that when it comes to the important matters before our nation, the priority he's most concerned with is himself.

Nevertheless, one of the student speakers at the march — Emma Gonzalez — astutely summed up what must become a priority for our nation, when she movingly concluded her remarks with the words "Fight for your lives, before it's someone else's job."

Indeed, Emma — very much so.

And on so many other important fronts which Trump — dangerously — shows such little if any genuine concern about, let alone even a faint understanding that rings true.

Les Ruark
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Unadoptable wild horses should be slaughtered

Your story about the teenager taking a mustang from wild to mild was truly inspiring. The responsibilities of rearing and training this horse for eventual adoption was in the words of the girl's mother a

win-win-win.

The article also states there are unadoptable horses rotting in corrals at containment centers. There are over 45,000 of these horses costing us over \$50 million in taxpayers dollars per year. I don't think rotting is a good choice of words for this lose-lose-lose situation. I have long advocated these unadoptable horses be slaughtered and the meat be provided to poor families. Spending \$1,000 per year per horse to be held until they die, often more than 10 years, while poor families cannot provide their children a nutritious meal is abhorrent. Nutritional analysis of horse meat has shown it to be more nutritious than beef.

The 72,000 horses roaming BLM lands, mentioned in the article, exceeds the 27,000 animals range scientists advocate for good range health. The herd is continuing to increase at 15 to 20 percent per year. Removal of animals for adoption and for programs like the one these kids are involved in should be a priority. The \$100 fee should be waived. After all, they would be saving the government \$1,000 per year. Those animals not suitable for adoption should be slaughtered and the meat provided first to poor families. If there are not enough poor families, the meat should be offered to the general public interested in a healthy, nutritious, lean source of protein. This could be a real win-win-win.

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