

# FORT WORTH Star-Telegram

## **NAFTA: LET'S GET TO THE HARD STUFF**

*Special to the Star-Telegram*

*April 6, 2018*

*By Justin Yancy*

I was in Washington, DC recently with members of the **Texas Business Leadership Council**, and NAFTA was on our mind.

In the course of our meetings with Texas officials in DC, we discussed how progress continues to be made but heard that there were still the sticking points (the hard stuff) that need to be overcome before a NAFTA 2.0 can be ratified.

The slow play of politics and the politically charged rhetoric that has punctuated some of the public debate over NAFTA isn't helping anyone, certainly not the businesses, economies and workers that have benefited from a strong trading relationship with our neighbors in Canada and Mexico.

There is no doubt that the 24-year-old agreement needs updating. Amazon didn't exist in 1994 and Mexico's energy market didn't allow for outside investment when NAFTA was originally signed. By all accounts, the planning focused on the modernization of NAFTA is essentially complete and there is agreement by the three countries on moving forward with a NAFTA built for the 21st century.

So why the lack of progress on the hard stuff? One, the Trump Administration's demand that NAFTA country content in automobiles move from 62.5 percent to 85 percent with a full 50 percent having to be US materials doesn't recognize the production sharing and supply chains that have flourished under a system of open and free trade.

I'm as patriotic as the next guy, but mandates built on misplaced anger and fear lead to isolationism — a framework that hasn't worked out too well for our country in the past. Add these roadblocks to the new taxes levied on Americans recently via tariffs, and our country is, once again, at a critical point in its history.

Will we get it right? As a Texan, I say, "You bet we will." Economic growth provides real opportunity to Texans and Americans, allowing us all to improve the quality of our lives, bring home paychecks and build and expand small businesses across the state.

Our group also heard about innovative ideas and solutions being offered by Texas leaders. Less than 24 hours after our meeting with Senator Ted Cruz, he announced the

need for a "competitiveness" chapter to be included in a NAFTA 2.0. A chapter intended to address issues such as streamlined permitting, a more transparent regulatory environment, workforce preparedness and building a 21st Century physical and digital infrastructure will facilitate the expansion of American jobs and economic growth.

So, let's get to, and past, the "hard stuff" by using an outside the beltway notion called reality. Jobs, opportunity, and our overall economy have thrived under NAFTA and no Texan, nor any American for that matter, will be better off if NAFTA goes away.

Lastly, I want to point out that many of our state's Members of Congress are doing an outstanding job supporting a strong NAFTA 2.0 and have let President Trump know how important the ties of NAFTA are to the livelihoods of the good people of Texas.

As Chairman Brady so eloquently stated earlier this year, "When we lead on trade, the American people — our workers and our families — always win. At the end of the day, America is made for trade. So is Texas. So let's move forward."

Let's finish strong — and soon.

*Justin Yancy is President of the Texas Business Leadership Council and has served in the administrations of then-Gov. George W. Bush and Gov. Rick Perry.*