

Last week, President Obama released his [2010 Trade Agenda](#) . I commend him for recognizing in the report that trade is essential to job creation in the United States. During this period of high unemployment, increasing exports and leveling the playing field for American small businesses is a critical part of getting our economy back on the right track and getting Americans back to work. This is certainly true for Northern California. As one of the richest agricultural regions in the world, Northern Californians rely heavily on the ninety-five percent of the world's consumers who live outside of our nation. As such, I strongly believe the U.S. should actively pursue ways to reduce barriers and increase market access for American-made goods and services.

While I applaud the President for recognizing the need to expand exports, I'm disappointed that his rhetoric has not been matched with concrete action. First and foremost, the President should invest the time and energy necessary to build support among Democratic lawmakers for the pending trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. These free trade agreements would increase U.S. exports to these countries by bringing down barriers to our goods and services. Currently, our exports to these nations face much higher tariffs than our imports from them. For example, 90 percent of Colombia's exports into the U.S. already enter duty free but our agriculture products face duties up to 21 percent. Similarly, 95 percent of our imports from Panama enter duty free but our agriculture producers pay duties averaging 20 percent. Last, U.S. agricultural tariffs are a quarter of the level of Korean tariffs. Passing the three pending trade agreements will remove many of these inequities, spurring exports and creating jobs here at home.

The President must also realize that the failure to implement these agreements could cost many Americans their jobs. Our competitors are aggressively moving to expand market access for their goods overseas, which threatens to lock out U.S. goods from these markets. For example, the European Union and Canada are completing their own trade agreements with South Korea and Colombia. If they are successful and we fail to act on our pending agreements, the demand for U.S. exports will diminish and American jobs will be put at risk. More broadly, there were 230 bilateral or regional trade agreements in force in 2008, and the U.S. was a partner in a mere 17 of them. There are 400 additional agreements pending or being negotiated and the U.S. is involved with only 4. I'm greatly concerned that the U.S. risks harming our workers, farmers, and small businesses if we fail to compete in the international marketplace. I believe it is time for the President to take this issue off the back-burner and work aggressively to build support for our pending fair trade agreements and other efforts to level the playing field for U.S. small businesses and workers.