

# Intelligence MEMOS



From: Jon R. Johnson  
To: American Farm Bureau Federation  
Copy to: Chrystia Freeland, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Date: January 8, 2018  
Re: **YOUR CONVENTION, PRESIDENT TRUMP AND A SIGN OF HIGH REGARD**

---

Your president, Zippy Duvall, praised Donald Trump's decision to attend your convention in Nashville today as "a sign of the high regard in which the nation's chief executive holds America's farm and ranch families." Your gathering presents an ideal opportunity for your member organizations to emphasize the importance of the president demonstrating that high regard by backing off from threats to withdraw the US from NAFTA.

Farm organizations have repeatedly warned the Trump administration of the negative impact that withdrawal would have on the US agricultural sector. Even the delivery of a notice of intention to withdraw would severely disrupt supply chains and call into serious question the reliability of the US as a supplier.

More than 160 farm organizations and agricultural businesses wrote US governors last November to "underscore the importance of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to the U.S. food and agriculture industry and to express concern about the potential of a withdrawal from this critical trade agreement." Governors of US agricultural states have repeatedly declared the critical importance of NAFTA remaining in effect. Eighteen Senators wrote Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, emphasizing the importance to the US agricultural sector of access to export markets and the critical role that trade agreements play in achieving that objective. Senators from agricultural states have been outspoken in their support for NAFTA and have expressed real concerns over the negative effects of a US withdrawal or a US notice of intent to withdraw from NAFTA. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue has been credited with helping to keep President Trump from withdrawing from NAFTA last year. US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has told Secretary Perdue that "do no harm has to be our objective" in the NAFTA renegotiation.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, as America's unified national voice of agriculture, can protect its member organizations by delivering a powerful message to the president.

In the November letter to Secretary Ross, the senators stated that "it is essential that Congress' voice be heard.". One hopes President Trump will demonstrate his high regard for the US agricultural sector by recognizing the concerns over the fate of NAFTA that have been so frequently expressed. However, Congress has the ultimate authority over trade agreements through the Commerce Clause in the US Constitution. If the president ignores the wishes of your member organizations and serves notice to withdraw from NAFTA, it is critical that Congress exercise its constitutional responsibilities and actively oppose such an action.

There is real urgency here. The next NAFTA negotiating round ends on January 28 and will most likely end with substantial issues remaining unresolved. President Trump delivers his State of the Union address on January 30. Your member organizations, governors and members of Congress who support the US agricultural sector must urge the President to adopt the "do no harm" principle by refraining from making damaging announcements about NAFTA.

*Jon Johnson is a former advisor to the Canadian Government during NAFTA negotiations and is a Senior Fellow at the C.D. Howe Institute.*

To send a comment or leave feedback, email us at [blog@cdhowe.org](mailto:blog@cdhowe.org)