

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
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The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
The Speaker of the House of Representatives
The Capitol
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The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Mr. President, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McConnell:

Government mandates, export controls, and other trade restrictions are proliferating around the world as countries confront the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally inadvisable, these actions will undermine a strong recovery.

The United States has already imposed restrictions on the export of health and medical resources. Policymakers are considering the imposition of new Buy America requirements for medical goods and pharmaceutical products, either by executive order or legislation.

Current shortages of critical medical goods in the Covid-19 pandemic have revealed to all the desirability of diversifying sources of supply and increasing inventory of storable medical goods. Diversifying supply sources and increasing inventories will be costly, but a broad Buy America regime will be more costly. The variety, supply, and price of goods available to Americans will suffer under a broad Buy America regime. Taxpayers and patients will pay more for drugs and medical supplies. Smart policies such as federal government stockpiling look more promising.

A Buy America directive can also hamstring the ability of U.S. pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacturers to meet our future needs if firms are denied access to essential foreign supplies. Moreover, we can expect our trading partners to adopt retaliatory “Don’t Buy American” barriers targeting U.S. exports as this type of retaliation is already occurring between other countries.

The President’s intuition was correct when in 2018 he called for zero tariffs, zero non-tariff barriers, and zero subsidies.

For the United States to make a rapid and strong recovery from the pandemic, we urge leaders to stand strong against those in the United States and abroad who seek to disrupt trade in essential medical products. Instead, the United States and its trading partners should pursue policies that make medical supplies more plentiful and affordable. Costly protectionism should not be foisted on patients at home and abroad.

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