



PROTECTIONISM OR PRAGMATISM?

-- SPEAKING NOTES --

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John R. Magnus
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Welcome and thanks for attending this afternoon's panel. I'm John Magnus and am honored to appear before you with this distinguished crew. I do a lot of these events, and this panel is as good as it gets.

This panel, and today's other events, are also testimony to the terrific scholarly community here at the Washington College of Law around issues of trade law and policy.

I won't interfere long with your enjoyment of the people you really came here to listen to.

THE SETTING

The setting for today's discussion is broadly familiar, in this room at least. We have all heard and read a good deal of hyperventilatory rhetoric – expressions of alarm that the American government is now careening downhill, on a sled with no brakes, toward a modern-day Smoot-Hawley scenario.

And then there have been some more sober evaluations.

Undoubtedly our government is doing some unusual things at the moment.

The economy is ailing. Too many see trade as part of the problem. Too few are persuaded that trade is part of the solution.

Conditions are not good for bringing new trade-liberalizing initiatives into force. But that was true a year ago. What is – or may be – different now involves trade commitments already in place. The newly seated U.S. government is accused of turning away from some commitments, violating their spirit or their letter, and of disruptively proposing to “re-visit” others. It is said to have been too parochial in the design of anti-recession measures.

Will the charges stick?

QUESTIONS

Here are some questions in advance for our panelists -- things I hope we will all leave this room better-informed about:

What is to be made of the new “Buy American” provisions? Of the auto company bailouts? Of the snuffing out of the Mexico trucking pilot program? Do these items collectively mean something more than the sum of what they mean individually?

What about the potential next wave of measures that could be trade-problematic in either a policy or legal sense – like “cash for clunkers,” or the border element of carbon control legislation?

And finally, taking up more directly the concern raised by the hyperventilators: is trade liberalization *really* so unpopular, and the current congress *really* so irresponsible, and the new administration *really* so incapable of providing discipline, that *really* bad things might happen trade-wise?

ON TO THE PANEL

I think that’s all we need to get launched here. We have terrific panelists. It is our good fortune that they will be able to enlighten us with a healthy mixture of information and -- what you really paid for -- opinion.

Followed by remarks of Gary Hufbauer (Peterson Institute for International Economics), Dan Ikenson (Cato Institute), Chris Parlin (DLA Piper), and Jason Kearns (House Committee on Ways & Means)