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OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trade Punishment for Trump Voters

President Trump meets with Shinzo Abe on Friday, and one subject is sure to be trade. The Japanese Prime Minister may be too diplomatic to say it, but someone should tell Mr. Trump the damage that his trade policies are already doing to the rural and farm-state voters who put him in the White House.

This year the U.S. is expected to export \$134 billion in agricultural goods, from pork to nuts to corn and much more. Exports contribute about 20% of U.S. farm income, and U.S. agriculture ran a \$19.5 billion global trade surplus in 2015. The No. 1 state for exports is California, which is home to high-value crops like lettuce and grapes. But Mr. Trump carried 11 of the top 15 exporting states, including Iowa, Nebraska, Indiana and Texas.

The nearby table shows how much American farmers rely on exports. Some 72% of U.S. tree nuts are exported, and roughly half of all rice, soybeans and wheat. Rice is grown in solid Republican states such as Arkansas, Louisiana and Missouri; soybeans are cash cows for Illinois, Iowa and Minnesota. Root plants like ginseng are exported from Michigan and Wisconsin, mainly to China.

The second table shows that Mr. Trump's protectionist threats are aimed at countries that are the biggest buyers of U.S. farm products. Of the top 11 U.S. export destinations, seven are in Asia and Japan and Vietnam are part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership that Mr. Trump abandoned in his first week. The Farm Bureau says that pact would have raised U.S. farm incomes by \$4.4 billion by reducing trade barriers in these and other markets. Japan, with its high incomes and 19% average tariff on U.S. farm goods, is a particular lost opportunity.

Mr. Trump also says he might impose tariffs on China, which could invite retaliation. In 2015 China bought nearly \$21 billion in U.S. agricultural goods, up 200% since 2006 and almost 15% of total U.S. farm exports.

Then there's his threat to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, though U.S. farm exports have quadrupled to Canada and Mexico since NAFTA took effect in 1994. The

irony here is that Mexico made farm-trade concessions because it was so desperate for access to U.S. markets. A NAFTA redo may be less favorable to Americans.

It isn't clear if Mr. Trump will withdraw from NAFTA, but recall what happened when the U.S. violated the deal in the past. When the U.S. closed the southern border to Mexican trucks in 2009, with tariffs that hit U.S. fruit and vegetable exporters hard, growers lost market share and income until the truck dispute was settled.

Dairy exports to Mexico alone support some 30,000 American jobs, according to the U.S. Dairy Export Council, and many are manufacturing jobs in rural areas. Americans who lose their jobs in a Trump trade war may have a hard time understanding how this helps the working class.

Global competition has forced U.S. farmers to become efficient and productive, but the reality is that other countries have arable land and willing labor. They can replace U.S. agriculture in a tariff war. Australia has a trade deal with Japan, and exports Down Under and wheat. U.S. beef imports to Japan will face high tariffs that the Trans-Pacific deal would have phased out or reduced. Mexico has bilateral trade deals with Chile, the European Union and others, and may buy more from Canada.

The bigger political picture for the Trump White House is that U.S. agriculture is already struggling amid a strong dollar and declining export volume. Net farm income dropped 15% to about \$68 billion last year, the lowest since 2009, according to the Agriculture Department. Unless Mr. Trump wants to compensate with more taxpayer subsidies, the best way to boost incomes is to let farmers sell in more markets, not fewer.

One reason the U.S. benefits from free-trade deals is that America has among the lowest import barriers on earth (5% average for agriculture), so new agreements tear down levies abroad and open new markets. President Trump's protectionist threats are aimed at countries that are the biggest buyers of U.S. farm products. Of the top 11 U.S. export destinations, seven are in Asia and Japan and Vietnam are part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership that Mr. Trump abandoned in his first week.

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Protectionism is already hurting the Farm Belt.

Farmers Love Exports

Eight of the top U.S. agriculture products by export percentage of total production, 2011-2015

Cotton	77.3%
Tree nuts	71.9
Rice	52.4
Wheat	50.6
Soybeans	45.8
Fresh fruits	27.8
Processed vegetables	24.7
Pork	22.5

Source: USDA Economic Research Service

Who Eats American?

The top 11 destinations for U.S. agricultural exports in 2015, in U.S. dollars

Canada	\$20.8 billion
China	20.2
Mexico	17.7
European Union	12.1
Japan	11.2
South Korea	6.0
Hong Kong	3.6
Taiwan	3.2
Colombia	2.4
Philippines	2.3
Vietnam	2.2

Source: USDA

The FCC's New Life of Pai

Senate Democrats found time this week for a press conference haranguing Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai for the high sin of opposing "net neutrality," which is their euphemism for government regulation of the internet. Less noticed is that Mr. Pai is restoring bipartisanship and political accountability to an agency that desperately needs it.

Mr. Pai has rolled out several useful changes in how the agency conducts business: The FCC typically doesn't release the text of its policies until after commissioners have voted. This allowed the Obama FCC to pitch ideas for net neutrality to the public and invent the details later, sometimes refusing to share drafts with GOP commissioners. Mr. Pai says all agenda items will be shared with Democrats before public release, a courtesy he wasn't always afforded in the minority.

Other advances include putting up consent decree settlements to a vote. Previously, the chairman's office could sign off on an enforcement

without the assent of colleagues. Another rule will bar agency staffers from making substantive changes to orders the commission has voted on, which the Obama FCC would do even after the public comment period had passed.

Most headlines on the FCC have accused Mr. Pai of confiscating phones from poor people in a program called Lifeline. The reality is that the commission is reconsidering marginal changes to the program that the Obama Administration tried to ram through on its way out the door. Mr. Pai's alleged net-neutrality violation is closing an investigation on telecoms that offer free data plans, which are popular with low-income consumers.

The Obama Administration ran the FCC as an extension of the White House, even ordering the agency in a YouTube video to classify the internet as a public utility. For all the invented panic over Republican rule in Washington, note that Mr. Pai is divesting himself of authority and making the agency more responsive to the consumers who pay his salary.

Merkel on the Ropes

One of Europe's last great political certainties is evaporating as it becomes clearer that Angela Merkel could lose the autumn election in Germany. For the first time since 2010 her party fell to a close second place in a poll released this week, and not a moment too soon.

We say that not out of enthusiasm for the opponent who's upstaging Mrs. Merkel's center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU). The center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) got a boost when it selected former European Parliament President Martin Schulz as its leader. Mr. Schulz is an orthodox tax-and-spend, pro-European Union social democrat, but he has the advantage of not being tarred by the previous leadership's 2013 decision to form a grand coalition with Mrs. Merkel.

Mrs. Merkel needs some serious political competition. Absent a vibrant center-left, Mrs. Merkel positioned herself as a pragmatic centrist of the European status quo. Most controversially, the lack of a challenger for centrist voters led Mrs. Merkel to assume she could count on that part of the electorate to support her open-door migration policy despite opposition from her right within the CDU. This fueled the popularity of the far-right, euroskeptic Alternative for Germany (AfD) party.

Now voters inclined to vote for a social democrat appear to be returning home to Mr. Schulz because he really is one. Polls show the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, together virtually tied with the SPD at around 30% support. This is forcing Mrs. Merkel back toward the right.

Witness the tougher new policy to deport some 60,000 migrants and to step up security surveillance while migrants are in Germany—she unveiled Thursday. This is a sign she's no longer taking for granted the support of the CDU faithful.

It's significant that Mrs. Merkel is being harried not by a euroskeptic but by another "good government." Perhaps the message is that voters have turned to fringe parties such as AfD not out of dislike for the EU but out of frustration with mainstream parties that don't compete against each other vigorously enough.

In which case, here's hoping Mrs. Merkel continues her rightward drift. Maybe she can even embrace economic-reform ideas such as the tax cuts for which some members of her party are agitating, while Mr. Schulz pushes his proposals for more government spending. The result would be a genuine mainstream choice for German voters—something too many of their European peers have been denied in recent elections.

Facts, Falsehoods and the First Amendment

The First Amendment sky is not falling as a result of the recent decision of the District of Columbia Court of Appeals permitting climatologist Michael Mann's case to proceed against the National Review Online, despite the claims of NRO's attorneys Michael A. Carvin and Anthony Dick in "A Libel Suit Threatens Catastrophe for the Climate of Public Debate" (op-ed, Feb. 6). In this litigation, Dr. Mann is challenging NRO's accusations that he engaged in scientific fraud when he published his "hockey stick" graph demonstrating the considerable rise in the earth's temperatures. Messrs. Carvin and Dick assert that this decision is catastrophic for public debate because their client was simply "questioning" Dr. Mann's work and "voicing one's opinion."

To the contrary, NRO's efforts to characterize its false accusations of fraud as some sort of contribution to public debate ignores the fundamental difference between genuine opinion and knowing or reckless falsehoods. Protected opinion has its limits; fake news doesn't qualify. This has been the law for decades, and in a delightfully ironic twist the court repeatedly cited a 1976 defamation case successfully pursued on this very ground by none other than William F. Buckley—the founder of National Review. The Buckley decision drew the sharp distinction between protected opinion and knowing falsehoods. The *Mann v. NRO* decision does nothing different; the First

Amendment remains alive and well and undisturbed.

Messrs. Carvin and Dick also tell us how their position is supported by certain "friend-of-the-court briefs," including one filed by an organization called the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. It should be pointed out to your readers that a member of this committee is News Corp, which owns The Wall Street Journal.

JOHN B. WILLIAMS
 Washington
 Mr. Williams represents Michael Mann in this lawsuit.

I favor freedom of the press, but I disagree vehemently with Messrs. Carvin and Dick. Certainly any publication should be able to say that someone's scientific data is suspect or that, in the opinion of the writer, the data was manipulated incorrectly. To say, however, that Mr. Mann fraudulently presented material and to compare him to Jerry Sandusky, who exploited in the most heinous way, young men, cannot possibly be considered in the same category as challenging data or its interpretation.

Along with that, in my judgment, Mr. Mann's charges of "fraudulent denial of climate change" and "corporate payoffs for knowingly lying about the threat climate change posed to humanity" should also be attacked as slander (or libel).

STEWART B. DUNKER
 Cincinnati

Should Politics From the Pulpit Be Banned?

It would be a tremendous mistake to allow President Trump and his religious supporters to repeal the 1954 Federal Religion Amendment that authorizes tax-exempt status for religious organizations only so long as they refrain from direct, targeted political campaign participation ("Trump Draft Order Would Expand Religious Rights, Could Allow Denial of Services to Gays," U.S. News, Feb. 5).

The moment any priest, minister, rabbi or imam expresses support for or endorses a particular political candidate, that church, synagogue or mosque becomes a political entity and should be subject to the same scrutiny and the same tax responsibility as any other political entity.

President James Garfield summed it up quite nicely when he said that: "The divorce between Church and State ought to be absolute. It ought to be so

absolute that no Church property anywhere, in any state or in the nation, should be exempt from equal taxation; for if you exempt the property of any church organization, to that extent you impose a tax upon the whole community" (James A. Garfield, Congressional Record, 1874).

I absolutely believe that individuals or organizations should be free to endorse any candidate for any office they wish, but only so long as they contribute the same resources every other taxpayer individual and organization contribute to the support of the government they would have their candidate lead. No taxation without representation is a profound value; correspondingly, taxation is the price that should be paid for the right to select our representatives.

GARY HARTZELL
 Manhattan Beach, Calif.

Bad Luck Doesn't Explain Mexico's Problems

Regarding Ruchir Sharma's "Mexico's Bad Luck Gets Even Worse" (op-ed, Feb. 2): It isn't bad luck that has caused Mexico's problems, as anyone who has lived, worked or even visited Mexico can tell Mr. Sharma. The two major problems that have bedeviled Mexico for many decades are cronyism and corruption. Cronyism has resulted in the mismanagement of Mexico's most important strategic asset, Pemex. And corruption has resulted in the growth of the drug cartels that pay off local law enforcement and are allowed to run rampant, killing, kidnapping and extorting at will. When

Mr. Sharma expresses surprise that NAFTA hasn't made Mexico richer, he need look no further than these two factors.

By all the usual measures, Mexico should be a comfortably middle-class country. It has the natural and human resources that would be the envy of other countries and a huge market on its doorstep. But one in two Mexicans lives in poverty. This isn't simply the result of bad luck.

JULIA WELLER
 Bethesda, Md.

Why Can't We Have Our Say and All Just Get Along?

In her Jan. 27 op-ed on the parlous state of free speech in academia (this "Censorship Is Free Speech? It Must Be Free Speech of 1984"), Jillian Melchior quotes guidance by two University of Wisconsin campuses which discourages the use of "illegal immigrant" or "illegal alien," because either term "fixates on legal status instead of people as individuals." So are we to understand that this proudly progressive university has finally embraced a principle long championed by conservatives—that rights inhere in the individual, not in groups or classes?

THOMAS COFFEY
 Wytheville, Va.

I graduated from Northern Illinois University in 1963. Things were said that didn't make me happy, but I was taught that we had freedom of speech and that I would get over it. In the real world after college, life isn't going to make you feel warm and fuzzy every day, so toughen up.

CHRISTY L. COUDRE
 Queen Valley, Ariz.

To those who think Donald Trump is thin-skinned: Don't you wish that his college had taught its students not to overreact to hurtful speech?

SUE LABREY
 Houston

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