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International Trade Update

Trans Pacific Partnership

After being sworn into office, one of President Donald Trump's first acts was formally withdrawing from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) on Jan. 23. This 12-country agreement had received criticism and praise from both sides of the aisle and became a target of criticism during Trump's campaign.

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

The future of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), a measure that seeks to establish a free trade zone between the U.S. and the European Union (EU), is also uncertain at this time. The EU Ambassador to the U.S., David O'Sullivan, [said recently](#) that TTIP is currently in limbo while primary trade contacts within Trump's administration remain uncertain. A deal to harmonize mutually recognized "good manufacturing practices" between the U.S. and EU will [reportedly](#) move forward, nevertheless.

North American Free Trade Agreement

The new administration has also set its sights on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Trump has promised to renegotiate or reopen NAFTA negotiations with Canada and Mexico. In the case of a possible withdrawal from NAFTA altogether, the U.S. [can technically withdraw](#) from the agreement after a 90-day notice period, but Congress will presumably have its own say on the matter and several of the posts central to further discussion have yet to be filled.

Cabinet Nominations Update

Department of Commerce

Wilbur Ross was confirmed as Commerce Secretary by a vote of 72-27 on Feb. 27. Secretary Ross will likely work in tandem with Peter Navarro, the University of California-Irvine economics professor in charge of Trump's newly created White House National Trade Council. Secretary Ross is also slated to take the lead on international trade issues traditionally reserved for the United States Trade Representative (USTR). For the post of USTR, Trump has nominated Robert Lighthizer, a trade lawyer and partner at the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher and Flom. Lighthizer previously served as deputy USTR under former President Ronald Reagan.

Department of Labor

Trump's initial pick for Labor Secretary (Andrew Puzder, CEO of CKE Restaurants) withdrew from consideration on Feb. 15, when it became clear he didn't have the votes in the Senate for confirmation. Trump instead appointed Alex Acosta, dean of students at Florida International University's College of Law. Acosta also served on the National Labor Relations Board and as assistant attorney general for the U.S. Department of Justice civil rights division under President George W Bush. Acosta's confirmation hearing [will be scheduled](#) in the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee after the Senate receives his required paperwork.

Small Business Administration

On Feb. 14, former World Wrestling Entertainment executive Linda McMahon was confirmed in the Senate by a vote of 81-19 to lead the Small Business Administration. She previously ran (unsuccessfully) for the Senate in Connecticut against Senators Richard Blumenthal and Chris Murphy. Both senators [supported](#) her nomination to lead the SBA.

Housing and Urban Development

Retired neurosurgeon and former Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson was confirmed to serve as Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary by a vote of 58 to 41 in the Senate. Carson also [received unanimous approval](#) from the Senate Banking Committee in January.

Department of Veterans Affairs

David Shulkin was unanimously confirmed in the Senate to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) on Feb. 13. Former Veterans Affairs undersecretary for health under the Obama administration, Shulkin has promised to deliver major reform in the VA following mismanagement scandals in recent

years. Greater accountability, improved access and expanded care options top Shulkin's priorities for the Department, but he does not plan to pursue privatization of services.

NCSL Announcements and Resources

DOL Grant for Occupational Licensing and Credentialing

In January, the Department of Labor [announced](#) a \$7.5 million award to NCSL for a project designed to improve geographic mobility for workers in licensed occupations. NCSL, in partnership with the National Governor's Association's Center for Best Practices and the Council of State Governments, will direct a coalition of several states with an eye toward increasing applicability of selected occupational licenses across state lines and reducing the breadth and burden of licensing criteria so as to ease entry for licensees into the labor market. As part of the project, NCSL will provide related research and technical assistance resources to states.

Work Matters Disability Report: *Work Matters: A Framework for States on Workforce Development for People with Disabilities*

NCSL released the Work Matters report in partnership with the Council of State Governments in December. It is a culmination of intensive research on state level policies focusing on career readiness and employability, hiring, retention, and reentry, entrepreneurship, tax incentives and procurement; and transportation, technology, and other employment supports for people with disabilities. The report is designed to assist states in improving the ways the public sector serves people with disabilities, and can be found [here](#).

Military & Veterans Affairs Report: *Preparing for Duty: State Policy Options to Sustain Military Installations*

This report highlights the importance of the military on state economies and provides policy options to support military-community cooperation and address land use challenges that may arise as the buffer narrows between military and civilian areas. The strategies presented can help states secure the future of their military bases and ensure that communities continue to benefit from the jobs and business opportunities the military provides. The report can be found [here](#).

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