

# Straight Talk on Trade

**What Democratic skeptics  
need to know about tariffs  
and factory work**

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# Give me one good reason to support “inflationary” tariffs!

Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden both put up tariffs to counter unfair trade practices by foreign companies and governments because American workers deserve a level playing field. But **tariffs have been around long before either of these leaders picked them up to defend American jobs, boost important American industries, and fight back against foreign labor and environmental abuses.**

Recent inflation gets pinned on tariffs, but, in reality, they’re a part of what modern trade between nations looks like. Very often (and very recently) they have prevented steep declines in American production capacity and employment.

Repealing or opposing tariffs based on politics, a chaotic rollout, or social media hot takes would be a mistake. American workers deserve our support, and, fundamentally, that’s what trade enforcement does: **Tariffs help safeguard American jobs when the foreign competition isn’t playing by the rules.**

**Why should  
I support tariffs  
on steel and  
other imports?  
I don't work in  
any of these  
industries!**

**You may not work in a steel mill or an aluminum smelter, but you depend on them.** Take a look around you: Steel, aluminum, and other critical materials are *everywhere*. They're in your pick-up truck, and the highways and bridges you drive it on. They make up the buildings in which we live, work, and sleep. We'd be hosed without the ability to make these things in America!

Politicians haven't always seen it that way, but now many do. Tariffs on these metals were raised in 2018 and have been kept up through three presidential terms. They were needed *then* because the world was flooded with too much steel and aluminum production, and they're needed *now* because many state-backed foreign manufacturers won't let up. **Tariffs are America's most precise tool to defend the workers who make these materials.**

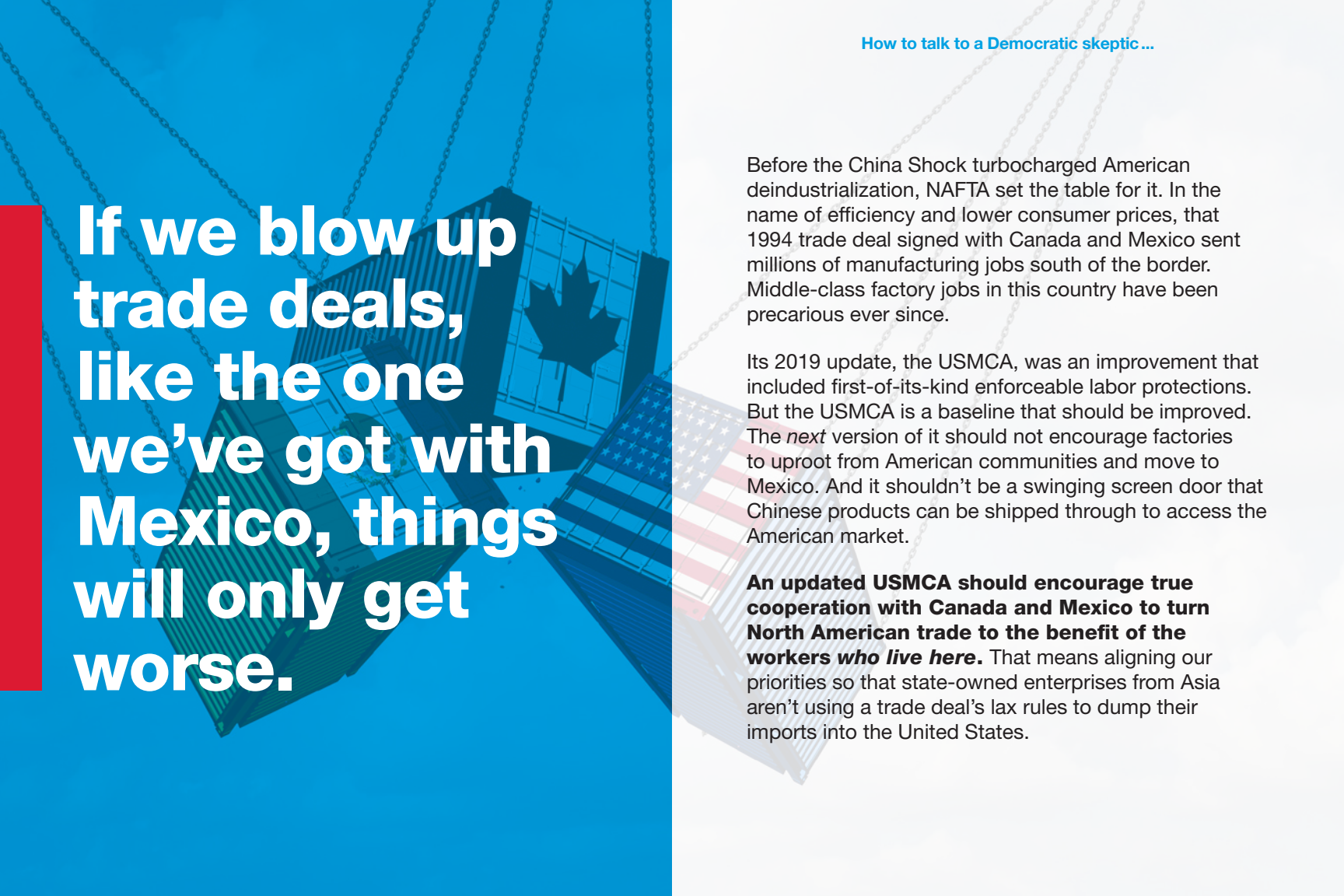
# What's the point of our "trade war" with China anyway?

Everyone likes cheap prices on Amazon and at Walmart. We *don't* like the extra stuff that decades of Chinese imports also brought: **Deindustrialization. Hollowed-out communities. Underemployment. Low wages.**

Despite plenty of warnings, that's what Washington bought in 2000 when it lowered our trade barriers and allowed those imports to flood the country. If we don't break our Chinese import addiction by encouraging domestic manufacturing and *holding the Chinese government accountable for massive labor and environmental abuses*, America won't reindustrialize.

"Section 301" tariffs were put in place because of mountains of evidence that show **China lied, cheated, and stole to boost its manufacturing industries at the expense of our own.** And those tariffs have slowed American consumption of Chinese goods. Get rid of them, and consumer prices may come down a little bit—and American factories will close. Or, we could couple them with demand-side industrial policy and watch domestic manufacturing *really* take off.

Remember: China has been fighting a trade war with us for 25 years. **It's about time we stood up for our workers and fought back.**



If we blow up  
trade deals,  
like the one  
we've got with  
Mexico, things  
will only get  
worse.

Before the China Shock turbocharged American deindustrialization, NAFTA set the table for it. In the name of efficiency and lower consumer prices, that 1994 trade deal signed with Canada and Mexico sent millions of manufacturing jobs south of the border. Middle-class factory jobs in this country have been precarious ever since.

Its 2019 update, the USMCA, was an improvement that included first-of-its-kind enforceable labor protections. But the USMCA is a baseline that should be improved. The *next* version of it should not encourage factories to uproot from American communities and move to Mexico. And it shouldn't be a swinging screen door that Chinese products can be shipped through to access the American market.

**An updated USMCA should encourage true cooperation with Canada and Mexico to turn North American trade to the benefit of the workers who live here.** That means aligning our priorities so that state-owned enterprises from Asia aren't using a trade deal's lax rules to dump their imports into the United States.



Why shouldn't  
I be able to buy  
a \$14,000 car  
from China?  
Times are  
tough.

The American auto industry is *the* pillar of American manufacturing, supporting millions of jobs not only in assembly plants but also in literally thousands of mills and factories up and down its supply chain.

**The workers that make up the auto industry are watching as state-backed Chinese automakers circle our borders,** waiting for the opportunity to flood the United States with impossibly cheap cars whose production has been tied to forced labor.

We can't let them in, because it won't be a fair fight. Many of these heavily subsidized Chinese car companies control every step of their supply chain. Once here, they'll bring down America's automakers and replace our auto parts makers with Chinese ones. The cars will be marginally cheaper, and then we'll get what we *really* paid for: **A second China Shock—worse than the first one that destroyed millions of middle-class jobs and hollowed out thousands of industrial communities across the United States.**

Those cheap cars will come with a price: a big pay cut for American factory workers. Chinese-level wages are 18 cents on the dollar.



# Why should I care about manufacturing at all?

## How to talk to a Democratic skeptic...

It's true that politicians like Donald Trump talk about manufacturing and factories so much that it can seem like empty rhetoric. Some of his messaging is needlessly nostalgic. But Obama talked up factories, too. Biden did as well. So will the next president. That's because this messaging is built on a fundamental truth: **Manufacturing remains a foundation on which you can build economic wealth for the middle class.** It means good wages, savings for retirement, and healthcare for its workers. It means strong communities centered around industry.

These are things worth fighting for, because we know what an economy looks like without them. We've seen a third of American manufacturing jobs leave for foreign countries since 2000, and by letting them walk we've introduced serious economic vulnerabilities to the United States. **Preserving the manufacturing we have and bringing even more of it back won't cure all of America's economic anxiety. But it will seriously help alleviate it.**

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Credit Donald Trump: He was the first American president this century to oppose more free trade agreements. And he went beyond that in his first term by putting tariffs on Chinese imports and defending American steel and aluminum. Trump then expanded those policies significantly in his second term.

**When importers—or foreign governments—flood America's market with unfairly traded products, we can and *should* levy tariffs to defend American manufacturers and our national security.**

The Supreme Court ruled that some of Trump's tariffs were too broad and rejected them, but, **if the core focus remains on China, defending critical industries and combatting unfair trade practices, we need tariffs.** Keep in mind: This is something congressional Democrats correctly stood for back in 1993 and 2000 during the NAFTA and China debates, long before Trump came around. We shouldn't reflexively oppose a useful trade tool for political reasons.



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Free market critics of tariffs on steel and aluminum often argue they don't make sense because there are more consumers of these products than there are *producers*. But that argument misses something obvious: **Once you lose the ability to make these things, you've handed it over to someone else.** And once lost, it will be nearly impossible to get back.

In this case, it'll be China's state-directed steel and aluminum sectors dictating who gets these essential industrial inputs. And when the U.S. gets crossways with the Chinese Communist Party? **We can't just build our planes, tanks, and body armor with cheeseburgers and Amazon orders.**

There's a reason countries around the world want to make their *own* steel and aluminum: Their own national security. It's incredibly hard to start up a steel mill or an aluminum smelter, so we shouldn't be eager to give ours away—only to be left reliant on the Chinese steel and aluminum makers that have been trying for years to put American manufacturers out of business.



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**Here's a fact: No company can compete with an entire government.**

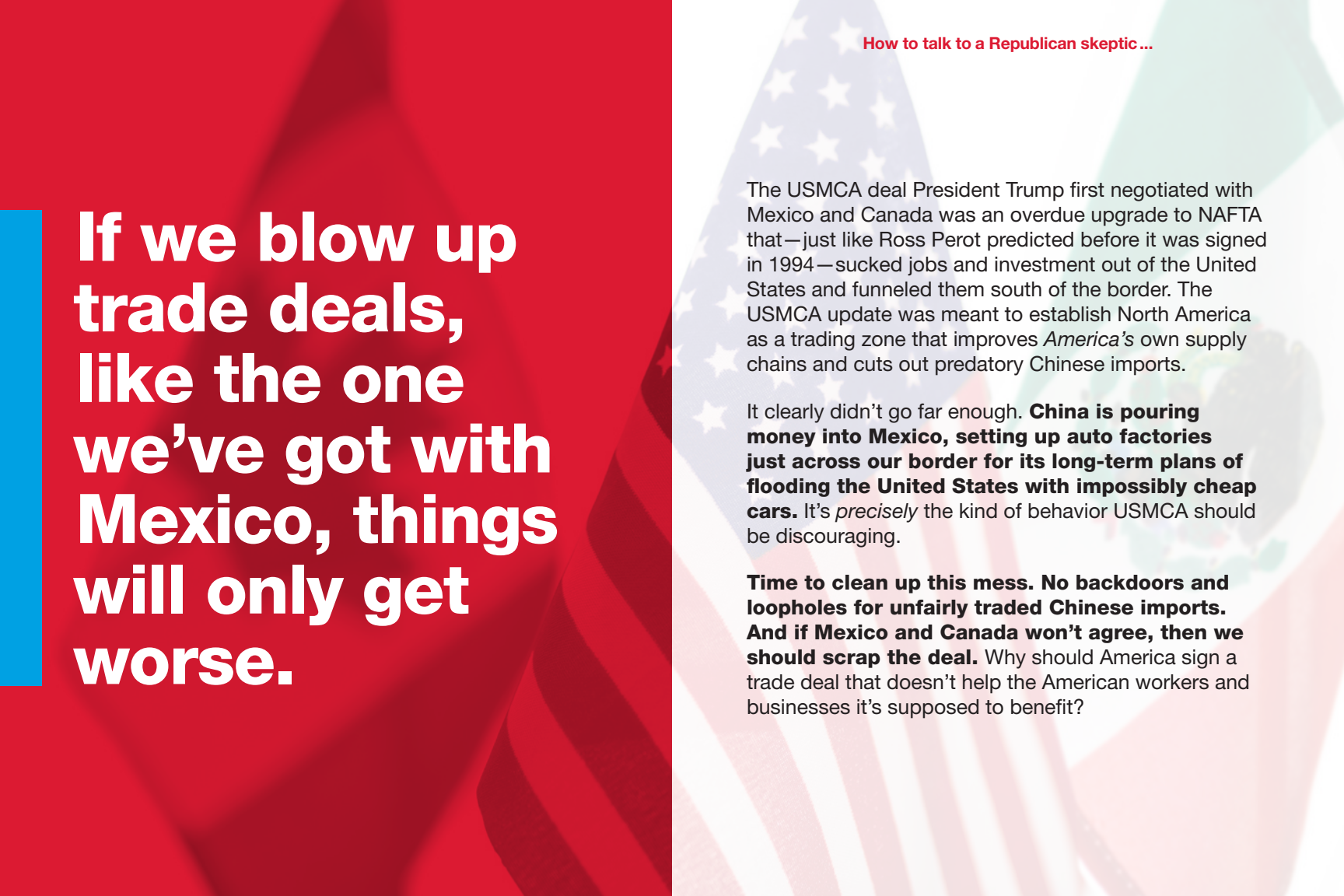
But that's what we're doing when we trade with China. For decades, the Chinese Communist Party has funneled government subsidies to its industrial champions. It paired that with relentless, state-backed industrial espionage that steals reams of intellectual property from American businesses, which Chinese companies commercialize and sell back to us at cut-rate prices.

That's not the free market at work, and it's not an accident; *China wants it this way*. **Destabilizing industries around the world and cementing dependencies on Chinese imports is the plan.**

Allowing it to go on for so long has poked huge holes in our industrial base, and it has materially weakened America's national security.

Rebuilding our industrial base can only happen if the flood of Chinese imports is addressed. Thanks in large part to the "Section 301" tariffs that President Trump raised during his first term, we're turning the firehose off. Taking these tariffs away will erase any gains Trump has made to restore American manufacturing—and reward America's chief rival for stealing from us.





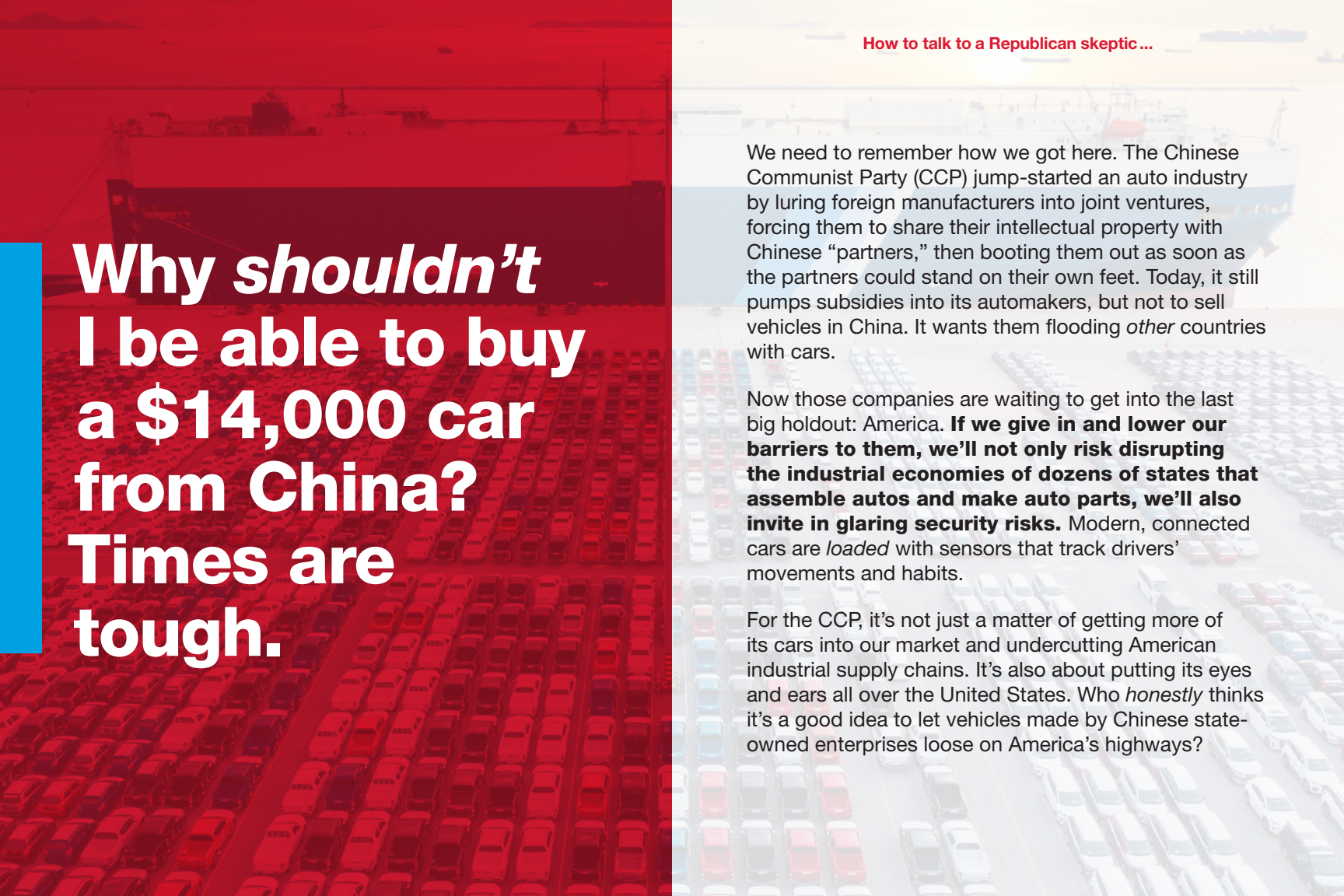
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#### How to talk to a Republican skeptic...

The USMCA deal President Trump first negotiated with Mexico and Canada was an overdue upgrade to NAFTA that—just like Ross Perot predicted before it was signed in 1994—sucked jobs and investment out of the United States and funneled them south of the border. The USMCA update was meant to establish North America as a trading zone that improves *America's* own supply chains and cuts out predatory Chinese imports.

It clearly didn't go far enough. **China is pouring money into Mexico, setting up auto factories just across our border for its long-term plans of flooding the United States with impossibly cheap cars.** It's *precisely* the kind of behavior USMCA should be discouraging.

**Time to clean up this mess. No backdoors and loopholes for unfairly traded Chinese imports. And if Mexico and Canada won't agree, then we should scrap the deal.** Why should America sign a trade deal that doesn't help the American workers and businesses it's supposed to benefit?



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#### How to talk to a Republican skeptic ...

We need to remember how we got here. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) jump-started an auto industry by luring foreign manufacturers into joint ventures, forcing them to share their intellectual property with Chinese “partners,” then booting them out as soon as the partners could stand on their own feet. Today, it still pumps subsidies into its automakers, but not to sell vehicles in China. It wants them flooding *other* countries with cars.

Now those companies are waiting to get into the last big holdout: America. **If we give in and lower our barriers to them, we'll not only risk disrupting the industrial economies of dozens of states that assemble autos and make auto parts, we'll also invite in glaring security risks.** Modern, connected cars are *loaded* with sensors that track drivers' movements and habits.

For the CCP, it's not just a matter of getting more of its cars into our market and undercutting American industrial supply chains. It's also about putting its eyes and ears all over the United States. Who *honestly* thinks it's a good idea to let vehicles made by Chinese state-owned enterprises loose on America's highways?



# Why should I care about manufacturing at all?

How to talk to a Republican skeptic...

**Fundamentally, support for manufacturing is about national security.** Sure, America needs a healthy industrial base because it's good for the economy, but it's truly important because it guarantees our safety and *our independence*. You can't field an army using imports. You can't keep a navy afloat by building your battleships and aircraft carriers overseas. You need to be able to produce these things inside your own borders.

And we can't forget, that's not all that security means. **For decades, Americans across the country went to work in factories in their hometowns, and, because of those jobs, they could get married, buy a house and raise kids in the same communities they grew up in. *That's* security too.** When our political class set deindustrialization in motion, we lost that version of America. If we want it back, we need to build American manufacturing back up again.

# Now matter how you look at it, manufacturing in the United States is crucial to support and protect our essential infrastructure and defense.

Electrical grid  
systems for  
renewable  
energy require  
up to **67 million  
metric tons of steel**  
and up to **31 million  
tons of aluminum**.



The U.S.  
Interstate  
Highway  
System is comprised of  
approximately **6 million  
metric tons of steel**  
and **48 million metric  
tons of cement**.



The U.S.  
military  
and defense  
industries  
consume **450,000  
tons of aluminum**  
annually.



## Every \$1 spent in manufacturing adds \$2.69 to the economy.

**12.6 million**

manufacturing jobs in the  
United States in May 2026



**\$830 billion**

in paychecks for 10.95 million workers was  
generated by the U.S. auto industry in 2024.

## Unfettered global trade has weakened America's economic and national security.



**China's auto exports surged by 300%**  
between 2001 and 2024, when it overtook Japan  
as the world's largest car exporter.

The U.S. trade deficit with China  
**eliminated 3.4 million U.S. jobs**  
between 2001 and 2017.



Chinese steel exports surged in 2025,  
**up 153%**  
from its 2020 export level.

China controls  
**90% of rare earth mineral  
processing.**

## American manufacturing is the backbone of our country.

# KEEP IT MADE IN AMERICA