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Most Americans Have Limited Understanding of U.S. Trade Agreements but Want to Know More

New nationwide listening tour suggests disconnect between policymakers and the public. Group issues recommendations to help guide future trade policy.

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, [Listening for America](#), a non-partisan, non-profit organization released a new report addressing Americans’ views about the impact of international trade on their everyday lives. Based on the findings the organization made recommendations to help guide policymakers’ future efforts in creating policy that better connects citizens, cities and businesses. The findings were released at a virtual event today hosted by the Washington International Trade Association.

The findings are an outgrowth of Listening for America’s efforts between 2018 and 2020 of conducting informal listening sessions and focus groups with approximately 1,000 individuals from various social, political and professional backgrounds. Participants were asked about the effect trade has on their lives, their perceived barriers to improvement and ideas about how we should talk about trade. The tour took place in over 37 cities in California, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

While trade and globalization were not top-of-mind for most participants, they had a generally positive view of globalization in terms of its effect on their own lives as well as the opportunity it offers for Americans.

“There’s a disconnect between D.C. policymakers and everyone else in the country when it comes to international trade and globalization,” said Catherine A. Novelli, President of Listening for America. “In our study, we sought to better understand how everyday Americans are impacted by globalization and trade and use those findings to help government officials pursue future trade policy that will tangibly benefit all Americans.”

The listening tour’s top line findings included:

- Trade is not top-of-mind for most individuals, but its importance comes out in discussion;
- Views on globalization were generally positive, while views on trade agreements were more negative;
- Despite divergent views on the current reality of trade, people are hopeful for what trade might become;
- Debunking misconceptions about trade transformed opinions;

- Concern about trade centers upon loss of manufacturing jobs, environmental destruction, worker exploitation and worldwide disparities and inequities often associated with unfair trade;
- Small businesses are often unaware they can directly benefit from the rules surrounding international trade, although at the same time they are actively engaged in trade in products and services; and
- Cities whose economies had been crushed by foreign competition had rebounded by leaning into their comparative advantages and leveraging globalization to their benefit.

Novelli added, “after listening to Americans across the country discuss their thoughts on trade, it’s clear there is work to be done to improve trade policy and ensure that it benefits the most people.” She continued, “we must listen to a more diverse community when developing future trade policies and ensure that trade policies are closely linked to activities that cities are pursuing. We should also be much more proactive about helping small businesses as they hone their competitive advantages and engage globally. Additionally, we should reach outside the beltway to give people accurate information about trade so that they can contribute fully to the policy-making discussion.”

The recommendations that resulted from the study to improve how trade is understood, leveraged, and implemented to better serve all Americans include:

- Conduct listening tours by senior officials to help close the gap between DC policymakers and everyday Americans;
- Create a Trade Corps of volunteer experts to provide hands-on local support to help small- and medium-sized businesses and smaller cities determine how to plug into globalization;
- Provide support for technical/community colleges to host courses specifically on how to import and export;
- Encourage partnerships and consultations between international development experts and local/regional economic development agencies so trade policy can be built from the bottom up; and
- Determine how trade can be proactive in addressing environmental and social challenges.

Please read the full report [here](#).

Listening for America

Listening for America is a non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to connecting people to the design of international trade policy. Our goal is to build a new, strategic set of U.S. policies that enjoy broad public support, will benefit Americans, and secure our future. We are comprised of people who have spent their careers in international trade and business. For more information please visit listeningforamerica.org

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