



# Opinions

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## Arizona can shape the new NAFTA

**A**rizona needs to face it: NAFTA is a rotary-dial trade deal in a smart-phone world.

So, don't cling to it.

Change is inevitable, and change can be beneficial.

So, let's embrace it.

As U.S. trade representative, Robert Lighthizer wrote to Congress, "our economy and our businesses have changed considerably" in the more than two decades since the agreement went into effect.

"NAFTA has not," he wrote.

Lighthizer's recent missive announcing that the Trump administration was initiating negotiations with Canada and Mexico should be seen as an invitation to get involved.

He talked about "modernizing" the North American Free Trade Agreement, not burying it.

We don't have to waste energy pushing back anymore.

Now, we need to nudge things in the right direction.

This was the spirit of a letter sent to Lighthizer from more than a dozen senators whose states benefit from trade. The first name on the list? Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake.

First promising to take a "keen interest" in NAFTA renegotiations, these sen-



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It's time to stop defending the old NAFTA and start fleshing out its new look. As a border state, Arizona is uniquely poised to guide reforms to the international trade pact.

ators pointed out the "significant" economic benefit from trade and cautioned against imposing "unnecessary restrictions on trade."

Because so much of NAFTA trade involves cross-border supply chains, it is essential that changes emphasize fast, efficient and safe ports.

Arizona's congressional delegation has long pushed for additional staffing at our ports of entry with Mexico. This is a good time to re-emphasize that and focus on the value of funding the CANAMEX corridor from Mexico through Arizona and into Canada.

This fits Trump's promise to fund infrastructure, which is one campaign promise worth remembering.

Happily, some other rhetoric may be forgotten.

Lighthizer's letter to Congress made no mention of NAFTA being the "single worst trade deal" ever negotiated by the United States, as Trump previously said.

Nor did it reiterate the president's previous claim that the three-nation trading deal resulted in "terrible losses" of U.S. jobs.

Instead, Trump's trade representative talked about updating NAFTA to "address the challenges" of "an increasingly global economy."

Lighthizer talked about modernizing NAFTA in the areas of digital trade and intellectual property rights.

Let's face it: Arizona and the other states that depend on trade have won the

argument.

NAFTA's here to stay. That's a solid foundation on which to build.

Arizona's experience as a border state has been a success story — despite some awkward moments when short-sighted politicians got carried away with their own rhetoric.

In a report for an Arizona Town Hall event that begins today in Hermosillo, Sonora, that venerable Arizona organization pointed out that:

1. Arizona's exports to Mexico last year exceeded \$9 billion.
2. Bilateral trade topped \$16 billion.
3. Mexican tourists spend about \$2.5 billion annually in Arizona.
4. Mexico's economy, now 15th largest in the world, is projected to weigh in at sixth largest by 2050.

The Town Hall's meeting in Mexico is emblematic of Arizona's efforts to foster a trade relationship that has great growth potential.

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton and Tucson Mayor Jonathan Rothschild, Gov. Doug Ducey and much of Arizona's delegation — Republican and Democratic — understand the stakes.

It's time to stop defending the old NAFTA and start shaping its new look.

We can make this change to serve Arizona's advantage.