

Vox

The tangled politics of Trump's speech blasting "globalization"

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On Tuesday, Donald Trump gave a speech in which he blasted trade deals pushed by "elites," and rejected decades worth of conservative dogma on trade issues.

"Our politicians have aggressively pursued a policy of globalization," Trump said, according to the prepared text of his speech. "Globalization has made the financial elite who donate to politicians very wealthy. But it has left millions of our workers with nothing but poverty and heartache."

As Trump continued, he vowed to withdraw the US from the pending Trans-Pacific Partnership and to renegotiate NAFTA (and to withdraw from that agreement if negotiations fail to produce a deal Trump deems good enough).

It was a remarkable series of statements for the presumptive presidential nominee of the Republican Party, and indicative of just how much the politics of trade have changed in recent years.

And condemnations from the right rolled in on Twitter. "Trump mimics Clinton's protectionist and pro-tariff trade policies," conservative talk radio host Mark Levin wrote. "Dear GOP delegates: You cannot nominate someone who endorses these positions," Tom Giovanetti, the president of a free market think tank, tweeted, adding, "Trump would turn the Republican Party into the party of economic know-nothings."

Now, leading Republican politicians haven't always been paragons of free trade. A 1988 Cato Institute paper called Ronald Reagan "the most protectionist president since Herbert Hoover." President George W. Bush instituted steel tariffs in 2002, to howls of protest from the right. Mitt Romney said he wanted to label China a currency manipulator during his 2012 campaign. Ted Cruz came out in opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership during the presidential campaign.

But most of these politicians have usually at least paid lip service to the *rhetoric* that free trade and free markets are panaceas for all that ails the American economy.

Trump did none of that. It's true that he didn't go as far as explicitly attacking "free trade," focusing instead on criticizing "cheating" from other countries. Still, his speech repeatedly argued that "globalization" was an elite-driven set of policies that helped enrich the wealthiest and hurt American workers — exactly the sort of argument that most conservative thinkers have long derided as pandering protectionism.

One might think that the issue of trade would be a straightforward political winner for Trump, but that's not entirely clear. Yes, it may help him brand himself as an anti-elite outsider. But as Jonathan Ladd wrote in a recent [Mischiefs of Faction post](#), Trump has assured with this speech that he'll receive another round of condemnations from conservatives, which will accordingly make it easier for the media to argue that politicians on "both sides" are rejecting Trump's views.

Still, pro-trade Republican elites are in quite a bind themselves. Because, since Clinton has moved left on the issue too, they really have nowhere to go at this point. The reaction of the US Chamber of Commerce (a group that typically backs Republicans over Democrats) to Trump's speech reveals this dilemma:



Under Trump's trade plans, we would see higher prices, fewer jobs, and a weaker economy uschamber.com/above-the-fold...

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What Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Donald Trump get wrong about [#trade uschamber.com/above-the-fold...](#)

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US Chamber of

Commerce Twitter Account

Don't shed too many tears for the Chamber — once the election has concluded, there will be ample time for the group to make its well-funded case to the new president, whoever he or she

may be. But it's no accident that Trump, Sanders, and Clinton have all criticized new trade deals. That's, they think, where the voters are. And that will be a big problem for new trade deals going forward.