



Federal agency rules in favor of Whirlpool's Clyde plant

Tom Jackson

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A federal agency ruled Thursday that Whirlpool is being hurt by increased imports of cheap foreign washing machines.

The 4-0 ruling by the U.S. International Trade Commission will likely aid workers at Whirlpool's Clyde plant, which makes washing machines, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, said Thursday.

"We can't let LG and Samsung get away with dumping their washers into the U.S. and hurting Ohio workers," Brown said. "The President and ITC must make a strong recommendation that provides real relief for workers in Clyde and around the U.S. who've been hurt by this surge of cheap washers."

Brown said he had testified at the International Trade Commission on behalf of the Clyde plant.

In a news release, the trade commission explained that the next step is to determine a remedy to help Whirlpool. A public hearing will take place to discuss possible solutions on Oct. 19. A report on a recommended remedy and other findings will be sent to President Donald Trump by Dec. 4, the commission said.

A fact sheet from the commission says that Trump will make the final decision on remedies.

Possible solutions include a hike in import duties, imposing a quota for imports, a tariff that would kick in once the quota is reached, trade assistance or a combination of those.

A trade expert for the Cato Institute, a free market think tank in Washington, D.C., blasted the ruling and said it will hurt people buying washing machines.

"This is very bad news for consumers," said Daniel Ikenson, director of Cato's Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies, in an email to the Register.

"Of course Senator Brown aligns his interests with Ohio's producers over the state's consumers and has long been a strong proponent of using the force of government to limit competition and the innovation it inspires. Without the challenge of competition, Whirlpool will have less incentive to improve quality, offer better prices, or provide the qualities and conveniences that consumers want in their washing machines," Ikenson said.

Ikenson said Brown's statement misrepresented the case by referring to it as "dumping."

"The fact is that this case – a Safeguard Case authorized under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974 – is not about dumping or subsidization or any so-called unfair trade practices," he said.

"Under this law, the industry seeking relief is expected to be contrite, begging forgiveness for having to ask for temporary duties on fairly traded imports and offering up a detailed plan on how it will right the ship and not have to seek relief again in the future. In this case, what is being 'remedied' with taxes on consumers is not unfair trade, but the domestic industry's lack of preparedness to compete in the face of import competition," he wrote.

According to the Sandusky County Economic Development Corporation, Whirlpool's Clyde plant is by far the county's largest employer, with 3,400 employees.

Whirlpool's corporate website says the company also has manufacturing facilities in four other Ohio locations — Ottawa, Findlay, Marion and Greenville.