



President Trump's call to 'buy American' raises specter of trade wars

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Newly sworn-in President Donald Trump called on all Americans to come together Friday, but he did not extend that invitation to the rest of the world.

Instead, Trump issued a loud decree "to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital" that he was reshaping the U.S. vision.

The priority was clear: "America first." The cheers were loud.

The message was well received among the thousands of supporters who'd come to the National Mall to witness Trump's inauguration. Many of them feel globalization has made them worse off.

It was not as well received around the world, where many had hoped that Trump would soften his criticism of trade instead of doubling down on the isolationist campaign themes that have fueled fears of trade wars and closed borders.

"Key words like 'buy American' are troubling," said Jorge Guajardo, Mexico's former ambassador to China. "That goes against the whole essence of NAFTA. Because the whole essence of the North American Free Trade Agreement is you do not distinguish between countries as you buy. There are rules."

Some new presidents soften their language when they take the podium for the first time on Inauguration Day. Trump did not.

He used harsh language to describe how he would revamp trade, taxes and foreign affairs to benefit American families. He blamed other countries for "stealing our companies and destroying our jobs."

"We must protect our borders from the ravages of other countries making our products," Trump said, to great applause. He added: "Protection will lead to great prosperity and strength."

HE has threatened to renegotiate or pull out of NAFTA, which critics say sent a flood of manufacturing jobs out of the country.

Clyde Prestowitz, a former top trade negotiator in the Reagan administration, was encouraged that Trump was continuing to make globalization, domestic infrastructure and recovering the wealth of the middle class priorities. He said it was about time that an administration paid closer attention.

“For a long time, over a lot of administrations, we have neglected our own welfare,” said Prestowitz, president of the Economic Strategy Institute.

But Trump’s critics argued he risks cutting off U.S. business from the rest of the world. Alex Nowrasteh, a policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute’s Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, said American business would have fewer customers to sell products to and that prices would rise.

“There is every sign he’s doubling down on protectionism, anti-capitalism, anti-free markets and our openness to the world, which is responsible for a large part of our prosperity,” Nowrasteh said.

Trump accused earlier administrations of helping to enrich other countries while allowing U.S. infrastructure to fall into disrepair and decay. He promised to be a friendly neighbor, but said it was crucial that the United States served its own citizens first.

“We will seek friendship and goodwill with the nations of the world, but we do so with the understanding that it is the right of all nations to put their own interests first,” he said.