



White House Proposes Big Tariffs on Aluminum, Steel

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President Trump on Thursday announced that next week he'll impose heavy tariffs on imports of aluminum and steel, which are vital materials for the fenestration, glazing and construction industries.

During a "listening session" with executives from U.S. steel and aluminum companies, Trump declared that he wants a 25-percent tariff on steel imports and a 10-percent tariff on aluminum imports to boost U.S. manufacturers.

"We're going to build our steel industry back and we're going to build our aluminum industry back," he said.

While China has faced many accusations of hurting the U.S. aluminum industry by flooding the market with cheaper products, Trump didn't say whether major U.S. trading partners such as Canada and the European Union would be exempt from tariffs.

Trump is using Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act to impose the tariffs. It's a law passed in 1962 that allows tariffs to be imposed by the president when imports are deemed to be damaging to U.S. national security.

The Window and Door Manufacturers Association (WDMA) expressed concern about the plan.

"While we are still assessing the impact on the industry, the tariffs will increase the cost of some materials needed for the production of windows, doors and skylights," said WDMA CEO Michael O'Brien. "More broadly speaking, we are also concerned about possible trade wars erupting in retaliation and impacting the cost of additional materials."

European leaders were urging the president to rethink the tariffs. Some said they'd retaliate with sanctions of their own, according to USA Today.

“We are not going to sit on our hands while our industry is at risk of being hit with unfair measures,” European Commission spokesman Alexander Winterstein told the newspaper. “We are going to respond swiftly, firmly and in a proportionate way.”

Steel entry doors represent the the largest share of both residential and commercial applications, according to the American Architectural Manufacturers Association, followed by fiberglass for residential and aluminum for nonresidential. Metal windows — mostly aluminum — make up roughly 10 percent of the residential market, but they're the bulk of commercial fenestration products in the U.S.

Randy Noel, chair of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and a home builder and developer from LaPlace, La., also called the tariff decision unfortunate.

“These tariffs will translate into higher costs for consumers and U.S. businesses that use these products, including home builders,” he said. “Given that home builders are already grappling with 20 percent tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber and that the price of lumber and other key building materials are near record highs, this announcement by the president could not have come at a worse time. Tariffs hurt consumers and harm housing affordability. We hope the administration will work quickly to resolve these trade disputes regarding lumber and steel so that businesses and consumers have access to an adequate supply at a fair market price.”

Walter Olson, a senior fellow with the libertarian Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., said in a Facebook post on Friday that the tariff decision could be a big step backward for U.S. economic policy under Trump.

“There are few topics on which economists of different stripes are as unanimous in their opinion as in their disapproval of protectionism and tariffs,” he said. “It would take only a few policy mistakes like this to cancel out a lot of the positive economic value contributed by this administration through such measures as regulatory relief, tax reform, and permit streamlining.”