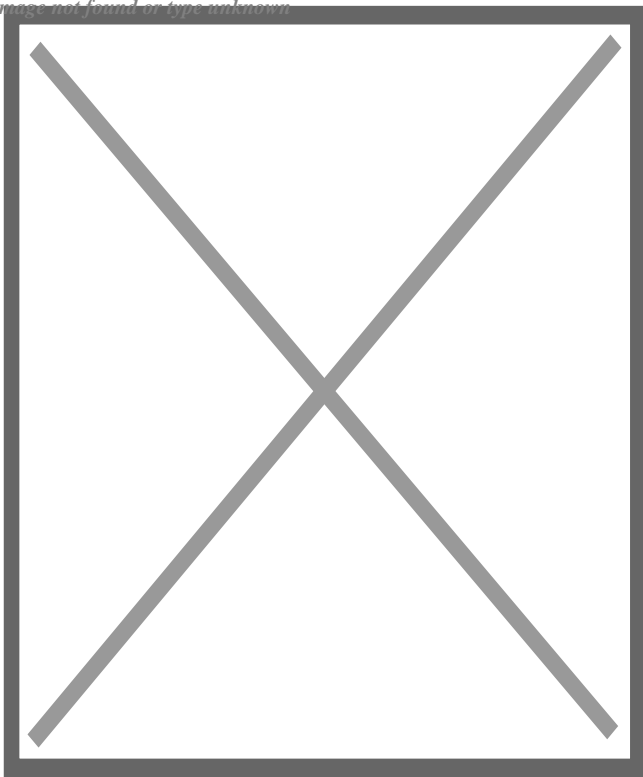


U.S. trade partners criticize Trump for 25-percent steel and aluminium tariffs

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"Wait a minute. Wait a minute. God is telling me to pile on the tariffs like He's never seen before."

Washington, February 12 (RHC)-- Several of the United States' main trading partners have condemned President Donald Trump's decision to hike tariff rates on all steel and aluminium imports starting next month.

Leaders from Mexico, Canada and the European Union on Tuesday described the move as reckless and counterproductive, warning that they would respond with their own measures in kind.

"I deeply regret the U.S. decision to impose tariffs on European steel and aluminum exports," Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, reaffirmed in a social media post. "The EU will act to safeguard its economic interests."

The EU had already called the tariffs "unjustified" and warned they will "trigger firm and proportionate countermeasures." The reactions come a day after Trump signed an executive order announcing the 25-percent tariffs as a "means of reducing imports" and "encouraging investment and expansion of production by domestic steel producers." Trump also framed the issue as a question of national security.

"It's 25 percent without exceptions or exemptions," Trump told reporters. "That's all countries, no matter where it comes from. All countries."

The tariffs will take effect on March 12th and impact millions of tonnes of imports from countries such as Canada, Brazil, Mexico and South Korea that had previously entered the U.S. largely free of import duties.

For much of his political career, Trump has railed against the effects of free trade, portraying agreements with foreign countries as "bad deals" that take advantage of the United States.

"We were being pummelled by both friend and foe alike," Trump said as he signed the orders at the White House. "It's time for our great industries to come back to America."

But his announcement has sparked anxieties about the potential economic fallout that could come with escalating measures and countermeasures between the US and its key trading partners.

Mexican Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard said the new tariffs were "not justified" while Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau called them "unacceptable." Trudeau added that he would work with the Trump administration to highlight the "negative impacts" of the tariffs. Canada provides nearly 80 percent of US aluminium imports.

"We are the U.S.'s closest ally. Our economies are integrated. Canadian steel and aluminum are used in a number of key U.S. industries, whether it is defence, shipbuilding, manufacturing, energy, automotive," Trudeau said on Tuesday. "Together we make North America more competitive."

But the prime minister added that, if forced, Canada would respond to the tariffs with retaliation. "If it comes to that, our response, of course, will be firm and clear. We will stand up for Canadian workers. We will stand up for Canadian industries."

In Brazil, the industry lobby group Aco Brasil also said it was "surprised" by Trump's tariffs, arguing the tax hikes would benefit neither country.

For years, labour groups and environmental activists have argued that free-trade deals allow businesses to exert downward pressure on the wages of domestic workers, relocate jobs overseas, and loosen restrictions on environmental and labour protections.

But experts have said that, after decades of economic integration, tariffs could upend supply chains and impose heightened costs on businesses and consumers.

"Small businesses run on very small margins. And so a 25-percent increase in any product is going to hurt," Sandra Payne, an owner of Denver Concrete Vibrator, which imports steel and other raw materials, told The Associated Press news agency.

"And we can't just raise our prices every time the cost goes up for us, so we are losing a lot of money."

[SOURCE: ASSOCIATED PRESS]

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