

Sierra Club
50 F St N.W.
Washington, DC 20001



February 12, 2025

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The Sierra Club is writing to you today to address your tariff on imported steel aimed at reviving the American manufacturing sector and restoring family-supporting wages to American workers. We share your assessment that revitalizing our domestic steel industry is key to a growing manufacturing sector in the United States. However, **tariffs, without complementary domestic measures to improve the performance of American iron and steel mills, will imperil this goal.**

In addition to creating jobs for steelworkers, the steel industry plays additional valuable roles for our economy and security:

- New ways to make iron and steel are discovered and commercialized at iron and steel mills, enabling new industries to grow domestically.
- High-quality steel products are made cost-effectively at iron and steel mills, allowing great American brands in the automotive, defense, and energy sectors to flourish.
- Tax revenue from steel mills provide resources that state and local governments rely on to deliver services to citizens.

The American steel industry has been in decline for decades due to neglect and unfair trade practices. Overproduction of dirty steel in China is currently endangering the industry by driving down the price of steel, revenue for steelmakers, and wages for steelworkers. However, even before Chinese steel began to compete in the global market in the 2000s, the American integrated iron and steel industry fell behind competitors in Japan and Germany because it:

- Did not innovate as quickly as global competitors, and
- Lost market share in downstream industries like automobiles.

A few facilities managed to stay open by laying off workers and neglecting investments in efficiency, public health, and worker safety. As a result, cancer rates and other health harms are far above the national average in places like Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, where the U.S. Steel Corporation operates its mill. These harms not only kill and disable vast numbers of

Americans, but failure to advance the facility beyond outdated methods also drives additional investments away from the area, preventing local economic growth.

Your imposition of tariffs on all imported steel can aid the industry. **With tariffs in place, direct investments can better address decades of neglect at integrated iron and steel mills.** But without changes at these facilities, the tariffs only delay the decline. This is why tariffs that your administration adopted in 2018 were not enough to prevent the Great Lakes Works in Michigan and Granite City Works in Illinois from idling in the last couple of years. The Biden administration merely continued your trade protections without making additional investments at these facilities.

Tariffs, combined with funding from the U.S. government and private industry, can reinvigorate the steel sector and restore American steelmaking facilities as cornerstones of the global economy and engines of broader American manufacturing in host communities. Investments from the U.S. government could take the form of:

- Research in innovative iron and steel production.
- Adoption of innovative iron-reduction and steel making methods with greater efficiencies.
- Expansion of capabilities to produce additional alloys and other product categories where the United States presently relies on foreign competitors.

If mills accept the support you offer, the U.S. government must hold steelmakers to the America First approach by conditioning support on adopting breakthrough innovations that give the United States an edge over China, India, Japan, and Germany, and, all the while, keep Americans healthy, safe, and enthusiastic about our domestic steel industry for generations to come.

You should consider the following measures to magnify the America First model in the domestic steel industry:

- **Trade policy:** Your 25% tariff on foreign steel imports can accrue even more revenue for the External Revenue Service and more forcefully reverse the trade deficit if paired with an additional tariff based on the level of dirty air and water made by foreign steelmakers that undercuts clean U.S. production and may even make its way to our shores.
- **Support to users of American Steel:** Provide incentives to American buyers, like automakers and road and energy infrastructure companies, to purchase cutting-edge, clean American steel.
- **Play hardball with users of America Steel:** Deploy penalties when these American buyers fail to prioritize the purchase of cutting-edge, clean American steel.
- **Industry-government research coordination:** Establish a National Lab dedicated to metallurgy research. This National Lab will host meetings between steelmakers and steel users receiving public funding to coordinate research around production challenges and share findings.

- **Government procurement:** American steel and finished goods — like automobiles manufactured with American steel made with the aforementioned support — should be prioritized in government purchases, such as infrastructure and defense.
- **Additional public-purpose investment:** Enhance American innovation and guide the America First model by establishing a National Investment Agency/Fund that directly promotes the adoption of cutting-edge steel and ironmaking domestically, and funds the development of turnkey, American-made cutting-edge steel and ironmaking solutions operated with American engineering services globally.

These policies, made even more attractive by the strategic tariffs you instituted, will revive the American steel industry, restore family-supporting wages to American steel workers, and preserve the health, happiness, pride, and dignity of steel communities. We look to you to take decisive action and deliver these benefits to the American steel industry and American families.

Sincerely,

Ben Jealous

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Jealous". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "B" and a long, sweeping tail on the "s".