

Kelly Ruh: Wisconsin knows NAFTA must be replaced

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Wisconsin can't be rid of NAFTA soon enough.

Our country and our state have suffered under that deeply flawed “free” trade deal for over a quarter of a century. At long last, the Trump administration has successfully negotiated a workable replacement with Mexico and Canada, and now it's up to Congress to get the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) passed. There's no time like the present.

The USMCA is a good deal for America, and an even better deal for Wisconsin, as Vice President Mike Pence [emphasized](#) when he visited Eau Claire Thursday. Many of the USMCA's revisions to NAFTA deal with the very issues that have held Wisconsin in particular back from economic prosperity.

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America's Dairyland somehow got locked out from the negotiating table back in the 1990s. While other industries gained access to Canadian and Mexican markets, those neighboring economies were allowed to keep high barriers to Wisconsin's

famous dairy products.

No longer — under the USMCA, Canada will allow limited tariff-free access to its domestic dairy market. This is huge news for Wisconsin dairy farmers. Once Congress ratifies the deal, their most competitive products will no longer hit a wall at the northern border.

Wisconsin's manufacturing sector is [doing](#) much better than it has in more than a decade, but it still has a lot to gain from replacing NAFTA, as well.

First of all, improved Nation-of-Origin requirements will mean more automotive parts production, a major industry here in Wisconsin, will take place in North America.

More broadly, the USMCA will, for the first time, demand that Mexico [grant](#) its workers significant union right and protections. The protections America offers our workers, especially the rights to organize and collectively bargain through a union, should be an example we encourage other countries to emulate, but NAFTA lacked any incentives for other countries to stop denying their workers basic rights.

After the USMCA is passed in Congress, Mexico will have to bring its labor laws more closely in line with ours if it wants to keep its preferential access to our markets, decreasing the incentive for manufacturers to exploit weak, cheap labor south of the border.

These reasons and more make me disappointed to see some Democrats on Capitol Hill playing politics with this agreement. Reports [indicate](#) that Speaker Nancy Pelosi is [holding](#) her House majority at arms length, seeing what concessions she can

extract in exchange for her Party's support.

It's even more disappointing to see Wisconsinites such as Senator Tammy Baldwin and Representative Ron Kind playing the same game.

Luckily, it doesn't seem that the gulf between the parties is unbridgeable here. Rep. Kind and others who have yet to commit to the USMCA are in broad agreement that NAFTA is outdated and must be replaced.

After decades of tough talk, we finally have an administration that has managed to put together a real deal to fix the vast economic problems derived from NAFTA. The ball is in Congress' court, but legislators aren't feeling the pressure from constituents to ratify this lay-up for America.

The people of Wisconsin ought to be among the loudest voices urging them on, because this state can't get rid of NAFTA soon enough.

— *Kelly Ruh, of De Pere, is the 8th Congressional District chair for the Republican Party of Wisconsin.*