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Title:
Removing Tariffs on Products Not Made in America Helps the US

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Publication:
Head Topics

Publication Date:
06/04/2026

URL:
https://us.headtopics.com/news/removing-tariffs-on-products-not-made-in-america-helps-the-84122738

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Notes:

This material was originally published by an independent media outlet.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 06/24/2026 5:57:24 PM

Removing tariffs on products not made in America helps the US

6/4/2026 10:27 AM

United States News News

United States Latest News,United States Headlines

6/4/2026 10:27 AM Newsweek 248 sec. here / 6 min. at publisher
News: 103% · Publisher: 52%

tariffs on geographically rooted goods risk undermining the bilateral trade relationships that sustain American jobs and competitiveness.

The U.S. government has collected roughly $340 billion in import duties since President Trump announced his Liberation Day tariffs over a year ago. And the economic impact has been more complex than either the supporters, or the critics, want to admit.

Proponents argue that tariffs incentivize companies to reshore factories and expand domestic investments. And there's plenty of evidence that's happening. A key measure of U.S. industrial production just jumped to its highest level since before the COVID pandemic, and in 2025, manufacturing productivity increased by the most in decades. But as critics have noted, tariffs are essentially sales taxes on imports—which inevitably means higher costs for Americans who buy those products.

Two-thirds ofWashington could minimize this financial burden—while still incentivizing reshoring—by making the tariff regime more targeted and flexible. In particular, it doesn't make sense to impose tariffs on imported goods that, by definition, cannot be made in America. Doing so inflates Americans' cost of living without stimulating the domestic job growth and industrial capacity build out that President Trump wants.

, Japanese knives, or French Champagne—are a distinct class of goods whose intrinsic value comes from their origin, and from traditions, skills, and production systems built over generations. That is why many products are legally protected by"geographical indications.

" Only sparkling wines from the Champagne region of France, for instance, can be marketed as champagne. Darjeeling tea, meanwhile, must come from a specific region of India. Even when superficially similar products exist, they lack the defining qualities consumers are seeking. As CEO of a Swiss watch group, I've seen this firsthand in my own industry.

"Swiss made" is a legal designation that requires a watch to be developed, inspected, and primarily manufactured in Switzerland. Its reputation rests on a centuries-old ecosystem of precision manufacturing and skills passed down through generations of craftsmen. If Swiss watchmakers moved their production to the United States, their watches would lose the authenticity that drives demand. History bears this out.

In 1954, the United States imposed steep tariffs on imported watch movements to protect domestic manufacturers, who were in a state of decline. But the industry did not recover. By 1967, President Johnson lifted the tariffs, concluding it was"in the national interest" to do so. Tariffs didn't bring Swiss watchmaking to America then—and they won't now.

What they do instead is raise prices—and threaten existing American jobs and prevent the creation of new ones. While Swiss watchmakers may manufacture in Switzerland, they have built an extensive footprint in the United States. They operate boutiques across the country and employ Americans in sales and client services. They also train U.S. technicians to service their products, creating skilled, well-paid technical jobs.

Because tariffs increase the already steep price of Swiss watches, they deter Americans from purchasing them. This leads to a lower turnover for the Swiss companies, which in turn prevents them from investing in hiring and training additional American workers for these supporting roles. Swiss watchmakers also drive other investments in America.

For instance, my company, Breitling, is backing major real estate investments, in particular in Florida, which will be announced soon, and runs a social club in New York City. It also collaborates with multiple NFL teams. Perhaps most vitally, tariffs on geographically rooted goods risk undermining the bilateral trade relationships that sustain American jobs and competitiveness. Targeted tariffs can play an important role in protecting American industry from countries like China that have engaged in unfair trade practices for decades.

But countries such as Switzerland have long maintained balanced, mutually beneficial trade ties with the United States. Despite having a population of just 9 million, Switzerland bought nearly $90 billion of goods and services from America in 2024—not far off from the roughly $98 billion in goods and services that Americans bought from Switzerland. On a per capita basis, America actually runs a lopsided surplus. The average American bought roughly $290 worth of Swiss goods and services.

Meanwhile, the average Swiss resident purchased $10,000 worth of goods and services from America. Policymakers already recognize that tariffing goods that America cannot produce makes little sense. The Trump administration previously exempted coffee, and just exempted Scotch whiskey, for that exact reason. The same logic should apply to Swiss watches, Japanese knives, and other geographically rooted products.

Lifting tariffs on these products would grow the U.S. economy, create more high-paying jobs, and strengthen America's relationships with its trading partners around the world. This material is distributed by Keybridge Communications on behalf of the Faith Whittlesey Society. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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