

Dear Editor:

Michael Gerson's recent column, "There's poetry in opening up markets," strikes a discord with many hard-working Americans.

In his column, Gerson rightly argues that most forms of protectionism are "economically self-destructive" and "diplomatically self-defeating," yet he severely downplays the existing imbalance in current international trade negotiations that tilt the playing field against the U.S.

Gerson creates an illusion that international trade negotiations are a black and white issue, ignoring obvious loopholes in current negotiations that benefit other countries, and by extension, hurt the U.S. economy.

Instead of making our workers out to be a bunch of whining "protectionists," Gerson should explain that the existing negotiations with the World Trade Organization would cripple U.S. market access for U.S. exports to emerging, developing economies—the very economies he claims depend most on our exports.

For U.S. agriculture, the current draft under negotiation would enable emerging economies to evade significant market access commitments. Loopholes like this ensure that no meaningful market access would be secured for U.S. agricultural exports, and domestically, endanger the U.S. government's ability to respond to shifts in its agricultural economy.

And, for non-agricultural market access, U.S. tariffs—which are already low—would be cut even further while WTO-bound tariffs of the so-called "emerging economies" would largely remain higher than those actually applied.

President Obama's trade agenda has promised to correct the imbalance in the aforementioned trade negotiations.

For our own economic survival, we should applaud the President for protecting our ability to compete on the global market, not threaten him if he decides to stand up for the U.S. and demand fair free-market access.

Larry Combest
Lubbock, TX
Former House Agriculture Committee Chairman
Spokesman, The Hand that Feeds U.S.