



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on December 21, 2010

Obama Promises Jobs, But Fails Struggling Alabama Manufacturer

According to the official White House website:

President Obama's first priority in confronting the economic crisis is to put Americans back to work. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan signed by the President will spur job creation while making long-term investments in health care, education, energy, and infrastructure.... The recovery plan will save or create about 3.5 million jobs while investing in priorities that create sustainable economic growth for the future.



While Americans are aware of White House rhetoric, one small Alabama manufacturer has yet to feel the love. Fox News reported Dec. 19 that the U.S.'s largest [sleeping bag manufacturer faces closure](#) unless relief is found from a free trade loophole.

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[Exxel](#) Outdoors, Inc. in tiny Hayleyville, Alabama, manufactures about two million sleeping bags per year in a plant it acquired in 2000, saving it from closure. Its nearly 70 workers operate the most efficient sleeping bag manufactory in the world, but chief executive Harry Kazazian says the American company is at a competitive disadvantage with foreign workers in Bangladesh. Fox noted:.

Sleeping bag imports have been on the duty-free list since Czechoslovakia successfully lobbied for it in the early 1990s. But the country, which split soon afterward into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, never followed through with its plan to get into the sleeping bag business, leaving the loophole dormant until Bangladesh took advantage in recent years, an Exxel official said.

Among the usual suspects causing competitive concerns for most American manufacturers is China. But the communist regime isn't exempt from sleeping bag tariffs, rendering Exxel able to compete. It began losing major orders, however when Bangladesh began flooding the market.

Exxel has been pressing the Obama administration to lift the exemption allowing Bangladeshi imports, but was turned down and forced to submit another request. Fox's report continued:.

The office of the U.S. Trade Representative, which is reviewing Exxel's request, told FoxNews.com that its review will conclude in the spring and that President Obama would have to sign off on any changes to the list of duty-free products — changes that would go into effect before July 1..

'We take Exxel's concerns seriously,' the office said in a statement.

Alabama Senator Jeff Sessions (R) has stepped in on Exxel's behalf, trying to attach a tariff on the imports, but has so far been unsuccessful in getting fellow lawmakers to change the U.S. Generalized System of Preferences. The GSP determines which products from third-world countries can be imported



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duty free. Sessions placed a hold on the annual GSP bill, making it probable that the program will lapse at the end of December. He said from the Senate floor in Friday:

I have supported free trade, probably more than my colleagues. But I have worked for two years to try to obtain a simple justice to close a loophole in the tariff laws that has impacted and will close a sleeping bag textile manufacturer in my state. They are an independent, hard-working people. And this bill as written will close that plant. And it should not happen..

Kazazian notes the irony of possibly having to move offshore instead of closing, especially after he moved his factory from Mexico to Alabama a few years ago. He said:

If the playing field should be tilted, it should be tilted in an American manufacturer's favor. I want the law to be interpreted the way it should be and the playing field leveled..

Closing the factory would cause an economic ripple, affecting Exxel's US vendors — suppliers of packaging, sewing thread, sleeping bag fill and other factory supplies, as well as trucking providers.

Many Americans dedicated to buying American are finding it harder and harder to support domestic manufacturers because they are disappearing — and along with them, our jobs. Here's [what the President had to say](#) about American small business on September 27, when he signed the Small Business Jobs Act. He explained:

Now this is important because small businesses produce most of the new jobs in this country. They are the anchors of our Main Streets. They are part of the promise of America — the idea that if you've got a dream and you're willing to work hard, you can succeed. That's what leads a worker to leave a job to become her own boss. That's what propels a basement inventor to sell a new product — or an amateur chef to open a restaurant. It's this promise that has drawn millions to our shores and made our economy the envy of the world..

If the President can put our money where his mouth is, vigilant Americans will want to pay attention to this issue.



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