

Pence pushes U.S.-Mexico trade pact in Artesia visit

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ARTESIA – With the oil and gas industry as his backdrop in southeast New Mexico, Vice President Mike Pence on Wednesday called on Congress to pass the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

“The clock is ticking,” Pence told the crowd at Elite Well Services. “The best place to turn up the heat for the USMCA is here in New Mexico. ... The president has done his job. Mexico and Canada have done their jobs. Now it’s time for Congress to do its job.”

The vice president, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and others in attendance said passage of the free trade agreement was needed to keep the momentum of the oil and gas industry going in places such as the Permian Basin.

“It’s only going to increase when the USMCA is signed into law,” Pence said, noting that the U.S. was now the No. 1 oil producer in the world and next year will be a net exporter for the first time in 70 years.

“And you people helped make that happen,” he said to the crowd of more than 500.

New Mexico Oil and Gas Association Director Ryan Flynn, participating in a panel before Pence’s arrival, agreed that the trade deal would be good for the oil and gas industry. He said the agreement kept intact parts of the North American Free Trade Agreement that allowed the industry to thrive.

“Mexico is the No. 1 importer of U.S. natural gas and fuel,” he said. “Canada is the No. 1 importer of U.S. crude.”

Pence said the USMCA would allow the U.S. to export oil without tariffs.

“This is a win for America,” Pence said. “This is an even bigger win for states that rely on trade with their neighbors, such as New Mexico.”

Ross, who spoke before the vice president, said New Mexico brings in about \$1.5 billion a year from exports to Mexico and Canada and said it would only grow under the new agreement.

“It’s a big win for all three countries,” he said. “It’s a bigger win for all you workers in New Mexico.”

Pence made his pitch to a very enthusiastic crowd.

“I just wanted to hear what the vice president had to say,” said Richard Soto of Artesia, who attended with his wife. “We’re big Trump supporters. They’ve done a really good job with the oil and gas industry. We wanted to hear what the new trade agreement is about.”

“I wanted to hear what the plan is,” Shane White of Roswell added. “I’m also here to support our country.”

Pence and other speakers highlighted some of the parts of the new agreement. Its requirements include: that automobile manufacturers have 75% of their components manufactured in the U.S., Canada or Mexico to qualify for zero tariffs, up from 62.5% under NAFTA; that 40% to 45% of automobile parts must be made by workers making \$16 an hour or more by 2023; and that dairy exports allowed to Canada are increased.

It also includes protections for intellectual property, the pharmaceutical drugs industry, and has provisions for digital technology.

Pence said the USMCA was an extension of the accomplishments of President Donald Trump's administration since he took office in 2017.

"From his first day as president, he said he wanted an energy revolution," Pence said. "He delivered, here in the Permian Basin and all across America."

He said Trump had worked hard to "increase American production on American soil."

Pence praised Trump's decision to withdraw "from the job-killing Paris Accord."

"He has signed more bills rolling back red tape than any president in American history," Pence said.

He said that the wages of blue collar workers have been on the increase.

"The forgotten American is no longer forgotten," Pence said.

He also said the administration was in the process of negotiating trade agreements with other countries including the United Kingdom, Japan and China as well as the European Union.

Pence said the administration was working on trade deals that would "level the playing field by putting America first."

"We're putting China on notice," the vice president said. "The United States will no longer tolerate trade abuse."