Robert Lighthizer

Robert Emmet Lighthizer (/ˈlaɪðəˌzɪər/; born October 11, 1947) is an American attorney and government official who is the current United States Trade Representative.

After he graduated from Georgetown University Law Center in 1973, Lighthizer joined the firm of Covington and Burling in Washington, D.C. He left the firm in 1978 to serve as chief minority counsel and later staff director and chief of staff of the Senate Committee on Finance under Chairman Bob Dole. In 1983, Robert Lighthizer was unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as Deputy U.S. Trade Representative for President Ronald Reagan. In 1985, Lighthizer joined the Washington office of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP as a partner and led the firm’s international trade group. On January 3, 2017, President-elect Donald Trump announced that he intended to nominate Lighthizer as his U.S. Trade Representative. Lighthizer was confirmed by the Senate on May 11, 2017, by a vote of 82–14.

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Early life and education

Lighthizer was born in 1947 in Ashtabula, Ohio, where he was raised, the son of Orville James and Michaelene Lighthizer. His father practiced medicine. He attended Gilmour Academy in Gates Mills, Ohio. He later graduated from Georgetown University with a B.A. in 1969 and a J.D. in 1973.
Career

After graduating from law school, Lighthizer joined Covington & Burling in Washington D.C. as an associate attorney. In 1978, Lighthizer left Covington & Burling to work for Senator Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who at the time was the Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee.[5][6] When Dole became Chairman of the Finance Committee in 1981, Lighthizer became the committee's staff director and chief of staff.[7][6][8] In the 1980s, Lighthizer hired fellow Georgetown Hoya Patrick Ewing as an intern.[6]

In 1983, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, Lighthizer was nominated and confirmed to serve as Deputy U.S. Trade Representative under William Brock.[9] During his tenure, Lighthizer negotiated over two dozen bilateral international agreements, including agreements on steel, automobiles, and agricultural products.[2] As Deputy USTR, Lighthizer also served as Vice Chairman of the Board of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation.[2]

In 1985, Lighthizer joined the law firm Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP (Skadden) as a partner.[6] He practiced international trade law at Skadden for over 30 years, representing American workers and businesses ranging from manufacturing to financial services, agriculture, and technology.[2] While at Skadden, Lighthizer worked to expand markets to U.S. exports and defended U.S. industries from unfair trading practices. He defended the steel industry in particular.[10]

Lighthizer served in a senior position in the 1988 presidential campaign of U.S. Senator Bob Dole. In 1996, he served as the treasurer of the Dole campaign.[11]

18th United States Trade Representative

On January 3, 2017, Donald Trump announced that he planned to nominate Lighthizer as U.S. Trade Representative, a cabinet-level position.[12] On January 23, press reports speculated that Lighthizer's nomination might require a waiver of section 141(b) (4) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended, due to his brief representation of a foreign government in litigation 25 years prior.[13] In March, White House Counsel Donald McGahn sent a letter to Senate leadership citing a Clinton-era opinion by the White House Counsel arguing that the statute was an unconstitutional limit on the president's ability to appoint his cabinet.[14][15]

At his confirmation hearing, Lighthizer was introduced by former Senator Bob Dole and U.S. Senators from Ohio Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman. In introducing Lighthizer, Brown said, "Mr. Lighthizer is eminently qualified, as
Senator Dole said, for this job. He has a long history of fighting on behalf of American manufacturers, and I would add, American workers."[16]

On April 25, the Senate Finance Committee unanimously approved Lighthizer's nomination to serve as the U.S. Trade Representative as well as a waiver of section 141(b)(4) of the Trade Act of 1974.[17]

Lighthizer was confirmed as the 18th U.S. Trade Representative on May 11, 2017, by a margin of 82–14.[18] He was sworn in by Vice President Mike Pence on May 15, 2017.[19]

Three days later, on May 18, Lighthizer notified Congress that President Trump intended to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which would make him the first USTR to renegotiate a major U.S. free trade agreement.[20]

According to multiple media reports, Lightizer became one of the most influential Trump Administration officials and the lead figure in formulating the administration's trade policy.[21][22][23] The media noted his agreement with Trump on trade issues.[24]

In April 2018, the media reported that Lightizer had spent $917,000 on new furnishings for two offices. Lighthizer said the upgrades had been initiated under former President Barack Obama to replace decades-old furniture, an assertion supported by vendors who supplied the new items.[25]

Policy views

Tariffs

Lighthizer has stated that using tariffs to promote American industry was a Republican tenet dating back to the pro-business politicians who established the party.[26] In a 2008 op-ed, he defended protectionism.[27]

Trade with China

Politico describes Lighthizer as "a decades-long skeptic of Beijing".[24] Lighthizer has accused the country of China of unfair trade practices,[28] and he believes China needs to make substantive and structural changes to its trade policies, as opposed to only minor changes it has offered in the past.[29] He wrote: "The icon of modern conservatism, Ronald Reagan, imposed quotas on imported steel, protected Harley-Davidson from Japanese competition, restrained import of semiconductors and automobiles, and took myriad similar steps to keep American industry strong. How does allowing China to constantly rig trade in its favor advance the core conservative goal of making markets more efficient? Markets do not run better when manufacturing shifts to China largely because of the actions of its government."[28]
Lighthizer suggested that the U.S. should bring more cases against China for failure to comply with the regulations of the World Trade Organization. In testimony before the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2010, Lighthizer said that "USTR (U.S. Trade Representative) should pursue WTO litigation with respect to all such examples of non-compliance. If necessary, Congress should give USTR additional resources to increase its ability."[30]

**Negotiating**

Lighthizer has stated in 1984 "I try to be friendly in negotiations. I'm not the theatrical type. The art of persuasion is knowing where the leverage is."[7]

**Personal life**

Lighthizer lives in Florida. He has two children, Robert and Claire, and three grandchildren.[31] Lighthizer is known for paying close attention to his health.[31][24]

Lighthizer's brother, O. James Lighthizer, is an American Civil War expert. James Lighthizer is the president of the American Battlefield Trust, a battlefield preservation organization, and a former member of the Maryland House of Delegates.[32]

**See also**

- Trump–Ukraine scandal

**References**


## External links

- Appearances (https://www.c-span.org/person/?robertlighthizer) on C-SPAN

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