

Event highlights US, China trade

Prof says China is world's workshop

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Wayne State will host a prominent mix of scholars and government officials in an event meant to highlight the trade relationship between the U.S. and China on Feb. 11.

The U.S.-China economic law conference will take place at the WSU Law School. The conference will focus largely on the economic and political impact the two countries have on each other as well as the important role the World Trade Organization plays in resolving trade disputes. A fact that Nicholas Howson, professor of law at the University of Michigan, said remains largely unknown to the U.S. public.

"Many people in the United States do not understand that every aspect of US-China trade is governed by the (WTO) discipline, and in a way that was specifically crafted for the People's Republic of China's entry into the global trading system. Because the trade and investment relationship has so much bearing on the global political and financial system, Americans are irresponsible if they don't work hard to understand how the system is governed," said Howson.

Howson is one of three people organizing the conference along with WSU law professors Julia Qin and Greg Fox. In recent years, policy experts have largely described the U.S.-China trade relationship as one that gives an "unfair" advantage to the Chinese. The organizers, however, hope to give attendees a broad understanding of trade policies from the perspectives of both countries.

"Our idea was to gather top specialists and officials from both sides -- China and the U.S. -- to forge better understanding of the rules of the game, and in particular how the "other side" functions in the global system in its own national interest," said Howson.

The keynote address, titled "The Politics of Trade and Globalization: The U.S.- China Relationship", will be given by former U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky.

Barshefsky served as trade representative from 1997 to 2001 after being nominated by former President Bill Clinton. The U.S. Trade Representative acts as the country's primary trade negotiator and works to gain favorable rulings from the WTO.

Barshefsky describes the U.S.-China relationship as "complex".

"The U.S.-China relationship overall is very complicated. It is a delicate dance," Barshefsky said during an interview in January 2010, before Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to the White House.

"The U.S. and China must co-operate both in the economic sphere as well as in the foreign policy sphere."

It is a belief that Howson agrees with.

"In short, China is the world's, and certainly America's, 'workshop,'" Howson said. "Almost everything we purchase and use in the United States seems to be manufactured in China. That has led to a very serious trade imbalance, the distribution of huge amounts of U.S. hard currency to developing China, and China being one of the United States' most important creditors. Thus, as the relationship has developed over the past several decades, China and the U.S. simply must deal with each other -- any failure on one side threatens collapse of the economy and stability of the other."