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NAFTA Update: US Administration Formally Notifies Congress of Upcoming Talks

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On May 18, 2017, US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer formally notified the US Congress of President Donald Trump's intent to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In letters transmitted to senior Congressional leaders, Ambassador Lighthizer pledged that the administration will consult closely with Congress to ensure its negotiating positions are consistent with the priorities and objectives set out under the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act, Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) legislation passed into law in 2015. The letter acknowledges how much the world has changed in the 25 years since NAFTA was first negotiated and states that the administration aims to modernize NAFTA to include provisions addressing issues like "intellectual property rights, regulatory practices, state-owned enterprises, services, customs procedures, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, labor, environment, and small and medium enterprises." It also reiterates the administration's pledge to pursue strong implementation and enforcement of trade commitments.

Ambassador Lighthizer's letter triggers a 90-day consultation period, during which he and other senior administration officials will work with Congress to develop the country's negotiating objectives. While formal talks between the US, Canada and Mexico can begin no earlier than mid-August, US and international stakeholders must engage with Trump Administration officials and lawmakers as soon as possible if they wish to be a part of the discussion. A late summer start also leaves a relatively short window for NAFTA negotiations to be concluded before Mexico's July 2018 presidential elections.

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