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Consumer goods CEOs in Davos hot seat over plastic waste



Inside C2

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China and U.S. among 76 WTO members pushing for new e-commerce rules

DAVOS, Switzerland (Reuters) - Impatient with a lack of World Trade Organization rules on the explosive growth of e-commerce, 76 members - including the United States, China, the European Union and Japan - agreed on Friday to start negotiating a new framework.

China, which is locked in a trade war with the United States, signaled conditional support for the initiative but said it should also take into account the needs of developing countries, in comments likely to rile Washington.

E-commerce, or online trade in goods and services, has become a huge component of the global economy. A WTO report put the total value of e-commerce in 2016 at \$27.7 trillion, of which nearly \$24 trillion was business-to-business transactions.

On the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, negotiators from the 76 countries and regions agreed on Friday to hammer out an agenda for negotiations they hope to kick off this year on setting new e-commerce rules.

"I've said for quite some time it was unacceptable that by 2018 ... the WTO won't have a deeper, more effective conversation about a phenomenon that is driving the global economy today," said WTO Director-General Roberto Azevedo.

"China was not an original signatory but now they are. They have reaffirmed their intention to start negotiations on electronic commerce. I think this is a welcome development," he told a briefing in Davos.

Japan's trade minister Hiroshige Seko said his country hopes to use its presidency of this year's Group of 20 meetings of major economies to help accelerate negotiations.

"The current WTO rules don't match the needs of the 21st century. You can tell that from the fact there are no solid rules on e-commerce," Seko told a separate briefing.

CHINA CRITICAL, INDIA ABSENT

China's WTO Ambassador Zhang Xiangchen said the e-commerce declaration "could have been better drafted" but Beijing was still willing to co-sponsor it.

But Beijing's call for "full respect (to be) accorded to the reasonable requests of developing members" could increase friction with Washington, which says the WTO must stop giving special treatment to countries such as China that call themselves "developing".

Another Asian giant, India, did not join the initiative. It has previously said the WTO should finish off the stalled but development-oriented "Doha Round" of talks before moving into new areas.

"It would always be better if we had every WTO member in it," Azevedo said. "But what is important also is that this group is open. It's an open-ended group, so any member that wants to participate in this conversation can join any time."

Trade experts say the global trade rulebook is rapidly becoming outdated and needs to keep up or become obsolete. A recent study found that 70 regional trade agreements already include provisions or chapters on e-commerce.

The WTO's 164 members failed to consolidate some 25 separate e-commerce proposals at a conference at Buenos Aires in December, including a call to set up a central e-commerce negotiating forum.

E-commerce, which developed largely after the WTO's creation in 1995, was not part of the Doha round of talks that began in 2001 and eventually collapsed more than a decade later.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration says the WTO is dysfunctional, as it has failed to hold China to account for not opening up its economy as envisaged when Beijing joined in 2001.

To force reform at the WTO, Trump's team has refused to allow new appointments to the Appellate Body, the world's top trade



FILE PHOTO: The logo of Alibaba Group is seen at the company's headquarters in Hangzhou

China confident of keeping 2019 growth within 'appropriate range'

SHANGHAI (Reuters) - China is fully confident that it is capable of keeping its economic growth rate within an appropriate range in 2019 in spite of challenges, state news agency Xinhua reported Chinese Premier Li Keqiang as saying on Friday.

"China's economy has enough resilience, potential and ample room for growth, especially with a huge domestic market and rich human resources of nearly 1.4 billion people," Li said at a discussion with some foreign experts working in China.

"Therefore, we are fully confident and capable of keeping economic growth rate within an appropriate range in spite of multiple risks and challenges in 2019," he said.

The world's second largest economy grew 6.6 percent in 2018, the slowest annual pace since 1990, amid pressure from faltering domestic demand and bruising U.S. tariffs.

Economists polled by Reuters expect the Chinese economy to cool further this year to 6.3 percent as those pressures continue.



FILE PHOTO: Chinese New Year lantern installation is displayed outside Sinopec gas station in Hong Kong

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Consumer goods CEOs in Davos hot seat over plastic waste

DAVOS, Switzerland (Reuters) - Consumer products companies including Procter & Gamble Co (PG.N) and Coca-Cola Co (KO.N) are emerging as new targets for global activism, with green groups blaming them for fouling the ocean with plastic and activists urging governments to regulate them.

Packaging free shower products are displayed at "Lush", handmade cosmetics store, in downtown Milan, Italy, January 25, 2019. REUTERS/Stefano Rellandini

At the annual World Economic Forum this week, the bosses of these and other firms like Unilever Plc (ULVR.L) and PepsiCo (PEPO) have been on the defensive, in a way reminiscent of how coal and oil chiefs came under pressure over climate change in previous years.

"I see parallels to coal," Greenpeace executive director Jennifer Morgan told Reuters after she and Procter & Gamble boss David Taylor had a feisty exchange at a joint news conference at the forum in the Swiss ski resort of Davos. "It's clear they are trying to not be regulated," she added.

The CEOs at Davos have vowed to cut their use of plastic packaging through a range of initiatives, including a joint recycling scheme unveiled during the forum. But Greenpeace used that announcement to call for plastic packaging bans and a goal of "peak plastic", saying recycling was not enough.

About 8 million tonnes of plastic are dumped into oceans every year, killing marine life and entering the food chain, according to the U.N. Environment Program. Data like that, and TV shows such as documentary-maker David Attenborough's Blue Planet, have taken the issue to the top of the summit agenda.

Attenborough, 92, was honoured with a special award at the start of the annual event, where environmental concerns were a running theme alongside gloom and doom over the U.S.-China trade war and a slowdown in the global economy.

"I sometimes wonder if we're in the branded litter business, branded trash," Unilever Chief Executive Alan Jope half-joked after he was asked during a panel debate if consumers were interested in the source of the company's products.

In 2017 at Davos, Dove soap maker Unilever promised to ensure all of its plastic packaging was recyclable, reusable

or compostable by 2025.

"Two years ago at Davos, Unilever was in front on plastics. At the moment it's very high on our radar to do something about plastic waste above and beyond... the rest of the industry," COLLECTING BOTTLES

Dozens of big companies have made various pledges to reduce plastic packaging, including a plan by 40 firms to eliminate unnecessary single-use plastic packaging in Britain by 2025.

"We will roll out new tech next year that will reduce the amount of packaging per kilo," PepsiCo Chief Executive Ramon Laguarta said at Davos, adding that Pepsi was trying to move more toward reusable cans and glass.

PepsiCo, Unilever and European supermarket chains Carrefour (CARR.PA) and Tesco (TSCO.L) are among firms that signed up to the pilot waste-reduction programme unveiled in Davos this week. It will deliver products such as orange juice in reusable bottles to shoppers and pick up the empties for cleaning and re-use.

"We can learn about the business model, and the consumer reaction to this and find solutions that last," P&G's Taylor said at the announcement.

At one Davos panel debate, human rights lawyer Vivek Maru, founder of legal advocacy group Namati, asked PepsiCo's Laguarta and the head of The Dow Chemical Company, Jim Fitterling, if they could be hit with lawsuits for the damage their companies had done, similar to litigation against the tobacco industry.

Packaging free shower products are displayed at "Lush", handmade cosmetics store, in downtown Milan, Italy, January 25, 2019. REUTERS/Stefano Rellandini

"It's a difficult question to answer," Fitterling said. "The plastic waste got there through consumer behavior and people putting it out into the environment."



Packaging free shower products are displayed at "Lush", handmade cosmetics store, in downtown Milan, Italy, January 25, 2019. REUTERS/Stefano Rellandini



FILE PHOTO: An Afghan shopkeeper works on his laptop at his online shop in Kabul

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Editor's Choice



Anti-war and civil rights activists rally against Trump administration interference in Venezuela politics in front of the White House in Washington



Anti-war and civil rights activists rally against Trump administration interference in Venezuela politics in front of the White House in Washington



Protesters wearing yellow vests take part in a demonstration by the "yellow vests" movement in Paris



Honey-coloured giant teddy bears are seen during a farewell ceremony at the town hall of the 13th arrondissement of Paris



Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaidó speaks during a rally with members of the Venezuela's National Assembly regarding an amnesty law project for members of the military, in Caracas



French police officer in riot gear secure the Place de la Bastille during a demonstration by the "yellow vests" movement in Paris



A French policeman in riot gear holds a flash-ball gun as protesters wearing yellow vests take part in a demonstration by the "yellow vests" movement at Place de la Bastille in Paris



Competitors take part in the ATSX 500 Ice Cross Downhill World Championship in Igora outside Saint Petersburg, Russia January 26, 2019. REUTERS/Anton Vaganov



A furloughed federal worker holds his daughter as they wait in line with others who are affected by the partial government shutdown for Philabundance volunteers to distribute food under Interstate 95 in Philadelphia Jan. 23. (Photo/AP)

Last Friday, the 35th day of the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, 800,000 federal employees will miss a second paycheck, ratcheting up the individual impact of the partial government shutdown.

An air-traffic controller in Chattanooga, Tennessee, says his family has been doing all right thanks to creditors who are willing to delay payments, but he worries about expenses that can't be postponed, such as food for his wife and their seven children.

Manley warned that the growing "sick-out" among Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screeners might spread to air-traffic controllers as they seek outside work to pay their bills.

Only 15 percent of civilian full-time federal employees live in the Washington, D.C., region, so representatives and senators from across the country could hear from increasingly anxious constituents well beyond the Beltway.

Wednesday began daily demonstrations at the Senate's Hart office building. By any measure, the shutdown is already causing wide-ranging damage.

Most visibly for the broader public, the TSA "sick-out" results in closed security lines and airport delays. Absentee rates hit a high of 10 percent on Sunday, about three times as high as the typical level at this point last year.

Humans tend to ignore gradual changes, like the proverbial frog in a pot of slowly heated water (see: climate change, national debt, on-line privacy).

A Department of Homeland Security employee who lives in Northern Virginia says the prospect of a full month without pay forced her and her husband, another civilian federal worker, to apply for unemployment benefits, food stamps, and free school lunches for their two children.

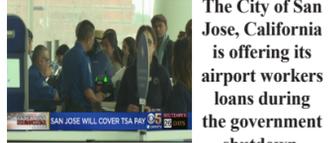
for assistance." The family was low on cash savings because they had recently renovated their basement so her disabled mother could live with them.

The federal government won't pay their salaries until President Donald Trump calls off the shutdown, something he claims will happen only after the Democrats agree to broker a \$5 billion-plus deal to build a border wall.

On Wednesday night, San Jose's city council was the first to approve a plan to offer no-interest loans to 500 federal airport workers at Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Air-

port. "We know for many customs and TSA employees who are living paycheck to paycheck, the shutdown has forced them into the decision of going to work, unable to pay rent, or driving for Uber," Mayor Sam Liccardo told CityLab.

The City of San Jose, California is offering its airport workers loans during the government shutdown.



The heightened focus on San Jose's airport workers, as opposed to the thousands of others affected, is a matter of public safety, says Pam Foley, a San Jose city council member who supported the plan.

The TSA absence rates at Norman Y. Mineta have reached 14 percent from the typical 3 percent; nationally, the TSA reported an absentee rate of 6.1 percent on Wednesday, elevated from an average of 5 percent.

But other compensation programs for federal workers, regardless of position, have been announced, too. From Sacramento's airport Thursday, California Governor Gavin Newsom announced that he would offer unemployment insurance "to those hurt by the shutdown" across the state.

Michigan, and New York called on the Labor Department to issue clearer guidelines as to whether they could, too. Connecticut gover-

nor Ned Lamont is partnering with Webster Bank to offer interest-free loans to the 1,500 to 2,500 federal workers in Connecticut, "including air traffic controllers and certain Environmental Protection Agency staff," the Connecticut Mirror reported.



House Democrats have also introduced legislation that would give out short-term loans to any federal employee, offering \$6,000 interest-free from the Treasury Department.

While federal workers have been promised back pay, even one lost paycheck could put families behind on mortgages, or hospital bills, or loan payments, or child care costs.

San Jose's coverage plan takes the form of a short-term loan program because cities cannot directly pay federal workers to do federal work. The estimated \$2.5 million program will be paid for out of the airport's \$50 million reserve fund, and will last up to three months.

Atlanta city council president Felicia Moore said. This strategy is being mirrored across the country: After Clovis, California, announced it would be offering interest-free loans to cover federal workers' utility bills, the neighboring city of Fresno reminded federal workers that they, too, were eligible for full utility coverage under an existing plan for residents experiencing hardship.

The path to getting all federal workers more consistent paychecks, though, rests in Washington. "We thank San Jose for stepping up to the plate, but unfortunately for the tens of thousands of TSA officers outside of San Jose, this issue will not be going away anytime soon," the president of the American Federation of Government Employees, David Cox, told the Mercury News.

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Advertisement for 幸福新邨公寓 (Happy Village Apartments), listing amenities and contact information.

Advertisement for 百樂公寓 (Bellaire Silk), featuring a new apartment building and contact information.

Advertisement for 美聯混凝土 (Mei Lian Concrete), offering concrete services and contact information.

Advertisement for 李元鐘保險 (Lee Yuan Zhong Insurance), offering various insurance services and contact information.

U.S. Chamber Of Commerce Says Shutdown Has Now Cost Small Businesses \$2.3 Billion



New data from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce suggests the extended government shutdown is having a significant adverse effect on 41,000 small businesses across all 50 states.

Small government contractors have lost \$2.3 billion in revenue thus far 34 days into the shutdown, with another \$29 billion at risk if the shutdown continues, Neil Bradley, executive vice president and chief policy officer at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told reporters Thursday.

Contractors at many of these 41,000-plus small businesses "aren't getting paid and in many cases will never get paid" as the government shutdown halts work on billions of dollars' worth of goods and services contracts, Bradley said.

Compounding the problem, more than one-third of those small businesses that perform government work "don't have cash reserves to sustain" themselves through the shutdown, said David Berteau, who represents hundreds of companies as head of the Professional Services Council.

Berteau, who spoke with Bradley on a call with reporters, said small businesses essentially face two choices: lay off employees or go out of business. The Chamber of Commerce delivered a letter to President Trump and Congress Thursday urging a third option—reopening government—but an agreement seems far-fetched as competing proposals in the Senate and House failed Thursday.



"The current shutdown—now the longest in American history—is causing significant and in some cases lasting damage to families, businesses, and the economy as a whole. The harm is well-documented and continues to compound with each passing day," reads the Chamber of Commerce letter, which was signed by more than 600 local and state organiza-

tions.

Thus far, 800,000 federal employees remain furloughed and tens of thousands of contractors have been laid off due to the shutdown. California, Virginia, Maryland, Texas and the District of Columbia have the most small business contractors in the country, but even Midwestern states like Iowa have hundreds. The effects on contractors will compound, Berteau said, with each new stop-work order issued by the unfunded agencies, which include the departments of Homeland Security and Agriculture, as well as NASA.

In addition, Berteau called on the government to bring back furloughed contracting personnel long enough to at least sign off on invoices from work performed by companies in October, November and December. Money to pay those invoices was obligated before the shutdown, but the invoices require signatures from feds who are currently furloughed. SAIC, a large defense and tech contractor, publicly said they haven't been paid for as much as \$50 million in

work performed last year.

"The government is usually very good at paying invoices, and right now they're not," Berteau said. (Courtesy <https://www.nextgov.com>)

Related
Another "Victim" Of The Federal Government Shutdown: Now The Wheels of Justice Are Grinding to a Halt



FBI agents report that the government shutdown is costing them confidential sources, postponing indictments, and shutting down investigations.

FBI agents have lost irreplaceable sources. Joint Terrorism Task Force officers can't get into the bureau's computer systems. Federal investigations are being stymied by a lack of resources. The partial government shutdown, now in its

ciation said on Tuesday.

Over the past several weeks, the association has been compiling stories from agents about the the shutdown's impact on the bureau's operations. One agent, speaking anonymously, said his unit had "lost several sources who have worked for months, and years, to penetrate groups and target subjects" due to the inability to pay confidential sources. "These assets cannot be replaced," the agent said. "Serving my country has always been a privilege, but it has never been so hard or thankless." Another agent reported: "Not being able to pay Confidential Human Sources risks losing them and the information they provide FOREVER. It is not a switch that we can turn on and off."

Others complained that their investigations were being slow-rolled, with dozens of grand-jury subpoenas going undelivered. "The operational impacts of this shutdown are immeasurable," said one agent in the Northeast region. "We have postponed the indictment of subjects due to the shutdown."



President Donald Trump, who said last month that he would take responsibility for shutting the government down if Congress refused to appropriate \$5.7 billion for his border wall, proposed what he described as a compromise over the weekend. But he continued to insist on the wall. Democrats rejected the proposal immediately.

The president did not mention the more than 800,000 federal workers affected by the impasse, let alone the effects it has had on counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and drug-trafficking and cybersecurity operations by the FBI—an agency for which he has little affection. In the two and a half years since the bureau launched its counterintelligence investigation into potential coordination between members of Trump's campaign and Russia, the president has chided the FBI in dozens of tweets, rallies, and interviews. The withering morale and possibility of having to work without pay has made it difficult to recruit new agents, current and former agents have told me.

The thousands of FBI agents and other federal employees whose unfettered work is imperative for national security have received "no assurances" about when their next paycheck will come or when they will be reimbursed for travel expenses—including overseas trips crucial to operations, one agent told me. The agent, who works in a particularly sensitive counterterrorism unit, was recently asked to travel to Africa out of his own pocket should his own pocket should his counterparts there need assistance. (Courtesy <https://www.r.nextgov.com/>)

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