

Dear Santa:

Christmas is confusing this year. Once confined to primarily a Christian holiday, people all over the world are now celebrating Christmas. Either the Gideon's are having greater success with the hotel Bibles than we thought, or something just isn't right. Look around, the Chinese are celebrating Christmas, so are the Israeli's, the European Union, the Russians, – the whole world is celebrating Christmas! Some of them don't even have to wait until December 25th like we do. For some people, it's Christmas every day.

While you're not here to give gifts away every day of the year, your elves certainly are. Here in the United States, we refer to your elves as the Administration, and this year they've been particularly generous. Why, the Russians regularly send us their Christmas wish list along with a note explaining that they're unsure, once again, of the status of their nuclear weapons, but the items on their wish list will help them resolve any potential nuclear problems. The Administration has been quite ready to send check after check made payable to Boris Yeltsin and friends. Boris must have really been a good boy to merit all the checks the Administration's been sending him. Traditionally Christmas is a time of sharing, but the Russians haven't given the US a thing in spite of all the US gifts. On the contrary, Russians are violating every trademark law known to man and widely counterfeiting US goods without the Administration mentioning one word of objection. Perhaps sending another Christmas check might get them to pay attention to the intellectual property problems. It'll have to be a big check because the Russian counterfeiters themselves are being very generous to Russian judges this year. We should also try to send clothes washing machines to Russia so that we aren't continually required to have US banks do Russian laundry.

We actually have a lot of laundry to do in the US. The Administration alone has a tremendous amount of mud to wash off after it's performance at the World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle. Evidently your elves are members of a labor union, because they certainly seem to believe labor unions should rule the free world – even when the entire rest of the world, including the vast majority of US corporations, disagree with them. Elves can be so stubborn and generous at Christmas time. You should have a talk with them and let them know how outrageously foolish the European Union is making the US look in the eyes of the world. What the Administration could point out to the rest of the world is that the Japanese and Europeans are just as responsible for the failure of the WTO meeting because of their protectionist stance on agriculture.

Of course the European Union (EU) should have nothing but nice things to say about the Administration since during its leadership the EU has been able to position itself to drastically overtake the US economically in years to come. Not to mention that during this Administration's leadership Europe is actually growing. The EU is negotiating free trade agreements with South Africa, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, all of which are about as European as Geronimo. Maybe Mexico turning to the EU is a result of the Administration's failure to get the three-country North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to work properly.

If Mexico can join the EU, why not China? The Administration continues to beat China over the head with myriad trade issues as though the Chinese could give a counterfeit Rolex about what the US thinks. A counterfeit Rolex is an excellent example of one of the advantages that China has over the US: Time. The Chinese have proven to be extremely patient and have the ability to outlast the US in the international trade agreement game of “who’ll blink first.” China knows that the US will always blink first when taking a hard stance on trade issues. All China must do is give it time, and its competitors will cave. With the size of the Chinese market, they realize that eventually everyone will be forced to pay attention to China.

It is why the US pays so much attention to Israel that is baffling. The US maintains a relationship with Israel that no one completely understands. The Israelis violate every trade agreement they sign with the US, take over land that does not belong to them with absolutely no repercussions from the Administration, and refuse to comply with negotiated agricultural tariff rates. US companies continue to pay outrageous duties on agricultural goods sent to Israel, while Israeli agricultural products enter the US duty free. Christmas is truly celebrated in this Holy Land where Israel is the world’s greatest recipient of US foreign aid in cash and kind.

Because our Administration is so giving, it’s difficult to understand why it is so reluctant to give the US Customs Service the funds necessary to pay for the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE). Particularly when industry already gave the money to pay for it to the Administration in the form of user fees. Evidently your elves don’t realize that without ACE, Christmas presents from around the world and other goods will be unable to enter into the US. What a shame it would be to give so much to the entire world and so little to the people who foot the bill for the Administration’s generosity.

This year, please point out to the Administration that it has done enough giving outside the US and that it is now time for it to pay attention to what is best for this country’s enterprises. This Administration should be reminded that Christmas, even celebrated by the world year round, is a time of giving and receiving. The US has done plenty of giving and it’s time we started receiving. US industry has tried repeatedly to send this message to the Administration without success. We now have no choice but to turn to you Santa, and ask that if you can’t get the message through to the Administration, please send us an Administration that will understand.