In terms of forcing changes in China, this is also a matter of national security. Once China is admitted into the WTO, they will be subject to the rule of law, which will be enforced by more than 130 countries. As we enter the 21st Century, China is on the verge of expanding its regional dominance. I believe it is apparent that the populous nation is simply too influential to ignore. Thus, I believe that our engagement, rather than disengagement, is essential. I think we have a better chance of encouraging reforms with more U.S. citizens bringing our culture, ideas, and freedoms to China rather than isolating them from the rest of the world.

With regard to China’s cross straits relations, the Taiwan question continues to heighten tensions in the region. Passage of PNTR would allow our country to continue to play a constructive role in diffusing that potentially destabilizing situation. Even Taiwan’s leaders recognize the importance of passing PNTR and China’s accession to the WTO. Recently, the newly elected President of Taiwan, Chen Shui-bian, stated that, “We would welcome the normalization of China trade relations... we look forward to both the People’s Republic of China’s and Taiwan’s accession to the WTO.”

We must respect and address many of the opposing arguments. Opponents argue that we as a nation must send a strong message to China and in many respects I agree. Let there be no mistake about it, forcing China to comply with their commitments will not be an easy task. China must know that we will be vigilant in our efforts to combat human rights abuses, that we will tolerate acts of aggression towards its neighbors. That is why I commend my colleagues Sandy Levin and Doug Bereuter for all their hard work crafting legislation that will enable our country to closely monitor China’s human rights record and compliance with its WTO commitments.

In addition, opponents of PNTR argue that only big business will benefit. I disagree. Today more than ever, U.S. businesses are functioning in a global economy, and thanks to the Information Age and the growth of e-commerce, a rapidly growing number of small and medium sized companies have already expanded their business to China rather than isolating them from the rest of the world.

As we enter the 21st Century, China is on the verge of expanding its regional dominance. It will only signal a retreat from the global economy and a surrendering of our nation’s leadership in the international arena.

I urge my colleagues to vote “yes” on PNTR.