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CHAIRMAN

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AT-LARGE WHIP

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C 20500

Dear Mr. President:

A few days before his departure, your predecessor imposed a 300 percent duty on Roquefort cheese. This aberrant taxation, a retaliation for the European Union's ban on U.S. beef containing hormones, will block access for this traditional French cheese to the U.S. market.

"Freedom fries" and "freedom toast" did serious damage to U.S.-French relations. We both want to reestablish America's moral authority in the world under your presidency; a very noble gesture toward that goal would be to remove or reduce this mean-spirited and unproductive punitive duty on Roquefort cheese.

Though I am a supporter of "buy American", it is for unfairly subsidized foreign products when they are identical or comparable to ours. Roquefort cheese is not in this category. I know from my own experience that if such retaliatory action were taken on products produced in small communities in my district, as Roquefort cheese is in a small French town, it would have a serious adverse local economic impact.

On the other hand, I believe action to eliminate or reduce the Roquefort duty would be well received in France and could, in fact, contribute to a better understanding of trade issues between our two countries. The French people enthusiastically followed your campaign and the early stages of your administration, and I know they would welcome such a gesture.

With best wishes.

Sincerely,



James L. Oberstar, M.C.

JLO/mb

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2308
February 2, 2009

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