

Daniel J. Ikenson

Dan Ikenson is the newly promoted director of Cato's Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies, where he focuses on World Trade Organization disputes, regional trade agreements, U.S.-China trade issues, steel and textile trade policies, and antidumping reform. He is the author of many studies on trade policy and the coauthor of *Antidumping Exposed: The Devilish Details of Unfair Trade Law*.

Ikenson has been involved in international trade for more than 20 years. Before joining Cato in 2000, he was director of international trade planning for an accounting and business advisory firm. Prior to that, he cofounded the Library of International Trade Resources, a consulting firm providing interactive information access and international trade consulting.

Ikenson holds an MA in economics from George Washington University. He is married with three children.

If there is anything like a conventional path to becoming a scholar at the Cato Institute, I rather doubt it's the road I traveled. During college in the mid-1980s, I clerked over the summer for my father, a trade lawyer whose clients included U.S. companies seeking protection from foreign competition under U.S. trade laws. It seemed obvious to me at the time that we had a choice of protecting American industry or learning how to say "I surrender" in Japanese. That I have since become a devout advocate of free trade has been described by my father—tongue-in-cheek to be sure—as a prolonged manifestation of my teenaged rebelliousness.

What drew me to Cato in October 2000 was not a profound commitment to libertarian ideas or any burning desire to commune with libertarians over big picture policy issues. In fact, I was not yet a committed libertarian when I joined the Institute. I had read and admired the works of Smith, Hume, Locke, the founders, Bastiat and others from previous centuries, but beyond Hayek, Friedman, and Rand, I had very little exposure to the works of contemporary libertarian thinkers.

What drew me to Cato was a belief in the propriety of free trade and the opportunity to expose the irrationality and capriciousness of the protectionist antidumping law. That belief—and the expertise I had developed on antidumping matters—was cultivated when I worked as an

economist for law firms representing foreign companies and U.S. importers throughout the 1990s (generically speaking, the targets of my father's clients).

I believed in free markets primarily because I found the economic arguments appealing. But I had yet to really appreciate the freedom aspect of "free" markets. Back then, I characterized my political views as economically conservative and socially liberal, without appreciating that those superficially inconsistent preferences share a perfectly consistent, libertarian view of government—that its role and power should be limited.

During my first few years at Cato, it all started coming together. The 9/11 attacks, the subsequent War on Terror, and the war in Iraq had opened the door to a massive expansion of the role and size of government, and that expansion was imperiling our liberties in real time. As one who naively accepted the argument that the security apparatus should be afforded almost a blank check to expand in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and that invading Iraq was jus-

tifiable in the name of security, I was chastened (and a bit ashamed) that I didn't see the imminence of those consequences before accepting the arguments in favor of expanding the state.

The lessons I drew from that experience—as well as the exposure I have had at Cato to some of the sharpest minds and most coherent arguments in the policy world—have been formative. In advocating free trade, my very first argument is now a moral one rooted in freedom rather than an economic one rooted in efficiency. In my assessments of policy matters, generally, I have become deeply skeptical of ideas that hint at expanded government or would otherwise impose upon civil society or personal freedom.



My "stint" at Cato as the chief researcher for what was called, in October 2000, the Project on Antidumping Reform was expected to last two years. I am very proud of the fact that 11 years later, I am still here with a broader mandate to cover the full gamut of international trade policy issues, and as the new director of the Herbert A. Stiefel Center for Trade Policy Studies.

I am also proud of the fact that I convinced my father that Bastiat, Hayek, and Friedman have a lot to say about the problems that afflict our country today. He read and enjoyed each of the books I bought him. ■