

# STEEL NEWS

E-NEWSLETTER FOR AIIS MEMBERS AND THE STEEL COMMUNITY



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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

### Global Steel Supply Chain Partnership Announced

This month I am honored to report to you a highly significant development in the 65-year history of the AIIS: the creation of the Global Steel Supply Chain Partnership. The Partnership, which was launched on May 21 in concert with the Made in Steel exposition and conference in Milan, Italy,

is the result of a new joint venture with our Luxembourg-based partner EUROMETAL and the London-based International Steel Trade Association (ISTA).

The rationale for this exciting new initiative with two distinguished, like-minded organizations is simple: the ultimate success of almost everything AIIS members are engaged in depends on an effective, efficient global steel supply chain. Over one-third of global steel production is traded internationally. In 2013, approximately 400 million tons of steel consumed in the world, representing about 30 percent of global steel supply, crossed a national border.

Although these numbers are illuminating, significant challenges for the global steel supply chain persist. The demand situation is variable. The potential for border delays continues, with at least one major United States trading partner recently instituting restrictive new steel import licensing rules. Important emerging markets pose unique challenges. Transportation and logistics costs are always vexing concerns. In addition to all of this, developments such as the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations may likely result in new trade rules and diplomatic relationships affecting steel-related trade. In the not-too-distant future, a successfully concluded TPP negotiation may result in a much larger, more comprehensive, and more robust trading platform in Asia, which is a stated United States TPP policy goal.

These issues and concerns—and, perhaps more important, issues and concerns we do not even know about yet—will greatly affect the global steel supply chain. We must be prepared to address them proactively.

Our initial action plan for the Partnership focuses on three things.

First, we aim to enhance the information flow among Partnership-affiliated members so they are able to become more agile, that is, able to adapt and adjust to change in a timely way in a highly dynamic international environment.

As AIIS Chairman John Foster put it in his remarks in Milan, “Steel is a strategic asset, but so is information.”

*(continued on page 2)*

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## *Executive Director's Report (continued from page 1)*

Bearing out Chairman Foster's comment about the strategic aspect of information, analysis has shown that businesses operating in a supply chain that cooperate in developing and sharing relevant information in a timely way are better able to innovate with other links in the chain. This type of cooperation and information sharing will inform every aspect of the Partnership's activities.

Second, the Partnership will serve as a forum for interaction and professional development. Our members have long recognized that we have a great deal to learn from one another. The Partnership will seek to enlarge and sharpen opportunities for member interaction and professional development on relevant matters.

Third, the Partnership will seek to better focus attention on steel supply chain issues in the multilateral trading system. To that end, we will seek to establish and make effective use of direct links to appropriate key international organizations such as the World Trade Organization, the World Customs Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation, and others.

We will, of course, place a high priority on helping our members better understand and navigate the new global trade architecture that is emerging as a consequence of initiatives such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations and other bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade initiatives.

What does this mean in practical terms?

In the context of the points just noted, these are just some of the questions we may address:

How do we best promote the most cost-efficient movement of steel and steel-containing goods through international commerce?

How do we best promote relevant trade liberalizing rules?

How do we most effectively identify and tackle excessive, costly regulations that burden all participants in the steel supply chain?

How can we more effectively address unwarranted protectionist measures?

How can we best address in international forums

"whole of the supply chain" concerns and issues, rather than taking a more narrowly focused, piece-meal approach?

Some additional final points for now about the Partnership:

It is a separate entity, established by means of a formal, joint agreement; it will have a separate website; and it will be open to new members.

Best of all, if you are an AIIS member, you are also now a member of the Partnership.

If you are not an AIIS member, and the steel supply chain is important to you, this would be a great time to look at the considerable and increasing value of membership, and join now.

Stay tuned for more news!

Finally this month, we have the great pleasure of welcoming a new member to the AIIS family, the LW Steel Corporation, based in Chicago, Illinois. We look forward to a long and fruitful affiliation.

## **MARKET UPDATE**

The U.S. economy performed even worse during the first quarter than originally thought, shrinking at an annualized rate of 0.7 percent, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

The BEA had estimated in April that the economy grew by 0.2 percent from January to March, but it revised that number downward as it collected more information. The 0.7 percent decline is still considered a preliminary estimate, with the final measure to be released in late June.

Gross domestic product growth was hurt by the strong dollar, which has sharply increased the trade deficit. Exports are counted as positives and imports as negatives in the measure of GDP performance, and if those two factors are removed from the first quarter calculations, the economy grew at a rate of 1.2 percent.

Consumer spending accounts for about two-thirds of the country's economic activity, and it increased by just 1.8 percent in the first quarter, following growth of 4.4 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014. The slowdown in spending

*(continued on page 3)*



### *Market Update (continued from page 2)*

occurred even as fuel prices have dropped sharply. Consumers appear to be using the money saved at gas pumps to pay down debt or increase savings. The lower energy prices, meanwhile, have led to a decline in oil and gas exploration projects and the jobs and other economic activity that come with them.

The economy was also slowed during the first quarter by several major snowstorms along the East Coast, along with harsh weather elsewhere. This has become something of a trend. First quarter growth has been negative in three of the past five years, and those have been the only negative quarters since mid-2009. Last year, the economy contracted at a rate of 2.1 percent during the first quarter, then went on to grow at rates of 4.6 percent, 5 percent and

2.2 percent for the rest of the year. This has led to some suggestions that the Q1 numbers are a seasonal aberration, and economic growth will strengthen with the moderation in weather. Jason Furman, chairman of the White House's Council of Economic Advisors, stressed the weather-related effects in a blog post and wrote that methodology adjustments may be needed to account for the impact of what he described as climate change.

"To the extent that worsening winter weather is part of a long-term trend rather than a random occurrence, changing weather patterns may be related to residual seasonality," Furman wrote. "A seasonal adjustment algorithm should adjust for effects of normal weather within a particular quarter – and to the extent that global climate

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### *Market Update (continued from page 3)*

change leads to a new 'normal' for weather, seasonal adjustments will eventually catch up. Indeed, first-quarter underperformance (defined as the difference between GDP growth in the first-quarter and the rest of the year) has tended to increase over the past ten years, in parallel with intensifying winter weather."

Others see the slowdown as having more to do with economic fundamentals than weather, though. Many analysts are forecasting growth of just 2 percent during the second quarter, while the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta expects only a 0.8 percent expansion.

A week before the latest GDP numbers were announced, Federal Reserve Chairman Janet Yellen said that, "The headwinds facing our economy have not fully abated, and, as such, I expect that continued growth in employment and output will be moderate over the remainder of the year and beyond." Despite those unabated headwinds, Yellen nonetheless said that the Fed will most likely raise interest rates this year because, "Delaying action to tighten monetary

policy until employment and inflation are already back to our objectives would risk overheating the economy."

The unemployment rate dipped a tenth of a point in April to 5.4 percent, the lowest level since May 2008, as the economy added 223,000 jobs, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. Many observers have noted the dichotomy of an unemployment rate that is steadily decreasing in an economy that is giving more and more signs of being shaky.

The unemployment rate, though, is an imprecise measure. In May, the Federal Reserve released the results of its "Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2014" survey, which showed that more than a third of all workers and nearly half of all part-time workers would prefer to work more hours at their current wage, if given the choice. This apparent underemployment, combined with a lack of significant wage growth – hourly wages increased just 2.1 percent from April 2014 to April 2015, which has been typical of the post-Great Recession period – makes for conditions that are weaker than the overall

*(continued on page 5)*



unemployment rate seems to indicate.

All of this may be contributing to a lack of consumer confidence. The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index measured 95.4 in May, virtually unchanged from April's 95.3. (The index's baseline is 100, established in 1985.) "While current conditions in the second quarter appear to be improving, consumers still remain cautious about the short-term outlook," the group's director of economic indicators said.

The Institute for Supply Management's Purchasing Managers Index was unchanged from March to April at 51.5. Any rating over 50 is associated with expansion in the manufacturing sector, so the index is close to the threshold indicating manufacturing contraction. The PMI, which is based on a survey of the nation's supply executives, was as high as 58.1 in August. Out of 18 manufacturing sectors surveyed, only 15 reported growth in April, up from 10 in March.

***At the end of May, the dollar was trading at 0.92 euros, 0.65 pounds, 124.17 yen and 6.2 yuan.***

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 115 points to close at 18,010.68 on May 29, the day the Q1 GDP numbers were announced. This was nearly 300 points off the record high set on March 2. The S&P 500 closed at 2,107.39 on that day, about 10 points below its record high set on April 24.

At the end of May, the dollar was trading at 0.92 euros, 0.65 pounds, 124.17 yen and 6.2 yuan.

Both housing starts and housing completions improved significantly in April, with the former increasing 20.2 percent from March and 9.2 percent from the previous April, and the latter growing 20.4 percent from March and 19.4 percent from a year earlier, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Existing home sales, however, declined 3.3 percent from March to April. This, though, was still 6.1 percent higher than in April 2014, the National Association of Realtors reported. The association's chief economist attributed April's decline to "lagging supply

relative to demand and the upward pressure it's putting on prices." The median price for existing homes in April was \$219,400, 8.9 percent higher than in April 2014.

Sales of light trucks in April were 7.9 percent higher than they were a year ago, while car sales were down 2.6 percent, the National Automobile Dealers Association reported. Light trucks account for about 55 percent of all light-vehicle sales. The association's chief economist said that, "Auto sales remain a leading indicator and, while the rest of the economy has hit a soft patch, we expect a rebound during summer."

And therein lies the question. Was January to March just a "soft patch" – and a predictable one at that – or did it reveal a deeper economic weakness that was masked for a couple of quarters last year.

An optimist might note that, in addition to the effects of transient factors such as bad weather, the GDP calculations show the United States being penalized for a strong currency that helped to push down exports 7.6 percent during the first quarter and boost imports 4.5 percent. This slowed economic growth by nearly 2 percentage points during the most recent quarter and by more than 1 point in the fourth quarter of 2014. The chairman of the Federal Reserve sounds sanguine when she expresses concern about the economy potentially "overheating" if interest rates remain low beyond this year, but even she, like many others, uses the word "moderate" in reference to anticipated growth. The era of lowered expectations seems here to stay for at least a little while longer.

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## Our Mission

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- Import and export compliance manual workshops outlining step by step development of these critical materials
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Global Trade Regulatory Review was created to help improve the regulation of global trade from the grassroots up. Global Trade Regulatory Review relies heavily on the input of global trade market participants who share similar goals in improving the regulation of global trade. Our mission is to pursue four goals in improving the regulatory process.

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For more information concerning the mission of the Global Trade Regulatory Review and how you can participate, please contact us or see our information at the following addresses:

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## STEEL SHORTS

### CBP Bill Includes Provisions to Help Domestic Steel Industry

Legislation passed by the Senate on May 14 would, supporters say, help the domestic steel industry by cutting down on currency manipulation.

Some lawmakers from steel-producing states, including members of both parties, say that certain countries are using inappropriate means to reduce the value of their currency. This, combined with an already strong dollar, promotes imports into the United States. In recent years, steel imports, in particular, have increased sharply, though they have declined fairly steadily during the past six months.

The Customs and Border Protection reauthorization bill ([H.R. 644](#)), which was approved by a 78-20 vote in the Senate, includes a provision drawn from the proposed “Currency Undervaluation Investigation Act” ([S. 433](#)) that would direct the Commerce Department to regard currency manipulation as an illegal subsidy and to apply duties in such cases. The agency already has this authority but does not use it.

In addition, the legislation incorporates a bill ([S. 891](#)) aimed at strengthening trade laws with a series of revisions and clarifications to the Commerce Department’s process for investigating and adjudicating possible trade violations. The sponsor of the bill that was folded into the CBP reauthorization, Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), has specifically referenced “layoffs like those we’ve seen recently in the steel sector” in advocating for its passage.

“We can give the steel industry and others new tools to fight back when foreign imports undercut their business,” Brown said after the vote.

A different version of the bill passed the House of Representatives in February. The legislation now goes back to that chamber, where support for the trade and currency manipulation provisions is uncertain.

### Senate Passes Trade Promotion Authority Legislation

The Senate on May 22 passed legislation to renew the President’s Trade Promotion Authority, which expired in 2007.

The “Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act” ([S. 995](#)), which the Senate passed 62-37, would establish an expedited “fast-track” process for approving trade agreements once negotiations are complete. This would mean that lawmakers would simply vote yes or no on the pact, without re-writing the agreement once it has been agreed to.

The TPA legislation would ease the approval process for a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, which the United States and 11 other nations are currently negotiating.

If successfully concluded, the TPP agreement would be the world’s largest free trade agreement.

“If done right, these agreements are vital to expanding opportunities for the middle class, leveling the playing field for American workers, and establishing rules for the global economy that help our businesses grow and hire by selling goods made in America to the rest of the world,” President Obama said after the bill’s passage. “This trade promotion authority legislation includes strong standards that will advance workers’ rights, protect the environment, [and] promote a free and open Internet, and it supports new robust measures to address unfair currency practices,” the President continued.

If approved by all 12 participating nations, the Trans-Pacific Partnership would bind together a group of countries that represents 40 percent of global GDP and about one-third of world trade. China is not included in these negotiations, but is participating with 15 other countries in a separate, parallel set of regional trade negotiations known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) talks.

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### *Steel Shorts (continued from page 7)*

Although President Obama backs the TPA legislation, only 14 Senate Democrats supported it. A few Republicans also voted against the measure.

In the House, Trade Promotion Authority legislation ([H.R. 1890](#)) cleared the Ways and Means Committee in April and is expected to pass the GOP-controlled chamber.

### **“Several” Anti-Dumping Complaints Expected to Be Filed by U.S. Steel**

U.S. Steel is expected to file “several” anti-dumping complaints soon.

The company, the nation’s largest steel producer, has long complained that “unfair” trade practices are hurting its business and has attributed the recent idling of multiple plants to the effect of imports.

U.S. Steel CEO Mario Longhi said in May that, “The surge in imports is unprecedented.”

“It’s no longer a matter of if we’re going to file [anti-dumping complaints], it’s a matter of when,” Longhi said.

In separate comments, Longhi downplayed the influence of the strong dollar, saying it is dumping that gives foreign competitors an advantage.

“If the strong dollar was the only thing we needed to contend with, I think we could handle it,” he said. “The problem is, if you look before the dollar got strong, if you look at the massive amounts of dumping that has been taking place continuously, that has been the source for the major problems for the industry.”

### **ArcelorMittal Cites “Unfairly Traded” Imports in Mill Closing**

A steel manufacturer is once again pointing to rising imports as a primary cause for a plant closing. ArcelorMittal, the world’s largest steel producer, announced that it will close its mill in Georgetown, S.C., by Sept. 30.

The Georgetown mill, the company said, “has been severely impacted by waves of unfairly traded steel imports from China and other countries.”

“Despite our joint efforts and a highly productive workforce, the facility has incurred significant losses since the restart [in 2011 after being idle for two years] due to high input costs and imports,” P.S. Venkat, CEO of ArcelorMittal Long Carbon North America, said.





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## CUSTOMS CORNER

### CEE Update

U. S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) continues to move forward with the implementation of its Centers for Excellence and Expertise (CEEs). The first three of the ten Centers are (Electronics, April 2015) or soon will be (Petroleum, July, and Pharmaceuticals, end of summer) fully operational, handling post-entry processing of all importations of the commodities assigned to them across the country. The additional seven Centers, which together will cover all remaining imported merchandise, are expected to reach full operability, in phases, within 18 months to two years. At that point all CBP Import Specialists will be assigned to one of the CEEs, and all post-entry processing will be conducted by the CEEs.

CEEs are virtual organizations. All of the personnel assigned to them will remain at their physical locations around the country, probably in the same offices and at the same desks they occupied when assigned to the various Port Directors. Each Center has a physical location for administrative purposes, but the work of the CEEs is shared electronically with assigned personnel located at most of the current Service Ports. Goods physically entered in one port may be processed by staff located at another port. Document filing will all be electronic, something that is of course made possible in part with the full implementation of the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE) in November 2015.

Entry processing, admissibility determination, cargo inspections, and at least for now drawback and duty collection will continue at the Port level. For products covered by fully operational CEEs, however, most post-entry processing – reviewing the Entry Summary (7501), handling Requests for Information and Notices of Action, entry liquidations, and other related actions will occur at the CEE. This applies both to goods imported by companies that have voluntarily “joined” a CEE as a participant, and goods imported by non-participating importers. A major difference is that participating importers handled by a CEE Partnership Branch will have a single CEE as a point of contact at CBP, and all of its transactions for all merchandise will normally be handled by personnel at that CEE familiar with the company’s operations. Imports by non-participating importers will be handled on a commodity basis, with entries assigned to teams based on the predominant commodity line (as is now done within a port); an importer (and its brokers) whose goods are covered by several CEEs will have to deal with each of them separately. Non-participating importers will have their transactions handled by the Validation and Compliance Branch at each CEE, but even within a single CEE not necessarily by the same personnel from transaction to transaction.

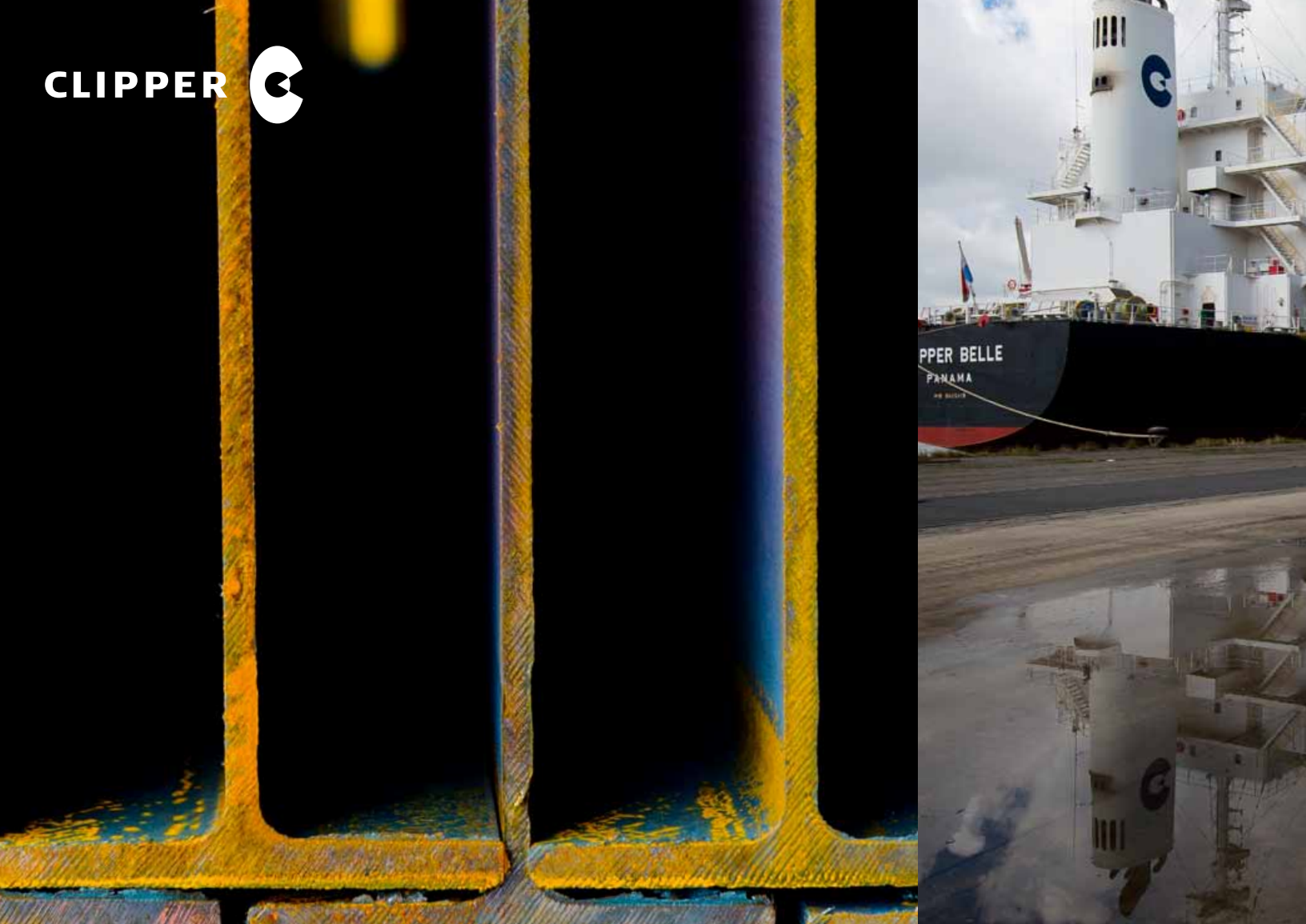
During the transition stages there will be a few additional differences in the treatment of participating CEE importer members and those whose transactions are assigned to CEEs based on commodity. Participants can file Protests with their CEEs; other importers will still file through the port of entry. Participants can consolidate Prior Disclosures at the CEE level; other importers must file with the FP&F offices at the ports. It is expected that these processes will eventually move to the CEE level, but the timing remains uncertain.

AIIS was involved in the public workshops that were held during the development of the CEEs, and specifically the Base Metals CEE headquartered in Chicago. The Institute continues to work with the CEE personnel, who have taken part in AIIS Customs Committee meetings. The Base Metals CEE is still in the test stage, supporting only importers who have applied for participation.

**Steven W. Baker**

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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*The Houstonian Houston Hotel*

December 15, 2015

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