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Opinion: Economic growth has made South Carolina a target for foreign IP thieves

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South Carolina has staked its economic future on innovation, and that bet is paying off. Life sciences is our state's fastest-growing industry, with an economic impact of \$25.7 billion per year. Meanwhile, employment in the Palmetto State's booming tech industry has grown by nearly a quarter since 2019.

But with success comes risk. Our rapid economic growth has made us a target. Encouraged by the Biden administration's weak enforcement, intellectual property thieves in China, Russia, India, and even Europe are stealing from the high-tech companies that call South Carolina home.

Congress and the new administration must fight back against this blatant theft and restore strong IP enforcement that puts America and South Carolina first.

South Carolina isn't just excelling in life sciences and tech; we're also emerging as a global leader in advanced manufacturing. Giants like Boeing, Mercedes-Benz, and Volvo have invested here, creating good-paying jobs and strengthening our industrial base.

Simply put, our economy thrives on new ideas and cutting-edge technology and on the IP rights that protect them.

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Patents and other IP protections make the costly, time-consuming process of developing new technologies worthwhile. They give inventors the exclusive right to

produce and sell their creations for a limited time, allowing them to recoup the enormous costs of research and development.

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Without these protections, there would be little incentive to invest in breakthrough products that require billions of dollars and years of research with no guarantee of success. So protecting IP is vital to our economic health.

That's why it's so devastating that for the past four years, the Biden administration allowed, and in many cases encouraged, IP theft instead of cracking down on it.

One key failure has been the erosion of the Special 301 Report, a tool Congress created to spotlight the worst cases of foreign IP infringement. Released annually by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), the Special 301 served for decades as America's first line of defense against foreign patent theft.

That changed during the Biden administration. Recent reports have downplayed or completely ignored IP violations that had previously been called out.

Take, for example, the growing use of compulsory licensing by foreign governments. Compulsory licensing allows a government to let its domestic companies infringe on patents without the patent owner's authorization.

Past Special 301 Reports rightly condemned this practice, but under Biden, the USTR has instead embraced it, stating that the United States "respects its trading partners' rights to grant compulsory licenses."

If President Trump's new USTR doesn't break from the Biden administration's negligent enforcement practices and take a firm stand against foreign IP violators, the consequences for South Carolina's economy could be dire.

Our flourishing life sciences industry and all the other sectors that depend on patents will be jeopardized. Nearly one-third of our state's private-sector jobs will be put at risk.

President Trump's trade agenda promises to put American workers, entrepreneurs, and businesses first. South Carolina's representatives in Congress can urge the administration to make sure this is reflected in the next Special 301 Report, which is currently in development.

By recommitting to IP protection and enforcement with a strong Special 301 Report, we can ensure that our state's investments in the future keep paying off for years to come.

James Edwards, executive director of Conservatives for Property Rights (@4Property Rights), is a native South Carolinian and author.