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MULTIPLE ISSUES, MULTIPLE ACTORS – THE PLAYERS IN CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS: AN OVERVIEW

Ambassador Gordon D. Giffin^{†‡}
U.S. Speaker

Thank you, Dr. King. It is a pleasure and an honor to be here. I think Bob and I are hoping to have more of a conversation than a lecture here this morning. Therefore, I will make a few minutes of remarks and then let Bob make his remarks and then we can have a dialogue with all of you.

The context for my analysis is considering the Canada-U.S. relationship in a broad geopolitical context as opposed to the specific sectors that you will talk about later in the conference, from an American's perspective. I will probably talk primarily about a perspective on how Canada deals with the U.S. I do not by doing that suggest that the United States does everything right in the way we deal with Canada or anyone else in the world. It is rather that I see my assignment to be looking north rather than looking south.

The Canada-U.S. relationship is enormously complicated. In my view, it is enormously complicated primarily because Canada makes it enormously complicated.

When I think about it, the best way I can express it is the relationship is like a telescope pointed across the border. Canadians look through the end that magnifies everything. Everything is bigger than it appears or than it is.

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[‡] *Editor's note – Thanks must be extended to Samantha Brutout, a second year student at the Case Western Reserve School of Law, for her assistance in editing the first session.*

The United States looks through the other end where everything is so distant, they do not even think about it. It is so far away, so obscure, there is not enough attention. So just think about this big telescope pointed across the 49th parallel, and that will help.

I used to kid people at the embassy, in my view, and I am being a little flippant to dramatize the point, but Canadians obsess about the United States. As a result, the Canadian government obsesses about the United States.

Jokingly, I used to say our goal here is to achieve a circumstance where one week a month they obsess about somebody else, pick any other country in the world and obsess about that one this week so I can relax a little and manage some of the personnel. I would have a work plan for a week or for a month that regularly would get sidetracked by the front page of a Canadian paper that was focused on something the U.S. did, that somebody in Canada was upset about, often times legitimately upset, but the intensity of the focus on the United States was remarkable.

Now, if you flip that over, there are very few days when the Canadian Ambassador in Washington gets up to find something on the front-page of the Washington Post where the United States is focused on what Canada did the day before. That is unfortunate I am not suggesting that is positive, but the dynamic is so different.

Now, I believe that our relationship together has to reach a new stage of maturity. We have gone through several evolutions over the century and a half or so of our history together. The latest plateau that I suggest that our relationship achieved was the so-called free trade plateau.

NAFTA is a species of free trade. It is not fulsome free trade; in any event, it is the free trade plateau. Nevertheless, that plateau was achieved in 1988.

If you think about it, the FTA is 16 years old. That is before we were using the Internet.

At one point, I referred to that component of our relationship as an Edsel and the more I think about it, that is not fair, because an Edsel was not a success. NAFTA or free trade has been a success. It is just antiquated and it is time for a newer, more mature relationship. The challenge there is it requires focus and effort on both sides of the border in order to achieve that new mature relationship. On the U.S. side, we as a country and as a government have to focus on how important the development of our continent is and the relationships on our continent. Certainly, Mexico has its own challenges and our relationship with Mexico similarly has its own challenges. I do not want to purport to know much about that because I do not. However, there is no question that we as a government and as a country have to refine our focus and refine our view of what the future of the continent is. We are all into globalization, worrying about what globalization's effect on us may be.

I suggest to you that continentalism is a subset of globalization and the U.S. has missed it. We are not paying attention to it as a country. Our perspective is far afield to places in the world where there are problems. Obviously, you do have to pay attention to problems. Nevertheless, I often refer to Canada as the wheel that does not squeak. We have to turn our attention as a country and as a policy-making group to that wheel.

In Canada, I suggest that there should be what I refer to as a national conversation about what Canadians want the relationship with the United States to be going forward. There is a schizophrenia, in my view, in Canada, with respect to the United States. On the one hand, we are known to be a rather friendly group of people that buy everything they make in Canada, does not matter what it is, ship it south and we buy it. About 88 percent of what is exported from Canada comes to the United States and we buy it.¹ Canadians like that trade relationship. It helps the standard of living, makes life quite pleasant. That is a good thing. We have Florida and we have Arizona, Canadians get to travel there. It is warm, pleasant, and sunny. That is a good thing.

Therefore, on the one hand, the right side of the Canadian brain likes the United States. The left side of the Canadian brain tries to establish what all the differences are between Canadians and Americans. It is extraordinarily important to Canadians explain to themselves and to the rest of the world that they not Americans and to define the reasons why they are not.

It always gave me a little bit of a chuckle when Canadians would talk about how as compared to Americans they're much more modest and understated, and after about fifteen minutes of telling me how much more moral they were, how more interested they were in world affairs and so forth, and I'd look and say that's the modest part, right? However, the challenge for the relationship from the Canadian perspective is for Canada and Canadians to come to grips with what they want the U.S. relationship to be.

There is this phrase in Canada, referring to the United States, "you are our best friends, whether we like it or not."² That phrase displays an ambivalence that gets in the way of the evolution of the relationship. I was asked by the press often times what was my primary goal as U.S. Ambassador to Canada. I would respond, my primary goal is the day I drive back across the border to re-enter private life, I want to be able to say that I erased the phrase after the coma; to finally reach the point where all Canadians would say, "you are our best friends," period.

¹ Robert Samuelson, *G-8 Must Squelch Economic Nationalism Leaders Should Act to Prevent Consequences of a Weaker Dollar*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, May 30, 2003.

² METROPOLITAN CORPORATE COUNSEL, CANADA AND THE U.S. – THE WORLD'S LARGEST BI-LATERAL TRADING RELATIONSHIP (2003).

I did not get there. I believe that in order for the relationship to make the kind of progress that we need to make together, Canadians are going to have to have a conversation and decide, “are we, or aren’t we, should we be or shouldn’t we be, are the things we have in common so overwhelmingly dominant in the relationship that they should be the things that drive us, as opposed to the things that we disagree on.” I think that kind of consensus has to be achieved in Canada for us to move to the next to plateau.

Any Prime Minister in Canada right now has to walk an enormously fine line of on the one hand maintaining a close enough relationship that the economics work very well, that the transborder movement works very well, but, on the other hand, has to satisfy the left side of the Canadian brain that keeps the Americans at arm’s length.³ That is an enormously difficult challenge.

Bob and I were talking last night, if you look at recent Prime Ministers in Canada, Brian Mulroney had an enormously close relationship with President Reagan and President Bush 41.⁴ I think as a consequence, he was able to do some things not just in the bilateral relationship, but to do some things where he drew the United States into global issues that were very, very productive. His efforts, because of that close relationship, helped the bilateral relationship and actually caused the United States to do things that we should do anyway. Nevertheless, he was criticized in Canada. Ultimately, one of the reasons why he had to retire as Prime Minister is because he was viewed to be too close to the United States.⁵

On the other hand, at the end of Prime Minister Chrétien’s tenure, he was being criticized in Canada for being too distant from the United States, for not getting along well enough with George Bush 43.⁶ Again, flippantly, I refer to that as the Goldilocks conundrum, the Prime Minister of Canada cannot ever get it just right because he or she will fall on one side of that line or other.

They tend to want to fall on the arm’s length side of that line for political purposes. Therefore, before we can get to the institutions that implement the policy goals, you have to examine what the greater framework of the relationship is going to look like going forward and exactly what the two countries want the goals to be.

³ Susan Delacourt, *Uncle Sam and Us*, TORONTO STAR, Jan. 10, 2004, at F1.

⁴ Sheldon Alberts & Bill Curry, *Left and Right Attack PM for Criticizing Bush: ‘Extremely Unwise’: Mulroney: Comments Harmful at Time When U.S. Needs to be Onside, Say Alberta Premier, Liberal MPs*, NATIONAL POST, May 29, 2003, at A4.

⁵ Susan Delacourt, *Uncle Sam and Us*, TORONTO STAR, Jan. 10, 2004, at F1.

⁶ Pilita Clark, *Despite Striking Similarities, Australia, Unlike Canada, is One of U.S. President Bush’s Biggest Cheerleaders When it Comes to Iraq. What Gives?*, GLOBE AND MAIL FOCUS, Feb. 8, 2003, at F3.

Moreover, I suggest it is going to require Canada to come to grips with the relationship first, not because they should, but because of the U.S. attention span that I referred to before, that we are looking at the wheels that squeak.

I would hope that Canada, maybe in the context of its next election, would have a conversation about what it wants the U.S. relationship to look like, get a coherent view of it, chart a course, and then be the demandeur with the United States about progress. I think it is going to take Canada to be that focus demandeur, because of the A.D.D. in the U.S. government, not just this government, but any government.

The myth that is out there in the press, particularly in Canada that the Canada-U.S. relationship is somehow in the tank, that it is at a historically low point, that things are just awful, I think is nonsense. I do not think the Canada-U.S. relationship is in the tank.

If you go back and look at the Diefenbaker period, you look at the Trudeau/Nixon period; I do not believe that the current aggravation between Canada and the United States even makes the top five.

That is just a little food for thought. I have got a lot more specifics we can discuss. I do not want to take up Bob's time and, hopefully, we can engage in a conversation.

