

ONTARIO & THE U.S.: CLOSE TIES, COMPLEX ISSUES

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IF THE PROVINCE WERE A COUNTRY, IT WOULD RANK AS THE UNITED STATES' FOURTH-LARGEST TRADING PARTNER, AFTER CANADA, CHINA AND MEXICO.

By Aaron Honn and John Nay

Canada and the United States are a bit like fraternal twins. Each has different identities and personalities, but they share a heritage and a history that make for a close, vital and distinctive relationship. That is especially true in the province of Ontario, home to Embassy Ottawa and Consulate General Toronto. Ontario showcases the full complexity and depth of these "family ties," including the longest border with the United States of any Canadian province or Mexican state, the largest trading relationship and, arguably, the single most important border crossing in the world.

Uniquely, the U.S.-Ontario border is entirely a water boundary, so the relationship has developed by crossing over or under rivers and lakes or via air connections. Ontario has 14 bridges for automobile border crossings as well as an important car tunnel, plus two rail tunnels, a separate rail bridge and at least five regularly scheduled ferry crossings. Six of the car bridges and all but one of the other crossings lie in southern Ontario.

Those bridges, tunnels, rail links and airports provide the infrastructure for a truly massive trading relation-

ship, with over \$750 million in trade flowing between the United States and Ontario every day, representing over half of all U.S.-Canada trade. In fact, if the province were a country, it would rank as the United States' fourth-largest trading partner, after Canada, China and Mexico. Some 42 million vehicles, including 8.3 million trucks, crossed between the United States and Ontario in 2006.

By far the most economically important crossings are the bridges and tunnels into Detroit and Port Huron, Mich., and the four bridges near Buffalo, N.Y. Notably, more trade crosses the 78-year-old Ambassador Bridge linking Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Mich., than is exchanged between the U.S. and Germany, or than moves across any other border crossing in the world.

Unique Issues

Ontario has become the largest motor-vehicle assembler in North America, surpassing even Michigan. Free trade in autos and parts has been a reality since the signing of the Auto Pact in 1965, and so many parts go back and forth across the border that many cars have effectively crossed the border seven times before being sold. Because auto and parts manufacturers have gone to a "just-in-time" delivery system, any bridge closures or delays quickly disrupt manufacturing operations and

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cost millions of dollars. Other shippers find that the shortest route between New York and Michigan is through southern Ontario; they never stop in Canada at all except for customs inspections.

Toronto's Pearson International Airport and Ottawa's Macdonald-Cartier International Airport are two of eight airports in Canada (and less than a handful of others around the world) to host Department of Homeland Security/Customs and Border Protection officers, who pre-clear air travelers to the United States prior to boarding flights. Nearly nine million passengers flew through Pearson to or from the United States in 2006, making it America's fifth-busiest airport port of entry. Pearson also handles 40 percent of Canada's air cargo.

For almost a century the International Joint Commission, established in 1909 under the Boundary Waters Treaty, has served as a model for managing and resolving maritime border disputes. To protect the quality of our shared water resources and ensure equitable sharing of this vital resource, Washington and Ottawa have signed several bilateral agreements. These include a

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1950 treaty governing sharing of water from the Niagara River to generate power on both sides of the border, while ensuring sufficient water to maintain Niagara Falls; and the 1972 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which commits Canada and the U.S. to maintaining the integrity of that ecosystem and cleaning up polluted sites.

Canadians do not need visas to travel to the U.S., of course, but Toronto visa officers still have much to do. Toronto is perhaps the world's most diverse city; nearly 50 percent of Torontonians were born outside of Canada (compared, for example, to the 36 percent of New Yorkers who are foreign-born). Non-Canadian applicants from around the world — over 60,000 representing some 172 countries in 2006 — come to Consulate Toronto to apply for U.S. visas. This makes our non-immigrant visa work more varied and challenging in its own way than perhaps at any other post.

Toronto also is the only U.S. Foreign Service post with major league baseball and an NBA team, and both Toronto and Ottawa host storied NHL franchises. This means that consular and CBP officers in both cities sup-



Courtesy of Embassy Ottawa

The International Bridge links Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. It crosses over the Soo Locks, which connect Lake Superior and the lower Great Lakes.

port movements of nationals from all over the world on these teams and the teams they play, as well as assisting foreign fans who want to see baseball, NFL, NHL or NBA games in Detroit or Buffalo.

Toronto and several other Ontario municipalities also send their trash across the border to Michigan landfills under contract with private companies, a longstanding thorn in the side of the state's residents. On a recent trip to the border, in a span of 10 minutes we counted 16 empty container trucks returning from Michigan. Restricting the flow of this kind of politically sensitive commerce may not be consistent with U.S. free-trade obligations under NAFTA and to the World Trade Organization, however. In addition, any attempt to impose controls might prompt reciprocal restrictions on the export of hazardous waste for destruction in Canada by Canadian specialty waste-management firms.

Finally, land claims and border-crossing rights by First Nations (the Canadian term for the country's many indigenous peoples) present unique challenges for tradi-

tional bilateral diplomacy — and perhaps nowhere more so than in Ontario. The territory of one First Nation, the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, actually straddles the U.S.-Canada border, including portions of New York, Ontario and Quebec. Treaties dating back to the Revolutionary War—era grant these groups the right to cross freely between the United States and Canada. Canadian First Nations members generally use their official status cards as identification when crossing into the U.S., as many are reluctant to acknowledge Canadian government sovereignty by using a passport. Current status cards do not meet the new DHS requirements for secure documentation, however, so First Nations members hope a new secure status card can be issued and will be accepted.

These are but a few examples of why some academics are using the term “intermestic” to refer to the way these international issues become heated, politicized domestic issues. Ontario is certainly a case study for that type of bilateral relations. ■

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