

# The Epoch Times

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## North American Summit Overshadowed by Election

Reuters

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NEW ORLEANS—With the U.S. election looming over their annual summit, North American leaders gathered on Monday for largely symbolic meetings likely to be dominated by questions about free trade.

At the two-day summit, U.S. President George W. Bush and his Canadian and Mexican counterparts are expected to defend the 14-year-old North American Free Trade Agreement, which has come under fire in the United States amid concerns that the country is in or headed to a recession.

Shortly after arriving, Bush said he chose New Orleans for the summit to celebrate the "comeback of a great American city."

Bush's administration was lambasted for its poor response to the August 2005 Hurricane Katrina—he worst natural disaster in U.S. history. Critics have said recovery has been slow in the city once known mainly for its jazz and lively night life but now marked by memories of deadly flooding.

"I wanted to send a clear signal to the people of my country that New Orleans is open for business, it's a good place to visit and that after the devastation of Katrina, it's become a hopeful city," Bush said at a ceremony to reopen the Mexican consulate, which was shut down in 2002 in a cost-cutting move.

Aside from showcasing the city, analysts expect few concrete results from the "Three Amigos" summit with Mexican President Felipe Calderon and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper—in part because Bush is leaving office in January.

"The political environment's not terribly conducive to any big progress," said Leonardo Martinez-Diaz, a Mexico expert at the Brookings Institution. "The Mexican president already knows that Bush can't deliver, given his lame-duck status."

"I think what's most important from the Mexican side is to get some assurances that what was negotiated in NAFTA will not be disturbed in any big way, regardless of what happens in the election."

Canada is the United States' largest trading partner and Mexico ranks third. Trade between the three countries last year totaled \$930 billion and is expected to reach \$1 trillion by the end of this year.

Canada and Mexico are the largest sources of imported energy to the United States, and Canada is the largest supplier of foreign oil.



President George W. Bush (R) speaks beside Mexican President Felipe Calderon (L) on April 21, 2008 in New Orleans, Louisiana, as part of the North American Leaders' Summit. (Saul Loeb/AFP/Getty Images)

## Questions Over NAFTA


Trade issues have been in the spotlight in the U.S. presidential race as Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have appealed for labor backing by promising to renegotiate or even abandon the unpopular NAFTA, citing the loss of roughly 3 million U.S. manufacturing jobs since 2000.

Obama and Clinton are vying for the Democratic nomination with the winner facing Republican John McCain in the November presidential election to replace Bush. Their opposition to NAFTA has caused concern in Canada and Mexico.

"We believe the NAFTA, while not perfect, continues to work well for the continent and that it is important to have a balanced dialogue about its merits," said Maryscott Greenwood, executive director of the Canadian-American Business Council. "The current political debate tends to be more about broad economic anxiety concerning globalization, and less about the actual impact of the NAFTA."

U.S. Chamber of Commerce President Tom Donohue warned against reopening NAFTA for labor or environment issues because it could expose the United States to demands to renegotiate other parts on valuable commodities such as oil.

In their meetings, the three leaders will talk about the environment and ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They are also expected to discuss regulatory cooperation; harmonizing energy efficiency standards and coordinating efforts to prevent unsafe food and products from entering North America.

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**REUTERS** 

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One final dance for Three Amigos  
April 20, 2008

The United States can't face down a recession by putting up walls to the \$1 trillion worth of trade it expects to do this year with Canada and Mexico. Seven years after 9/11, it's time the White House and Congress shed their obsession with terror-proofing America's borders and focused their energies on facilitating the trade that benefits us all.

That's the main message Prime Minister Harper should carry to the "Security and Prosperity Partnership" summit tomorrow with U.S. President George Bush and Mexican President Felipe Calderon. The two-day New Orleans get-together is the last one for these Three Amigos, all conservatives, as Bush is soon to leave office.

What better moment for Harper to send a message over Bush's head to Republican presidential candidate John McCain and Democrats Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton: the time has come to turn the page on 9/11 and to unsnarl trade at the border crossings.

It is, after all, the Security *and* Prosperity Partnership summit. It's past time Washington stopped impeding the prosperity aspect. Canada has invested more than \$10 billion terror-proofing our side of the border. That ought to be reassurance enough.

Canadians aren't alone in voicing concern. The Brookings Institution in Washington released a study last month on the Great Lakes region economy that found that "a more involved U.S. border screening process" with new security checks, stringent regulations and prolonged questioning has played its part in tripling the processing time to cross the border and in cutting Canadian tourism in half. This has cost both countries some \$11.5 billion annually.

"These conditions threaten to crimp trade and commerce, at a time when the region and both nations have a tremendous shared stake in enhanced economic integration," the report warned.

Given that McCain, Obama and Clinton are talking up the faltering U.S. economy, a strong prod from Harper may have more effect now than at any time since the 9/11 attacks. And Canadian business leaders who will meet with the leaders behind controversially closed doors to lobby for more continental integration should echo Harper's concern.

The business leaders intend to discuss the nitty-gritty of harmonizing North American standards affecting auto sector regulations, fuel efficiency, freezers, fridges and air conditioners; recalling hazardous products; and cracking down on intellectual property rip-offs.

Meanwhile, trade over the Peace Bridge grinds to a halt as the border "thickens," and portable toilets become a fixture at clogged crossings.

This makes no sense. The Americans need to decide, fast, what "secure" documents they want, apart from passports, and on procedures to fast-track people and goods. Both sides urgently need to upgrade crossing points and increase staff. And attitudes need adjusting. Hassling Canadians who want to visit family or friends won't enhance prosperity or security. Neither will holding up truckers and tourists.

Rather than muse about reopening the North American Free Trade Agreement, Obama and Clinton should be challenged to shed the 9/11 "Fortress America" mentality and ease trade frictions.

And the Democrats should be receptive, too, to legitimate complaints about the secrecy surrounding these meetings. **Even the Canadian American Business Council in Washington last year criticized the "lack of transparency" since this trilateral summitry began in 2005.** The process should be opened up.

April 2, 2008

## **U.S. to demand passports by 2009**

By Beth Gorham, THE CANADIAN PRESS

WASHINGTON - Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff insisted Tuesday that American officials will be ready next year to demand passports at the Canada-U.S. border despite the misgivings of legislators and businesses.

At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, Chertoff said entry points already have machines that can read passports, enhanced driver's licences and a new lower-cost passport card for Americans.

And there will be other devices at most border crossings by next spring that can read documents from a distance to speed up the process, he said.

But committee chairman Senator Patrick Leahy said he's still concerned about whether the technology and training available by then can prevent major disruptions as a result of the so-called Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

"I'm worried about the department's record and how it has handled WHTI," said Leahy, who represents Vermont.

"Let's do it right. Canada is a great country."

"We share a lot of our culture and economy with them. I would like to see more money spent to improve our intelligence on both sides of the border for those who are threats than to lose hundreds of billions of dollars worth of jobs because we do something that may be more symbolic than substantive."

The senator also blasted the department's use of U.S. checkpoints far from the border where vehicles, including those of Canadians, are sometimes searched

"It sounds like Big Brother gone awry," he said.

Leahy, fearing traffic chaos, was one of several legislators who pushed Congress to pass legislation delaying the passport requirement at land and sea crossings until June 2009.

Chertoff has always been reluctant to wait that long but finally signalled last week he was willing to comply.

Leahy's concerns are mirrored by businesses that aren't yet confident travel and trade will flow smoothly.

"I hope Chertoff's right but I have my doubts," said Scotty Greenwood, executive director of the Canadian American Business Council.

"What he's willing to do is have immediate economic dislocation and implement the program before the agency is ready."

Even if a Democrat wins the White House in this fall's election, the plan to require passports is unlikely to change, said Greenwood, although it might buy some more time.

Presidential contender Hillary Clinton, a New York senator, has been vocal about taking the time to get the passport plan right.

The U.S. announced it would stop taking oral declarations of citizenship from people crossing the border in January.

But no one has been turned away yet if they don't have the required birth certificate and a piece of government-issued photo identification.

Even when the full passport rule goes into effect, there will be acceptable alternatives, including high-technology driver's licences.

Washington state has already issued 6,500 special licences after a pilot project with British Columbia and there are orders for another 18,000, said Chertoff.

New York, Vermont, Michigan and Arizona are developing the lower-cost alternatives, as is Ontario.

"It's certainly a convenience and an expense saver," said Chertoff. "We are encouraging other states to do this."

Air travellers entering the United States have needed passports since last year.