

The ties that bind

The Midwest and Canada are partners in more than trade.

BY ILENE K. GROSSMAN

Trade between the United States and Canada exceeds \$1 billion a day and supports more than 2 million jobs in each country. The economic importance of this relationship can readily be seen in the Midwest, where Canada is the largest trading partner of nearly every state in the region. The United States is the leading market for each of Canada's 13 provinces and territories.

The economic ties between Canada and the United States prompted the Midwestern Legislative Conference to create the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee in 1991. It quickly became apparent that state and provincial legislators had much in common beyond trade. Despite differences between legislative processes in the states and provinces, public policy challenges such as education reform and health care funding are of great importance to officials on both sides of the border.

The benefits of working cooperatively and sharing information were underscored in 2000, when the province of Saskatchewan became an affiliate member of the MLC, and in 2001, when Ontario affiliated. The Midwest is not alone in acknowledging such ties. Quebec was the first province to affiliate with CSG through the Eastern Regional Conference. Since then the provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have joined the ERC. CSG-WEST also is affiliated with two Canadian provinces, Alberta and British Columbia.

Shared interests

The Midwest-Canada Relations Committee has legislative members from



Trucks coming into the United States were backed up for hours in Windsor, Ontario, two days after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., as tighter security checks slowed down border crossings between the two countries. Photo by The Windsor Star.

all 11 states in the Midwest region and Ontario and Saskatchewan in Canada. Committee leaders also come from both countries, with Rep. Stephen Buehrer of Ohio and Speaker Myron Kowalsky of Saskatchewan serving as co-chairs, and Nebraska Sen. Pam Redfield as vice chair. Members have worked cooperatively on issues such as management of boundary waters, agriculture, university student exchanges and border management.

For several years, the committee worked to repeal Section 110 of the Immigration Reform Act of 1996, which would have required imposition of an automated entry-exit system at the border. Many experts were concerned that implementing the system without proper funding would have caused major backups of people and goods at the border. The federal government finally decided not to impose procedures mandated by Section 110.

In addition to working on issues of shared interest, committee members also have learned about legislative processes on both sides of the border. The commit-



Members of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee visited the Lear Corporation seat-manufacturing facility in Windsor, Ontario, to observe the just-in-time delivery process. They also met with U.S. and Canadian immigration and customs officials and watched Lear seats being installed while visiting a General Motors assembly line in Michigan.

New Canadian-American border agreement signed

American and Canadian officials signed an important new border and security agreement in early December. U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft; Canadian Solicitor General Lawrence MacAulay; and Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Elinor Caplan signed the Memorandum of Cooperation on Dec. 3.

The accord was signed on the same day Ashcroft announced that 600 Army and National Guard troops were being assigned to assist inspectors at border crossings and to conduct helicopter patrols along the border.

The new agreement addresses a number of common immigration and border security concerns and strengthens cooperative efforts between the two nations. It calls for the expansion of Integrated Border Enforcement Teams, multi-agency law enforcement groups, and increases participation in the teams from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

The agreement also bolsters Project

Northstar, a program to improve communication and enhance coordination between U.S. and Canadian law-enforcement agencies. Both countries will discuss the addition of a Canadian presence to the U.S. Foreign Terrorist Tracking Task Force, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police will be given access to the FBI's digital-fingerprint database, the first time access will be granted to another country's police force.

The Memorandum of Cooperation also implements a number of immigration procedures aimed at preventing terrorists from entering either country. To stem unlawful migration between Canada and the United States, the two nations agreed to review their visitor visa policies and develop joint-visa requirements. They will establish joint units to analyze passenger information at major international airports in both countries. Both nations also will increase the number of immigration-control officers posted overseas to bet-

ter identify people who should not be admitted to either country.

Later in December, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Manley and Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge signed a declaration for the creation of a Smart Border for the 21st Century. The accord further refines the cooperative agreement signed on Dec. 3, and outlines a plan for identifying and addressing security risks. Both countries also will adopt a series of measures to expedite the legitimate flow of people and goods across the border, including processing truck, rail and marine cargo at facilities away from the border.

Some concerns about loss of sovereignty, especially relating to the establishment of joint visa standards, have arisen since the accord was signed. Both nations hope the measures they agreed to will help them better coordinate security efforts and ultimately restore confidence about border control.

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tee, with financial support from the government of Canada, has organized a series of cross-border legislative exchanges. Iowa, Minnesota and Ohio have all hosted groups of provincial parliamentarians, while the legislative assemblies of Ontario and Saskatchewan have been hosts to groups of Midwestern state legislators.

The exchanges give legislators from both countries the opportunity to spend a few days “job shadowing” and observing the legislative process across the border. Delegations include four to six legislators who attend caucus and committee meetings and floor sessions with the lawmakers they follow. In most cases, legislators have been able to shadow people from more than one political party, giving them a feel for what it is like to be in both the majority and the minority. The exchanges also have provided an important opportunity for legislators from the Midwest and the neighboring provinces to build professional and personal relationships.

Border security and trade

The committee expects to focus its attention during the current biennium on energy, air-quality, transportation and water issues, but it is the 5,500-mile shared border between the two countries that is now garnering the most public attention. Since Sept. 11, security procedures have been tightened for people and goods, but only 600 border-patrol and immigration officials are regularly posted at the northern border, while the U.S.-Mexico border has 9,000 agents. Immediately after the terrorist attacks, delays at some of the busiest border crossings, such as Detroit-Windsor and Lewiston, N.Y., approached 10 hours as border officials struggled to more closely inspect cargo traveling between the two countries.

Increased scrutiny at the border could lead to critical faults in the “just-in-time” delivery system relied upon by so many companies, especially the big automakers. The Big Three manufacturers have been able to place orders with nearby suppliers in the morning and have the required parts delivered by afternoon,

even if their suppliers were located across the border. Members of the Midwest-Canada Relations Committee visited an auto-seat manufacturer in Windsor and a General Motors plant in Michigan in December 2000. GM received the seats on a just-in-time basis, and any snag in the production or delivery process could have shut down GM’s assembly line at a cost of \$17,000 a minute. The Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor accommodates as many as 7,000 trucks entering the United States a day.

Border management will likely continue as one of the most important issues in U.S.-Canadian relations. (See sidebar, “New Canadian-American border agreement signed.”) While in the short term there will be tighter security

and more troops posted at the border, there also may be an opportunity to look at new ways to manage the border. Agreements by both governments to set similar standards for issuing visas and moving some cargo inspections to the site where the goods are loaded (and then monitoring the cargo with a high-tech tracking system) may offer many of the same protections as the current border-control system but without some of the backups. These modernization efforts are essential to continuing the strong economic relationship the two countries already have established. ★

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