

Interview With CTV March 28, 2006

Canada-U.S. Relations

Q. Well, first of all, Mr. President, thank you very much for inviting us into your home. We certainly appreciate that.

Before we get on to talking about Canada-U.S. relations, I want to deal a little bit with your personal relations with Canadians. They haven't exactly been a roaring success. Does that matter? Does that matter to you? Does it matter to the relationship?

The President. I think I've had very good relations with the Canadians with whom I've dealt. I mean, Prime Minister Chretien and his successor, Paul Martin, and I got along just fine. We didn't always agree, but I can understand people not agreeing with some of the decisions I made. But that doesn't necessarily mean there's any problems with the relationship.

I guess much has been made about some of the name-calling that went on. That's just part of politics, and it doesn't bother me in the least. If I was bothered about name-calling from Canada, I'd certainly be bothered about name-calling from the United States as well. [Laughter]

The relationship between Canada and the United States is really a relationship not necessarily by government only but by the peoples, by the interchange, by the exchanges we have, by the relatives on both sides of the border. And that's what really makes the relationship unique and very strong.

Trade With Canada/Softwood Lumber

Q. In that regard, Prime Minister Harper, the new—I think this is now the third Prime Minister you've gone through—

The President. It is. [Laughter]

Q. —in Canada. He said that of the top priorities that he's got, softwood lumber has to be number one; says it's, in his words, putting a very serious strain on the

relationship between the two countries. You've often said that this is something that you want to take care of. I'm giving you an opportunity to make some news here. [Laughter]

The President. I may not see that. [Laughter]

Q. Okay. [Laughter] What would be—is there any one thing that you can do to unblock this issue?

The President. Well, I can tell our people to try to find common ground. I thought we were pretty close to a deal a couple of years ago—I can't remember the exact timing of it, but I know we've been working on softwood lumber for quite a while.

I fully understand how difficult an issue this is, particularly from Canada's perspective, since there's been some rulings. And we want to get it solved. I told that to Stephen Harper, that I understand its importance. I understand its priority. And I'd like to get the issue resolved once and for all myself. The best thing I can do is tell our negotiators that—see if you can find common ground. Again, we were close to an agreement before—maybe that's a place for people to look for common ground.

I know it's not going to get solved if it's done—if these negotiations are public. It's going to require some very quiet consultations to see if we can do what I'd like to see done.

Q. Can it be solved on your watch?

The President. I certainly hope so. This is a difficult issue. I know it creates anxieties in Canada. I really don't want to create anxieties. On the other hand, I do want to be fair to our folks here as well, and I think we can find ground.

Canada-U.S. Border/Homeland Security

Q. Talking about common ground, it seems to me that there's so much that we

have in common between these two countries: We've got the world's largest undefended border; we're both countries at war; we've got boots on the ground in Afghanistan. And yet here at home, we're putting more barriers along that Canadian-American border.

You've often said that the reason for this—or what Stephen Harper calls the passport problem—you've said that it's because you want to know who's coming and going across that border. So I guess it begs the question, are the Canadians not telling you who's coming and going? Are we not doing a good enough job?

The President. Oh, I think Canada has been very cooperative, and the relationship between our services is very good. The idea is to have—it doesn't necessarily have to be a passport. It can be a document, a tamper-proof document that will expedite border crossings, not delay border crossings. The idea is to make sure that tourists and trade moves freely and terrorists don't.

And right after September the 11th, obviously, our country took a hard look at the procedures enabling people to come back and forth across our borders, both north and south. And the idea was to come up, as I said, with a tamper-proof document. I know they've been focused on the passport, but surely we can design something—the law doesn't say passport only; the law says, kind of, passport-like, if I'm not mistaken.

But the key is that it be tamper-proof. We've found a lot of, for example, driver's license forgeries throughout the United States that make it difficult to—you know, as best as we can, assure our citizens that we know who's coming in and who's not.

Q. I guess part of the problem for a lot of people in this is they say, look, it's not so much guys like you and me going across—we've all got passports or identity cards. But it's the minor league, peewee hockey team, or the peewee baseball team that won't be able to play in each other's

countries right now because it's too much of a hassle to get this card.

The President. Again, the idea is to make it hassle-free as best as possible. I can understand—I mean, on any change of the status quo, you can always find, kind of, the nightmare scenario that makes life—it makes it feel like life is going to be a lot worse. I don't think it necessarily has to be. I think we can work with our Canadian counterparts to come up with something that's rational and meets the law that has been passed by the Congress and that I signed.

Trade With Canada

Q. Can you foresee—you're going down to Cancun as part of the exercise, I guess, of imagining a new North America and then getting it going. In your vision, can you foresee a day when there would be free travel of people across the borders without identity cards, just free movement of people in North America?

The President. Oh, I don't know. That's probably down the road. But I'm not imagining an important relationship, though, because we're really building on what our predecessors left behind, which is a trading arrangement that has substantially increased trade between the United States and Canada and Mexico.

Canada is our number-one trading partner. I'm a believer that trade helps grow economies. I think free trade is an important part—and fair trade—something that Canadians want and something that Americans want is free and fair trade—benefits both of us. You know, we traded about nearly \$500 billion, two-way trade, in 2005, which is very positive for both our economies.

What I'm concerned about is that protectionist tendency and isolationist tendency that could emerge in both our countries as well as in Mexico, which would make it harder for us to realize the benefits of collaboration together, make it harder for us to, kind of, grow together. And that

would be not beneficial for the hemisphere, and frankly, it will make it a lot harder for future Americans and Canadians and Mexicans to compete with the Chinese, for example.

And so there is a relationship which exists which needs to be protected and nurtured and streamlined and made more efficient, and that's really what the discussions will be in Cancun.

Canadian Government

Q. A quick last question for you—I don't know if you're going to take the bait on this one.

The President. Probably not.

Q. Okay. [Laughter]

The President. Now that you've let me know—

Q. I let the cat out of the bag.

The President. —let me know there was a hook coming. [Laughter]

Q. Are you any happier with the Conservative Government in Canada than a Liberal Government?

The President. I am—I respect the will of the Canadian people, and as I say, you know, this is—there were some tense times when I made the decision to go to war in Iraq, and I understand that. I'm not the—I fully understand why people, not only in Canada but in the United States, expressed deep concern about the use of force to protect ourselves. I stand by the decision. I think it's the right decision. And therefore, I wasn't surprised when I heard, you know, members of political parties in both our countries express deep concern about it.

Having said all that, however, in the midst of turbulent times, my relationships with the two Prime Ministers, prior to Stephen Harper, were good, solid relationships. We had candid discussions; we were friendly toward each other; we shared the same values of human rights and human dignity and freedom to speak and freedom to worship.

So I view the relationship with Canada as a very strong and important relationship for the United States of America. It's a relationship that we should never take for granted, and I'm confident the Canadians won't take our relationship for granted. And it's a relationship that needs attention and care. And there are problems that arise, like softwood lumber. Hopefully, we'll get that solved. But we've also had a BSE issue that came up on my watch, which we solved, as well as potatoes. We had a potato issue when I first became President of the United States that we worked through with Prime Minister Chretien.

Q. Mr. President, you've been very generous with your time, and I appreciate it.

The President. Well, thanks for coming.

Q. Thank you.

The President. Welcome to Washington.

Q. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:55 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to former Prime Ministers Jean Chretien and Paul Martin, and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 29.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria

March 29, 2006

President Bush. Mr. President, welcome back to the Oval Office. We have just had

a discussion that covered a lot of topics. Every time I meet with the President, he