

# CANADA-U.S. TIES ARE MORE BINDING THAN WE THOUGHT



DAVID ZUSSMAN

In early March, Frank McKenna will become Canada's ambassador in Washington. Given the importance Prime Minister Paul Martin has attached to improving our relations with the United States, Mr. McKenna will be under some pressure to "hit the road running" and quickly show that he brings a new approach to the job. To do that, he will first have to appreciate the vast and complex relations that exist between Canada and the U.S.

Fortunately, the Canada School of Public Service recently published a fascinating two-volume report that documents the nature of the collaboration between our two countries and recommends how Canadian officials should advance our interests when dealing with their U.S. counterparts.

The study was prompted by the recognition that the range and scale of linkages between the two countries have increased dramatically over the past few years to the point that no organization or individual had a complete understanding of the extent of the burgeoning relationship.

The school also recognized that, given the growing complexity of conducting foreign policy due to globalization and other factors, there has been a blurring of the division between domestic and bilateral affairs that has challenged our traditional ways of developing foreign policy.

The report's authors also noted that U.S. decision-makers know very little about Canada and the important economic mutual reliance we have and that, until we understand the dynamics governing the knowledge gap of U.S. officials, our ability to influence them will be severely limited.

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As part of the school's action research roundtable program, a 30-person study team was created to review the relevant literature, distribute a questionnaire to all federal and provincial departments and agencies, interview foreign-policy experts and meet with interest groups in a number of Canadian cities.

The study revealed that there currently are more than 300 formal treaties and countless other informal understand-

ings that govern Canada-U.S. relations. While most people measure the effectiveness and nature of our relations with the United States by how well the prime minister and the president are reported to get along, the study suggests it would be valuable to look at the relationship from a broader perspective.

The analysis demonstrates that our relationship with the U.S. is the aggregation of hundreds, if not thousands, of formal and informal interactions between officials at all levels on both sides of the border.

Until this study appeared, it is unlikely that anyone knew the degree to which our countries are integrated in so many diverse public-policy areas.

The report notes that the "unique strength of Canada-U.S. relations resides primarily in the person-to-person linkages between officials," due to the growing complexity and technical nature of the agreements, the confounding overlap between domestic and international policies (also known as intermeshing), and the complex array of bilateral agreements and processes.

Moreover, the validity and strength of these relationships are also a result of strong personal relations between officials that are often longstanding and based on common professional relationships (such as scientists or experts on particular subjects) that work through "highly specialized and functional channels." The authors also note that the vast majority of these interactions take

place "below the radar screen" of embassy and consular officials, who are not likely to be aware of all of them.

The 75-page report contains a wide range of recommendations that builds on the expertise of deputy ministers, academics and private-sector experts who were interviewed for the study. In general, the consensus is that the federal government needs to be strategic in the way it co-ordinates its relations with the United States.

At a minimum, the report argues, there should be greater direction from our political leaders, stronger institution building, the development and communication of coherent and consistent policy frameworks, and formalized training for those whose jobs depend on understanding the dynamics around Canada-U.S. relations.

The CSPC report comes at a most opportune time, as the federal government is putting the finishing touches on its much-anticipated international policy review, as the U.S. election results give us a clear picture of Washington's policy agenda for the next four years, and as Canada prepares to have a new ambassador to the United States who has lots of energy and likes to get things done.

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