

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? NAFTA Council established to assist in negotiations

The renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been one of the most important issues of this year so far.

It has serious implications, not only for Canada's economy, but also for Canadian jobs.

The current Liberal government announced Aug. 2 a new NAFTA Council to assist in Canadian negotiations on NAFTA, which are set to begin in mid-August. The importance of the Canada-U.S. trading relationship for both Canada the U.S.A.'s prosperity can't be stressed enough and the current government must reinforce this message during the upcoming negotiations.

It's not surprising that Canada and the United States are the world's largest trading partners, with more than \$2 billion in trade crossing the Canada-U.S. border every day. Canada is also the top trading partner for more than 30 of the 50 U.S. states. U.S. exports to Canada increased by 179 per cent since 1993 when NAFTA came into force.

In terms of jobs, NAFTA has created hundreds of thousands of high-paying jobs in Canada, including 550,000 in the auto sector, 400,000 in the forestry sector and 211,000 in the aerospace sector. On the other side of the border, approximately nine million U.S. jobs depend on trade and investment with Canada.

The Conservative party has always been a champion for free trade and NAFTA is a Conservative legacy. We will always work hard to protect this agreement which creates an enormous number of jobs and helps hundreds of thousands of Canadian families prosper. Our current role as the Official Opposition is to ask the serious questions about the current Liberal government's priorities heading into the NAFTA negotiations. We also won't hesitate to hold the current government accountable for their failure to protect Canadian jobs, as we have done on important issues, such as softwood lumber. Canadians can count on us to continue this watchdog role.

Regretfully, the current Liberal government has lost valuable time in its wait-and-see approach to the NAFTA renegotiations. The current government could've been a strong and assertive advocate for Canadian jobs right from the start, but instead have curiously chosen to focus on a trade deal with China over protecting a 24-year old agreement with our closest ally and largest trading partner. We are fortunate to have dedicated public servants, such as Rona Ambrose and James Moore, to serve on the advisory council, taking an active role to help ensure these most serious negotiations receive the full attention they deserve.

Canadians rightfully expect the current Liberal government to have a clear plan for how Canada will approach the negotiations in a fashion that will preserve the benefits of the agreement for North America and protect Canadian jobs. The current government must make every effort to engage the American Congress and utilize cross-border associations to remind American decision makers of the significance of the Canada-U.S. trading relationship to both Canada's and the U.S.A.'s prosperity. Canadians deserve nothing less from their government.

