

New NAFTA falls short

by DAVID TILSON

On May 29, 2019, the current Liberal government tabled Bill C-100 (An Act to implement the Agreement between Canada, the United States of America and the United Mexican States), the renegotiated NAFTA. The Prime Minister and his government are touting it as, 'a good deal for Canadians'; however, it falls short of that claim. Canadians recall the Prime Minister promising a better NAFTA deal, which was followed by him volunteering to renegotiate the agreement and coming back with concession after concession, and no wins for Canada. He promised NAFTA 2.0. and Canada received NAFTA 0.5.

When we look back, we see the Prime Minister demonstrated weak leadership on the NAFTA file from the beginning, as he told President-elect Donald Trump on election night that he was 'more than happy' to start NAFTA negotiations without pre-conditions. Following that, he pursued a complete renegotiation instead of following the lead of other countries, such as South Korea, who made more minor adjustments to their agreements with the U.S. and aimed to minimize disruption to their countries.

Prime Minister Trudeau's negotiating strategy from the start was to highlight his 'progressive agenda,' which was intended to drive a wedge with the US administration, pushing for conditions that had nothing to do with trade. The Prime Minister and his government didn't take the discussions seriously as witnessed in their miscalculation with respect to Mexico insisting on tri-lateral negotiations. All of this resulted in Canada being left in the cold while Mexico and the U.S. worked out a deal with Canada coming in at the end.

As a result of the new deal: automakers are limited in how many cars they can export to the United States; Canadians will have reduced access to essential medicines and will have to pay higher prices for prescription drugs; the U.S. now holds unprecedented influence over our future negotiations with new potential trading partners; U.S. farmers will have non-tariff access to a significant share of the supply-managed sector in Canada, while the U.S. has not made a single concession on its own subsidized and protected dairy industry.

The United States measured their success on NAFTA by what it gained. The Prime Minister measured his on what he didn't give up. We, the Conservative Official Opposition, reluctantly support the deal because no trade deal with the United States is worse than a bad trade deal. However, after October 21, our new government will work to mitigate the damage this deal has caused. We will address things like the lingering softwood lumber dispute, the remaining Buy American provisions, the disjointed regulatory regimes, and the difficulties with cross-border business travel. We will negotiate with the US from a position of strength, by emphasizing security and defence cooperation and by imposing safeguards to protect North American steel from Chinese dumping. We will diversify our trading partners to reduce dependence on the US. We will also lower taxes and reduce regulatory burden on business to ensure that Canada is attractive to investors and that Canadian businesses can compete and win on the world stage.

Conservatives want the best deal for Canadian families, workers, and businesses. A Conservative government will defend Canada's trade interests around the world, unlike Prime Minister Trudeau, who's mishandled the NAFTA negotiations from the very beginning. Canadians deserve better.