

Hope Remains for a New NAFTA

Colin Robertson, the Vice President of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, is confident, despite missing another deadline for completion of a revamped North American Free Trade Agreement, a deal is still possible.

An informal deadline passed in May when the U.S. had hoped to have a revamped North American Free Trade Agreement in place to present to Congress.

Robertson said while making progress on several chapters of the agreement and some thorny issues remain unresolved, all three partners are demonstrating a desire to move forward with a deal.

"My reckoning is we still have many months ahead of us of tough negotiations and then resultant trade-offs before we reach an agreement, but I do think an agreement is possible," he said. "What is very encouraging is that, whereas there was no support two years ago in the Congress for the NAFTA, now there's a very significant chunk of Congress. A couple of examples are where over 100 members of Congress, from the Senate, House, went into the President to say 'don't harm the NAFTA' particularly as it relates to agriculture because the farm community is very supportive of the NAFTA."

Robertson said people will have to see where all of this goes but the good news is negotiations continue and no longer is there a fixed deadline hanging over the heads of the negotiators.

However, he acknowledges there is still some sense of urgency because the United States is engaged in significant trade negotiations with China so there appears to be a feeling that it would be nice to get this one out of the way sooner than later.

Manitoba Premier, Brian Pallister said no one is taking for granted the benefits created on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border by NAFTA.

Pallister recently participated in meetings in New York to promote Manitoba and draw attention to the positive direction in which the province is going.

The premier said Canada's trading relationship with the U.S. and theirs with Manitoba is the strongest of any two nations in the world but sometimes in life people are guilty of taking these blessings for granted.

"I think for many people, frankly in the business sector, for example, felt pretty happy with the way things were," he said in a recent interview. "In Manitoba and across Canada we benefited from the NAFTA, not only the program's terms for trade but also from work-

ing dispute resolution mechanisms and things that gave stability to our relationship. Let's face it the U.S. is an enormous economy and tremendously strong, and so you need rules, and we had rules that gave structure to our trading relationship. We need those rules, and we need rules going forward."

Pallister said it might need some tweaking, some updating, and some chapters that need rewriting and he accepts that. But, what's happened in the last few months is that people who perhaps were a

little bit unappreciative of this trading relationship are starting to understand how important it is, on both sides of the border.

"You're getting American people speaking up in places like Wisconsin and Minnesota where they have economic benefits and jobs created by Canadians," said the premier. "And vice versa we have benefitted from a lot of the work that people in the United States have done regarding our imports."

He said Manitoba imports a lot of goods from the United States and the relationship Manitoba may have taken for granted in the past is in most places not being taken for granted now. •

— By Harry Siemens



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