



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

**THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.
INTERVENTION ON AN OPPOSITION MOTION
REGARDING THE CANADA-UNITED STATES BORDER
MONDAY, APRIL 27, 2009**

Mr. Speaker, A moment or two ago we listened to some interventions by government members who talked about the relative importance of the relationship that Canada has with its southern neighbour, the United States. No one wants to contest that. What my colleague from Ajax—Pickering is saying in his motion to all Canadians, and I would ask government members to read it carefully, is that it is not important enough for us to look in the mirror and say are we not a great partner in this beautiful relationship, but rather what are we doing to let the other member of that partnership understand the importance of that relationship?

At a time when we are both interdependent, and I noted that the member for Sarnia—Lambton also pointed to the fact that one out of every four jobs, 25%, in the United States are dependent on the relationship that Canada and the United States have developed over the years. They must be aware of the commercial impact of this partnership. What are the Conservatives doing to let the other side understand the importance of a relationship to them and hence from that, what are the political decisions that the Americans are making to enhance that partnership?

My colleague from Ajax—Pickering essentially was calling on all Canadians to think in terms of the four themes that need to be addressed. If we are going to be talking about enhancing and nurturing this relationship, no one wants to contest that it is important. Yes, we trade more with the United States and yes, the United States trades more with us than we do with every other nation in the world. Yes, we are a much more important partner to the United States from a commercial point of view than all 27 EU member states, but are the Americans aware of the significance of that? And what are they doing to enhance and nurture that relationship? Because no relationship is worth having unless it is worth nurturing. People have to work at being friends, at being partners, at being business associates, otherwise that partnership, that friendship, that political association collapses. It does not matter what we think of ourselves, unless we engage the other side, it does not work.

I was glad that the parliamentary secretary who just spoke gave us an opportunity to talk about the relationship that has been allowed to go more and more fallow. When we were in government not that long ago, 88% of our international trade went immediately south of the

border. That does not make us a trading nation but it does indicate that we are an integral part of the dynamics of this continental economy. We were working toward enhancing the percentage that would go further abroad. Now today, the partnership has a much smaller percentage of our overall trade. Unfortunately, the total quantity of that trade has also diminished.

I said I wanted to talk on all four issues. One of them is the commercial one that seems to be going further and further into the red. We need to take a look at the dynamic that is most important for us and build a relationship with the political elements in the United States as well as the entrepreneurial elements that indicate that they can have the relationship that we need here in North America. We need it in our base

The government acknowledges the fact that there are about 300,000 people who cross the border every day. They are not Canadians; they are Americans as well. So there are about 150,000 people who actually make a trip across the border on a daily basis. That shows the interconnectedness of our commercial affairs. That does not include all of those people who are driving or having access through other means of transportation, be it commercial or personal.

With more of our industries making the investment decision to move south because of the perception that the Americans are no longer as comfortable about the relationship or that partnership, then we are losing investment decisions to go down south. We need just take a look at the problems associated with the auto industry, and some of my colleagues opposite understand that. They might say this is cyclical, but all the associated supply chain industries, whether they are making similar decisions, are making generational decisions. They are not going to happen again in our country for quite some time.

What is the government doing? Is it taking any proactive steps to ensure a reverse of this trend? Today's motion talks to that. It does not talk about being important. Today's motion talks about how to maintain and grow those imports. How do we make the Americans understand where we are?

Members have talked about the fact that the Olympics will be held in Vancouver in 2010. The Americans will want to come here. They have a habit of moving around without the problems associated with the documentation that the rest of the world takes for granted. Fifty-three per cent of Canadians are accustomed to carrying a passport, but not the Americans. The percentage is a lot less. The member opposite contests that number, but that is okay because it is still vastly superior to the American number.

Here is the importance of that, and my colleague from Essex would know this more than others. It means that the Americans will be tougher on their own citizens as they try to re-enter the United States without the appropriate documentation.

It is okay for Canadians to accept Americans coming across the border. We are probably a little less punctilious about recognizing that somebody may be coming from Detroit to work in Windsor. When that individual goes back to Detroit, he or she will face an examination for their passport credentials. We need to address that.

One of the ways to do it is to build a political relationship with political leaders on the other side. We need to ask where this madness will lead our commercial partnership. Where is the madness for detail that does not appear to be as necessary as fearmongers would suggest? Where is the madness going to lead our relationship?

I said earlier that the previous government took steps with CANPASS and NEXUS and the biometrics on improving and enhancing CBSA supervision at the border. The Liberal government increased border expenditures so those borders would not only be smart borders, but they would be effective borders, and most important, from a commercial point of view, they would be efficient borders. They would move traffic back and forth very quickly. That means an investment has to be made not only in people but in technology. We did that, and I am glad that the government is following on that.

However, In my view, the government has stopped that trend.

As recently as 2002, the Liberal government, a government of which I was a happy participant, had 14 trade and consular offices in the United States. We decided we needed to expand that number well beyond 14. Members must keep in mind that the Mexicans have 45 such offices in the United States and they are not nearly as close in the partnership as we are. We had 14 and we upped that number to 21. What has the current government done since? Zero. In other words, the government has abandoned that political relationship. It abandoned a political relationship on a macro basis, government to government, but it did it as well on a personal basis.

Government members have pointed to the relationship with Louise Slaughter, a member of Congress from upstate New York. I have met her as have other members of Parliament. She is the one spokesperson who says that the relationship the U.S. has with Canada is important. She is the only one who says our relationship is better than the ones the European states have with each other, where they value freedom of mobility of people and freedom of mobility of goods. It is on the basis of that free movement of people and goods that the European Union is growing not only commercially, but also culturally.

In Canada we are not building that relationship with the Louise Slaughters of the United States Congress. In fact, forget about Janet Napolitano. What is worse, and this is a real shame, John McCain, a close friend of the Conservatives and the republicans on that side of the House, has now decried the U.S. relationship with Canada. This tells us the government is doing zip.