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Keynote Address – The United States and Canada: Outlook for Bilateral Relations in 2021

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The Honorable Jane Harman (moderator)

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS – THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA: OUTLOOK FOR BILATERAL RELATIONS IN 2021

Ambassador Kirsten Hillman

Moderator: The Honorable Jane Harman

AMBASSADOR KIRSTEN HILLMAN: Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Jane. Thank you for the very kind welcome, and I very much love your idea of a get-together lunch. I can't wait till the day that we can all be sitting around tables again together, talking in a face-to-face way. These are good opportunities as well, but I think we all miss the person-to-person contact. So, thank you so much for inviting me. Greetings to the Executive Committee of CUSLI and to everyone else who's joining today. I'm really glad to be with you.

So, I'm going to focus on two things in my remarks today. Quite briefly, opportunities for bilateral cooperation with the incoming Biden administration, and I'd like to reflect a little bit on Canada-U.S. cooperation during COVID times, and what I think that means for our two countries going forward.

So, starting with the election in transition. Obviously, the transition's well underway. Prime Minister Trudeau and President-elect Biden had a very broad-ranging and a very positive phone call just a little over a day after the election was called for the president-elect.

The two leaders know each other well. They have a strong and, I would say, warm relationship, which I think is important. It's not the only feature to being able to work together well, but it certainly helps.

They also, very importantly, share strong policy objectives. And they share not only specific policy objectives, but they also share the view that both countries should be working together with allies to make things better, not only within our own countries, but globally, around the world.

So, as we all know, the president-elect has identified, for now, four core priorities: fighting COVID, economic recovery, climate change, and racial equity. And underlying all of those, as I see it, is a strong objective of working with allies and partners whenever possible to increase the chances of success in being able to implement those policies.

And if we look at the appointments that the president-elect has been making, I think that we are—and speaking for my country—I think that we're really encouraged because, first of all, there are a lot of people within those groups that we know well, that we worked with before, that we already have good relationships with. But also, we see people with a strong track record of working with allies and cooperating in ways to help us grapple with some of the trickiest problems that are facing our countries and our globe. So, I think that that is all very good, and we are encouraged by it all.

On the Canadian side, you know, our core priorities, as I say, are very much aligned with those four that I've just mentioned. But, in truth, much like here, job one—job one, two, three, four, five, and six—is fighting the pandemic, keeping our citizens safe, following the advice of our experts, making sure that we get ourselves into a place where our lives can return to some sense of normalcy. And, while doing that, supporting Canadians as we do it, and moving towards a sustainable economic recovery, and maybe taking advantage of some of the things that we've learned through this pandemic to make that economic recovery more innovative, more sustainable, better than it maybe otherwise could have been.

There's also great potential between our two governments for cooperation in a variety of other ways. Obviously, on climate change—we have a deep commitment to the Paris Agreement, to decarbonization of our economy, both within our country but also the global partnerships that are required in order for us to do this as a globe.

We see a lot of potential for cooperation in our energy partnership. We have a very strong and multi-faceted energy relationship with the U.S., which is going to be key to economic recovery. And it's also going to be key to moving forward with some of the climate change objectives that we share with the incoming Biden administration.

And then of course, you know, international cooperation, peace, and security. And domestic issues that are really front and center for both of our countries, including fighting systemic racism and anti-Black racism.

So, there's a lot there in common between our two governments. We have a lot to do together—this is a very complex and, unfortunately, very difficult moment in history. But I think all of the basis is there, both at a personal level and on a policy level, for us to have enormous success.

Which kind of brings me to my second theme that I just want to spend a minute on, which is Canada-U.S. cooperation in the time of COVID. I mean, it goes without saying that all of us have faced unprecedented upheaval in our lives—our personal lives, our communities, our business lives—you know, across the board, this has been an incredibly complicated and difficult time for everyone. And it's also exposed both, I think, strengths and vulnerabilities in some of the systems of governance that we have, and just some of the social systems that we have, and some of the ways in which we work within our own country and we work with our partners. I have no doubt that we will be reflecting on this experience and the lessons learned from this year for years to come, and a lot of that reflection has already started.

I think that, for us, one of the reflections that is really deeply underway right now for Canada is looking at the way in which we organize our supply chains, and looking at some vulnerabilities that might exist there in some of our most critical products and supply relationships. The good news there is that, while some of those vulnerabilities have absolutely been experienced over the last several months, what has also been clearly demonstrated is that when it comes to Canada-U.S. cooperation—economically, and trade, and supply chain integration—both countries are deeply committed not only to maintaining it, but keeping it reliable and strong.

And we saw that, right? We saw that when the border measures were put in place to restrict nonessential travel between Canada and the United States. Those measures were designed explicitly to make sure that trade could continue. And the facts bear it out—we have about an 85 percent reduction in travel overall between our two countries, but the volume of trade going back and forth is virtually unchanged.

Another really good example is, in those early days, when there was a real struggle to get all the PPE that our countries needed, we quickly realized that we were supplying each other, first of all, PPE products in great measure. Canada, last year, it was almost \$9 billion worth of PPE that we exported to the United States. And the U.S. exports to Canada as well. But also, the components that go into manufacturing those.

And as more businesses within both of our countries were retooling to make some of these products that were in great demand, the necessity of keeping our supply chains open to the components that go into that manufacturing became apparent within, you know, hours if not, you know, days of those rejigging of our manufacturing bases. And that was a real world, concrete example of why we can actually work together and make each other safer, and stronger, and more resilient.

And what I'm really encouraged by is the fact that it didn't take a lot of, you know, convincing. Everybody realized it very, very quickly. And I think there's a lot of reasons for that. One is, everything was happening very, very quickly, especially in those early days. But also, we've developed over the past three or four years—even though it wasn't always easy, and there were some challenges—we have developed a very strong common understanding of our bilateral trading relationship through the NAFTA renegotiation. And everybody is fairly conversant with the degree to which we, kind of, need each other.

And that's great. And it's particularly great in the face of a crisis, when you're not sure who you can rely on, you're not sure if your systems are going to stay working the way they should. We were able to demonstrate that, in a moment of crisis, we were 100 percent there for each other. Our lines of communication were open, we were collaborative. And I think it is the perfect tone to have been set for what comes next, which is economic recovery, rethinking the way we do some things.

So, on that I would say, you know, we can build on this recent experience. We can build on the modernized framework that we have through the USMCA, CUSMA, new NAFTA agreement. We can build on key initiatives that we have, like on critical minerals, where we are actually very decisively and very proactively fostering cooperation in an area that needed a bit of a signal from governments that that was something that was important to us. And the strong policy alignment between our two governments.

So, working on all of those things, I think we're going to be able to move towards an economic rebound, recovery, you know, Build Back Better, that is highly mutually supportive. That doesn't mean that we won't have disagreements, right? Because in a partnership like this, with so much going on at any one time, we're not going to agree on everything. But that's where those strong areas of mutual understanding, those relationships, those histories of working together will

make a really big difference. So, I think it's an exciting time and looking forward to what comes next. Thanks.

HON. JANE HARMAN: Well, thank you. That was a wonderful tour of the sort of Northern Hemisphere issues, and you anticipated every question I was going to ask you about COVID, or the supply chain, so I'll ask you a few other things. First, let me note that I think it was reported that President-elect Biden's first call to a foreign leader was to Justin Trudeau. And if that is accurate—so much of our news, apparently, is not so accurate—that's good news, because that was the right first call.

(Laughter.)

He didn't ask me, and he probably didn't even ask you, but I think that was great. And it symbolizes how close we are, and how much we need each other, and how much we can do together. You know, restoring partnerships around the world has got to be a huge priority for Biden.

So, in that vein, let me ask you about TPP [Trans-Pacific Partnership]. I know you were one of the negotiators back in the day, and trade is your bag. It is now CPTPP, and doesn't include the U.S., but it does include the other countries that helped to negotiate it. The concept, as I remember, was that these are all—mostly Asian, not all, Canada and others—but trading partners with China, and to create an economic buffer, in certain respects, between all of us and China was a foreign policy aim.

When I asked people—and I was just Zooming in a conference to Japan—“What are the chances that the U.S. will be back?”, they're kind of skeptical. And they say they're not sure the U.S. will be back, and they're not sure it's, at least, a first-year priority for Biden, because there's so many other things to crowd it out. And then they start talking about China.

So, my question to you is, do you think the U.S. will be back? How could it be back in a reasonably short term? And if it is back, is the original aim as I understood it—you're more sophisticated about it, I think, than I am—is the original aim of creating a buffer of friendly nations, not to block China, but to help all of us coexist and compete better with China, is that achievable?

You're muted.

AMB. KIRSTEN HILLMAN: There we go. Okay. So, as to whether or not the U.S. will seek to join this agreement, I think, I mean, we'll have to see what they decide to do. There have been some statements made by the incoming administration that negotiating free trade agreements is not going to be a top priority, at least right out of the gate. And I think that's understandable. I mean, we're all grappling with very, very important domestic issues, health issues, and economic issues, you know. So, I think that there's nothing necessarily negative to read into that. I think it's just a question of governments have to make their, you know, pace themselves and focus on what is of vital interest to their country at any one time. So, I think, that's my understanding.

As to whether, you know, whether or not they will come back eventually, or come into the agreement eventually, and whether or not the goals of the agreement remain important, obviously we think so. We think it's a terrific agreement. We're

very happy to be parties to it. We think that having strong rules-based frameworks in which to operate in the Asia-Pacific region is crucial.

I mean, there are other agreements that exist in the Asia-Pacific region, but this is by far the most, as we say in trade talk, ambitious. So, it's the most liberalizing, and it also deals with important issues that help countries that have economies that are structured differently do business together on a level playing field. So, there are, you know, in that agreement, you've got countries like Canada and the United States, but you also have Vietnam, you also have Singapore, and those are two . . . and Brunei, right, which is a sultanate. So, these economies are constructed in very different ways. And that's fine, that doesn't at all impede the ability to trade fairly. But, you do need to establish what the rules are in order for that trade to take place. And we're proud of what was achieved there and, hopefully, you know, it can grow when the time is right.

HON. JANE HARMAN: Well, I'm not surprised at the answer. And you said something that I should have said, but setting the rules to the road is a huge part of having trade arrangements that are beneficial. And one of the sad things to many of us who were watching the Trump decision was, we abdicated that role—we the U.S., not Canada, the U.S. And I do hope that going forward we can figure it out again, because part of the policy of the Obama administration to so-called "pivot" to Asia was to pivot to Asia economically, not just militarily. And this was going to be a centerpiece. So, hopefully we'll figure out it out.

I have lots of other questions but no time, so let me just ask you one. This week marked the thirty-first anniversary of the tragic École Polytechnique massacre in Montreal on December 6, 1989, where fourteen women were murdered, and many injured. You've spoken about this incident publicly. The Wilson Center is in the midst of its 16 Days of Activism [Against Gender-Based Violence], and I was involved in an event we just did in Latin America. Which leads me to ask you, as Canada's first Ambassador to the United States who happens to be a woman—that's how I describe my tenure at Wilson, I'm the first president and CEO who happens to be a woman—how far have we come on this issue? And how far has Canada come on this issue since 1989? And what can we do given the fact that in many countries, because of the quarantine, violence against women is increasing, not decreasing?

AMB. KIRSTEN HILLMAN: Yeah. Well, that is a very good question. The answer to your question, "How far have we come?", I think my response has to be, "not far enough." Not nearly far enough, as a matter of fact.

And I think that this COVID time, in this issue of violence against women, like in a few other issues, it has demonstrated, as I said, vulnerabilities within our society, right? It's demonstrated things that maybe don't come to the fore when we're all very busy doing our normal, daily lives. But when people find themselves confined together, and find themselves focused in on having their sphere of activity narrowed so severely, we see things that we didn't see before. Perhaps that violence has increased—and there are studies that are saying that it has, which is a terrible tragedy—but I have no doubt that it's been there all along. It may be exacerbated, but it's been there all along.

So, there are the kinds of things that, you know, as I was saying earlier, we are going to have to look at what this is telling us—not only about our economies, not only about how we arrange our supply chains, but around our societies, and who is doing what in our societies, and who is vulnerable, and who is more vulnerable when things get tough. So, I think, you know, the issue around women, and protecting women, and violence against women and girls, these are crucial issues that we all have to be looking at. And it's not just, of course, women and girls. There are many segments in our society.

HON. JANE HARMAN: Right.

AMB. KIRSTEN HILLMAN: So, we haven't done enough, we need to do more. I'd like to think that . . . There's some interesting work actually being done between Johns Hopkins and, I want to say, Simon Fraser University on the effect of COVID on women in particular. First of all, I'm delighted that that research is happening and, secondly, I think we should have a good look at what it says, and what we can do about it, and hopefully we'll come out with some concrete ideas for us.

HON. JANE HARMAN: So, let's make this one of the topics for our woman power lunch in Washington. It's not only that women have a lens on this, but more often than not girls and women are victims of it—sometimes perpetrators, but often victims. And it will be a pleasure to meet you in person soon.

AMB. KIRSTEN HILLMAN: Yes.

HON. JANE HARMAN: And now, the morning continues under, I guess, Chris is next, at any rate, to introduce the rest of the program. And what a delight to chat with you. Welcome to the Washington, or another welcome to the Washington sisterhood.

(Applause.)

AMB. KIRSTEN HILLMAN: Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you, very much. It's been a delight. Thank you.

DR. SANDS: Well, let me add my thanks. And when the sisterhood gets together for that lunch, I'll cook. How's that? Just to be around the table, that would be great.