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Friday Luncheon Keynote

Hon. David Cohen

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FRIDAY LUNCHEON KEYNOTE

STEPHEN J. PETRAS.: We're here to start our luncheon keynote presentation. And here to introduce our keynote speaker is our own Jim Blanchard. Jim is the co-chair of the Canada-US Law Institute, and we all know him very well, a very impressive person. He's a well-recognized practitioner of international trade law with the firm DLA Piper in Washington, DC. He's got a very interesting career, and I don't think there's anything he hasn't done. He was a representative in Congress for the State of Michigan, the Governor of Michigan, and a former Ambassador to Canada from the United States. Here, to introduce our current ambassador [to Canada] is Jim.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: Thank you. Steve Petras. Thank you very much for your leadership and Dean Scharf, thank you, as well, for your support and leadership. I have the great pleasure of introducing our US ambassador to Canada, which is one of the most exciting and interesting jobs anybody could ever have. And he comes to it with fabulous credentials. Those of you watching virtually, we welcome you. Thank you.

I do want to thank David Jacobson, again, for making a special case to be here and your address last night was really wonderful, and I commend you to begin teaching at some point while you still have your marbles – and I assume that will be for a long time. Thank you, Colin. Thank you also for the Consul General of Detroit which covers Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Kentucky. It's the cradle of cooperation, basically, especially Detroit-Windsor, we're glad you're here. Russ Singer, thank you for coming from the Canada desk. I've talked about some of the people I recruited Andy Doctoroff from the Governor's Office and he's here. Where's Andy? We're going to hear from Andy later on, the Gordie Howe Bridge may be a little bit on Line 5 as well. Jim Peterson has always been a wonderful partner. And he introduced Colin Bird earlier. So, Jim, I know you're watching. Give our best to Heather, and thanks for all your leadership and help.

I mentioned the job of US Ambassador to Canada is really the best public service appointment you can really have in our government for a lot of reasons. It isn't just Canada, and we like Canadians and all of you who are Canadian here, it's just that you get to deal with every issue. It's a combination of diplomacy, government, politics, every issue domestic or foreign. We weren't just founders of NATO or the United Nations or NORAD, or all these different agreements and treaties, the longest environmental treaty, the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909, but we're dealing with Great Lakes water quality, or the next moon shot. You name it, we're working on it. It's not just trade and energy, it's everything. It's helping support democracy and help save Ukraine, or help the Ukrainians save their country,

David Cohen comes to this job with enormous experience. He is well known as the Senior Executive Vice President of Comcast. He was a senior adviser to the CEO [of Comcast] more recently. Previously, he's been chairman of a prominent law firm in Philadelphia. He's been active at almost every charity and civic organization in Pennsylvania, I think. He's been, [among] other things, a trustee of the University of Pennsylvania, President of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce. He's been well known over the years as the Chief of Staff to the Mayor of Philadelphia, who then

later became the Governor of Philadelphia, Ed Rendell. Some of you may know Ed. Ed Rendell became chairman of the National Governors Association as well. David Cohen was the man to see; a connoisseur of government policy and nuances, knows how to get things done. He went to Swarthmore College and University of Pennsylvania Law School. But in addition to all these talents and experience, the one thing you have to remember is he's a very close friend of our dear President, Joe Biden. My pleasure to introduce David Cohen. David, Ambassador.

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: Thanks very much, Jim. Great to see you. I really appreciate your friendship, the advice you've given me. The thing can be said of David, it's always nice to see former Ambassadors, former Ambassadors to Canada. Jim, you've been a particularly good friend and advisor as I've assumed this position, and I appreciate the invitation to appear here. Last year, some of you may remember, I actually joined you all virtually, so this is my second appearance at this conference. I must say it is far preferable to be here in person and actually to see you and to meet people and to talk to you, and I hope by the time I'm done, you agree with that, and you would not prefer me to return to Zoom. This is a great conference; it always attracts a fantastic audience, I appreciate the invitation to appear here.

I'm also excited to be here in Cleveland, which is a city known for its charm, blue collar grit, hardworking residents, and notably passionate sports fans. In fact, it reminds me of my hometown of Philadelphia. The Cavaliers, by the way, had a pretty good regular season this year. I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that my Philadelphia 76ers had their number this year, winning four out of their five games. As the crow flies, the only thing separating Cleveland from Canada is Lake Erie. After my flight from Ottawa this morning, I can confirm that Canada is just not that far away from Cleveland. Indeed, the close proximity has given Cleveland and Canada the opportunity to forge strong bonds—economically and otherwise.

John F. Kennedy succinctly described the relationship between Canada and the United States when he addressed the Canadian Parliament way back in 1961. While President Kennedy was speaking about the entire United States, his words ring especially true for people in cities like Cleveland, which really are gateways across our shared border. The famous quote from President Kennedy "Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. Those whom nature hath so joined, let no man put asunder." I do think that captures the special relationship between Canada and the United States.

I'm also thrilled to be in the state of Ohio, which has an especially important relationship with Canada, and especially the province of Ontario, just across the US Embassy in Canada, my Mission Canada team includes many Ohioans including our Navy attaché and my chief of staff, who by the way, was sort of unhappy that she couldn't figure out a way to be here today with me to get a quick visit home. Every single day thousands of Ohio-made goods make their way into Canada for processing, assembly and consumption. The dynamic trade relationship between Canada and Ohio keeps both economies strong. Canada is Ohio's number one customer and Ohio exported more than \$18 billion in goods to Canada in 2021. The symbiotic relationship helps Canadian businesses too with Ohio having imported nearly \$14.5 billion of Canadian goods at the same time. Ohio's auto and manufacturing industries

thrive in large part thanks to Canada. Canadian aluminum and iron have a healthy consumer base right here in Ohio.

A wonderful Canadian success story in Ohio is Nature Fresh Farms (based in Ontario). This company has expanded its greenhouse operations in the village of Delta, Ohio, about two and a half hours west of Cleveland. Recently, the company doubled its acreage, allowing the company to incorporate modern greenhouse technology right here in Ohio, which will help support the increased demand on both sides of the border for year-round, fresh, and local produce. In fact, Nature Fresh Farms is just one of the 325 Canadian-owned enterprises that employ more than 21,000 Ohioans. Not only does the productive relationship between Canada and Ohio promote growth and investment, but it also helps lead the fight against climate change. Canadian-based Magna International has five manufacturing plants in Ohio, which make vehicle parts including for plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. Magna International's investment in Ohio, which has created more than 2,700 jobs, represents the way many manufacturing states like Ohio have embraced an industrial path that is greener and more sustainable. This is highlighted by the rapid expansion of electric vehicle manufacturing capacity across North America.

All the things President Kennedy talked about: geography, trade, our partnership in NORAD, and our alliances in NATO are important, of course, but I would argue that what really makes the US-Canada relationship unique are the ties between families, friends, and communities that stretch across our border for thousands of miles, from coastal towns on the Atlantic, to frozen tundra and Alaska. And quite frankly, I believe there is no stronger or more important bilateral relationship in the world than the US-Canada relationship.

To quote another president who addressed the Canadian Parliament, in this case, President Biden, and a lot more recent than 1961, this quote comes from last month. "We are two people, two countries, sharing one heart. No two nations on Earth are bound by such close ties, friendship, family, commerce, and culture." So, a second president really captured the nature of the US-Canada relationship.

We all know that our friendship has been strained at times, but the true test of friendship is not whether you have any differences, it's how you handle those differences. Do you just give up? Or do you sit down, take a deep breath, and try to work things out.

One of my top priorities as Ambassador and one of the top priorities of the Biden-Harris Administration has been rebuilding the trust and special relationship between the United States and Canada. There's some recent polling that gets at this issue really well. For a long time the Environment Council of the States (ECOS) has been polling the question of Canadians' views of the US relationship. The Canadians' perception of our relationship peaked with positive responses well above 60% during the latter years of the Obama administration but fell precipitously to only 10% in the prior administration. It's now almost 50 points higher than that though, with most of that increase occurring since I've arrived in Canada. [laughter] And Frank Graves gave me permission to use that line, [he] says it's it is factually true.

On the US side of the border, another recent poll found that an amazing 88% of US citizens had a favorable impression of Canada, which was the highest ranked country in the world. And for those of you who follow opinion survey research, it is

not easy to find anything that 88% of your respondents will agree with. By the way, that's a Gallup poll. In America 88% people in America ranked Canada as our most important relationship. Now, I truly do know that I'm not the cause of the improvement in Canadian attitudes toward the United States. It is mostly President Biden, which exposes the risk of what happens when President Biden is no longer president. But for me, being able to contribute to our special partnership and make it stronger than ever, really is the honor of a lifetime.

Everywhere I go, I make sure Canadians know that the United States is back. We want to rebuild and solidify our relationship with Canada. During President Biden's visit a few weeks ago he said "the United States chooses to link our future with Canada's because 'we know that we will find [a] no better partner, [a] no more reliable, [a] no more steady friend.'" With a message to all the people of Canada the President said, "You will always be able to count on the United States." I try to make that expressly apparent at every opportunity I have when I speak around Canada.

My team has totaled up my engagements as Ambassador during my first year in Canada. Through January [2023] I have traveled over 35,000 miles. That happened in Canada; I always cite that as 55,000 kilometers, because it sounds more impressive, 55,000 [is] a bigger number than 35,000. I've been to all seven of our consulates at least once. I visited more than twenty Canadian cities, several many times. To paraphrase a movie that features another great Canadian-American partnership, John Candy and Steve Martin, I've traveled on planes, trains, and automobiles, and also on buses. And even a few boats, including, I'm proud to say the United States' newest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, during one of my visits to Halifax.

I've met almost all of the Federal Cabinet. I'm down to two members of the Cabinet who have not met yet. I never identify them by name because I don't want them to feel left out. I've met all thirteen Premiers, and in some provinces, I've met more than one Premier, because in the 16 months I've been here there's been a turnover in premierships. I've attended literally hundreds of meetings and gatherings and I've met thousands of Canadians. I've taken every opportunity to talk with Canadians, elected officials, opinion leaders, elites, and what I just call "regular" people, "normal" people. I've learned that Canada is filled with generous, interesting, and of course very polite people. And although I know we still have a lot of work to do rebuilding the trust between Canada and the United States I feel like we're off to a pretty good start, which is what the ECOS polling absolutely demonstrates and if that's all I can accomplish as US Ambassador to Canada, I'll be pretty proud of that legacy.

In guiding my agenda, I've been fortunate to be able to rely on work done by President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau, back in February of 2021, before I arrived in Canada, which they reconfirmed last month. They released a roadmap for a renewed US-Canada partnership as a six-pillar action plan to guide both countries substantively and to guide our friendship to the next generation. The roadmap has also served as the guiding vision for my ambassadorship and for the embassy and our seven consulates across Canada. During his visit to Canada a few weeks ago, the President was able to sit down with the Prime Minister and discuss the progress we've made and reiterate the strategic value of the roadmap going forward with some updated areas of focus. When I think about the amazing work that our team at the US

embassy and consulates have done over the past year, a few things stand out, both for their own significance, and for what they represent. So, I'm going to cite just a few of those examples.

[A] major accomplishment that I'm personally very proud of is our work with small and medium-sized enterprises or SMEs. A key pillar of the roadmap is Building Back Better. I know I'm speaking to a lot of lawyers. I too am a lawyer and I was trained that words matter. The pillar and the roadmap pillar on economic development, economy building, doesn't say building back, it says Building Back Better. That word "better" has significance. And the significance it has is to make sure that no one is left behind, that our recovery is inclusive, and it is equitable, and it means that it must cover small and medium-sized enterprises who took a disproportionate hit in the pandemic. As President Biden says, "we need to build our economies from the bottom up and from the inside out, not from the top down."

For both the US and Canadian economies SMEs really are the backbone. They're critical to trade and investment on both sides of the border. 98% of all businesses responsible for well over 90% of all jobs in both the United States and Canada are associated with SMEs. I talk about this everywhere I go. I've had people come up to me and say, "gee, we heard you and why do you spend so much time talking about small and medium sized enterprises?" Intuitively, it's the mega companies that are going to be the quickest route to building our economies back. I respond saying, "well, I subscribe to the Willie Sutton School." Half the people I say it to don't even know who Willie Sutton is.

Willie Sutton was probably the most famous bank robber in United States history. At the time, when you got caught robbing a bank, the penalties were enormous because they were subject to federal law. Whereas if you would [rob] grocery store or department store, you have much lesser penalties. A reporter asked Willie Sutton, "Why are you robbing bank, isn't it easier, less risk to rob stores or things like that? Looking at the reporter, like he [i.e. the reporter] was crazy, Willie Sutton says, "because that's where the money is.""

I talk about SMEs all the time because that's where the jobs are. If we're going to rebuild our economies, we need to focus on the places where the jobs are—small and medium-sized enterprises. My focus in SMEs is not just SMEs in general, but in particular, SMEs that are founded and owned by women, people of color, Indigenous Peoples, and other underrepresented groups. That's another pillar of the roadmap—diversity and inclusion. We're the only nations on earth who have a statement of principle, for a strategy going forward, have specifically identified diversity and inclusion is something that our two countries are going to pay attention to.

What have we done at the embassy? Well, we've prioritized SMEs and ensured that they are not left behind in our economic recovery. Both countries have created significant programs to support the recovery of SMEs. During the presidential visit [to Ottawa] last month the President and Prime Minister reaffirmed their commitments to diversity and inclusion and to supporting the recovery of SMEs after the pandemic.

Second, we've also worked hard to battle climate change and help transition our economies to clean energy—another key roadmap priority. I spent a lot of time since

I arrived focusing on our energy relationship and the importance of the energy transition, both from a climate change and a security perspective. In September, for example, I flew up to James Bay in Northern Quebec, to look at Hydro Quebec's impressive hydroelectric operations. You might ask, "well, what does that have to do with the United States? Why was I going to Northern Quebec?" Well, Hydro Quebec has been working with indigenous communities in Quebec—a true partnership, not a beads and trinkets approach of "we'll buy you off, and you'll let us exploit your traditional lands"—but as a true partnership. And with New York State [set] to build the Champlain Hudson Power Express, which will soon provide 20% of New York City's electricity needs. Hydro Quebec will be providing, in an environmentally clean fashion, along with indigenous partners, 20% of New York City's electrical needs. These are true partnerships, which will make a real difference not only for indigenous communities. Also, for our planet.

I'm also proud to say that the Biden-Harris Administration has really stepped up when it comes to fighting climate change. Last year, President Biden signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act which contains the biggest investment in US history to curb emissions, promote clean energy technologies, advance environmental justice, and bolster climate adoption efforts. The Act presents huge opportunities for the United States, and Canada, and Mexico, to open new avenues for trade and manufacturing and clean energy and to strengthen regional supply chains, which are the lifeblood of our economies.

We are also working together with Canada on critical minerals, which are an essential component to accelerate North America's clean energy strategy. Our two countries are in full agreement that mining critical minerals can and should be conducted in the context of sustaining the environment, respecting local communities, and adhering to high ethical standards. There's an interesting equation at play here in the elements that I've just mentioned [in the sense that] our two countries agree on the importance of the energy transition. It's a transition, it doesn't mean, my friends in Alberta, that we're cutting out oil and gas. Oil and gas is going to be a significant component of our energy utilization for generations to come. [A] transition means making that energy as clean as possible and complementing it with more environmentally acceptable methods of energy as well. Both nations agree on an energy transition, which will aid in our battle against climate change. The two are absolutely linked.

The energy transition will also help bolster national security by weening the world's democracies from overdependence on Russian oil and gas. And critical minerals, which are a leading opportunity to grow the pie of our mutual economies, are right at the nexus of those foreign policy objectives, and also will help provide some independence from China, which is the world's leading supplier and processor of many critical minerals.

I focus on critical minerals because it's one of the few significant growth opportunities for the Canadian and the US economies. But I also focus on them because they are the linchpin to the energy transition and to bolstering energy security, which is the aspect that a lot of people do not mention. This constellation of issues, the energy transition, climate change and critical minerals was a featured part of the discussions during the President's visit to Canada. We saw the mutual

embracing of the promise of the Inflation Reduction Act, the creation of a one-year Energy Transformation Task Force to work across the spectrum of the clean economy, and the commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars to the exploitation of critical minerals and creation of businesses across the critical minerals supply chain. Bolstering security and defense and building global alliances are the final two pillars I want to mention in the roadmap.

We talk a lot about NATO defense spending and the Wales Pledge and about modernizing NORAD. Those are very important but they're not the end of the story, not even close to it. We publicly have welcomed the release of Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy in November, and we look forward to Canada's Defense Policy Update expected later this year, which is something that very few people talk about. Very few people understand the policy significance of a Defense Policy update. As partners in NORAD and as NATO allies, interoperability between our armed forces is critical to maintaining our collective security. That's why we were thrilled to learn the Canada selected the F-35 as its future fighter, a state-of-the-art aircraft, used by the United States and most of our closest allies and partners. Now, Canada. Canada's Air Force will be interoperable and interchangeable with the US Air Force and with most NATO countries' air forces.

Defense was also a featured part of the future commitments laid out during the President's visit. Canada made additional timing commitments on its NORAD modernization plan, specifically—the commitment to have the first over-the-horizon radar system in place by 2028. Canada and the United States reiterated publicly the importance of all members of NATO honoring their Wales Pledge commitments.

I'm also proud of the way the United States and Canada have come together in support of the people of Ukraine, standing up for their country and their democracy. Our support of Ukraine demonstrates the leadership [that] the United States and Canada can provide when we work together. Since Vladimir Putin began his illegal, brutal invasion of Ukraine just over a year ago, our two countries have provided billions of dollars of security, financial, energy, and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. \$35 billion in military assistance from the United States alone. By the way [this amount] exceeds the total commitments made by every other country in the world. So, if there's any doubt as to whether the United States is back and playing our rightful role as a leader of the world's democracies, you just have to look at that number.

We've also welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to our countries. I know that in Northeast Ohio alone, you've welcomed more than 3,000 Ukrainians in the last year, and that's terrific. During the President's visit to Canada both he and Prime Minister Trudeau reiterated their commitment to continue supporting Ukraine. I always worry about politicians and elected officials who put time clocks on commitments because when you put a time clock on it, you know that they almost never get honored. The language used by Prime Minister Trudeau and by President Biden is incredibly important here “for as long as it takes, the United States and Canada will be there for Ukraine for as long as it takes.” It's indisputable that together, Canada and the United States are making good progress. Have we completely rebuilt the trust between us? No, we still have work to do, but we have a great foundation. We've made a great start, and I'm proud of the work we've done at

our embassy in Ottawa and our consulates across Canada. I'm optimistic that work will continue through 2023 and beyond.

As Jim mentioned in his introduction, I've known Joe Biden for a long time – over three decades. I was honored to welcome him here to Ottawa last month for a visit that underscored the robust nature of the US-Canadian relationship as friends, partners, and allies.

One of the major reasons I wanted to become the US Ambassador to Canada was the importance of Canada to President Biden. He's had many opportunities to express his feelings on the country, but I will always remember the inspiring close of his speech to Parliament during his March visit. I'm not going to be able to do it justice for anyone who did not see it. It's worth calling it up on the web and watching it. He closed by saying, "ladies and gentlemen, we're living in an age of possibilities. Nothing is beyond our capacity. We can do anything. We have to never forget: we must never doubt our capacity. Canada and the United States can do big things. We stand together. We're going to write the future together, I promise you." To a rousing standing ovation of Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, the Green Party, there was not a person in that room that was not inspired by that description of our relationship. That's how I feel about the US-Canada relationship; about our friendship, about our partnership, about our future. We are all about creating possibilities together.

Thank you all very much. I look forward to answering Jim's tough questions and your questions.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: Well, that was great. I enjoyed every minute of it, and I loved hearing about your travels, because it is so important to get out and about. I have some questions that have been submitted that I can look at, although you've really covered a lot of the ground. Let me ask you a couple personal questions: Did you ever think when you were in college or law school or starting out that you'd become an ambassador?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: That's an easy question: never. It really was not on my career roadmap at all.

Like a lot of people, I thought ambassadorial roles were mostly ceremonial. I do the ceremonial pretty well, but that's not what starts my engine in the morning, I care about the substance. I really didn't seriously think about becoming an ambassador until the year of the election. When Joe Biden was talking to me, I should say, little known, although he said it, so I think I can say it. Before he was President he has tried to hire me three times, and I turned him down all three times. It just wasn't the right time in my career. We were having breakfast one day during the campaign, he [Biden] said, "I don't want to jinx me, but assuming I win, do you think I have any chance of convincing you to come and work for me this time around?" I said, "actually, the timing might be better this time around." And so, he led me through consideration of opportunities that might exist in the administration. It was the first time I talked to people who are ambassadors and seriously considered the role of ambassador as a career path. And that's when I sort of fell in love with the opportunity.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: It's a perfect job for you too. And, of course, Pennsylvania is a major, major state. Speaking of Pennsylvania, your undergrad degree was at Swarthmore. How many people have heard of Swarthmore College?

Look at that this crowd has heard [of Swarthmore College]? Why did they have all these prominent, and not just you, but my previous Senator Carl Levin, current Senator Chris Van Hollen, author James Michener, suffragist—Alice Paul, Michael Dukakis, where did they get all these [people]? What attracted all these people to this small college in suburban Philadelphia?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: It's a great school. I mean, that is fundamentally what attracts people. It's an incredibly high-quality academic school. It is a small institution. And, for people who might be interested in a smaller school with more intimate relations with faculty and with students, it's an incredibly attractive option.

Although it is interesting, [a] little known fact—and this has been a trivia question in certain contests—but at the time I went to Swarthmore, I was a registered Republican. My parents were Republican. They were Nelson Rockefeller, Millicent Fenwick, Republicans. Today, they would be radical liberals. I was a registered Republican at Swarthmore. Two most radical liberal colleges in America during the Vietnam War were [University of California, Berkeley] and Swarthmore. Here I am a registered Republican, and I find myself on campus surrounded by lunatic radicals. People who would make Bernie Sanders look like a conservative.

I'll tell you just one story. Going all the way back in the Vietnam War, you remember the invasion of Cambodia by the United States, which offended the radical left, not saying it shouldn't have, but it really offended the radical left. I woke up one morning, I'm walking to class at eight o'clock, really early. And I look around campus and I sort of shake my head and said, "oh, my God, what?" I see hanging in every window—every dorm room window, classroom window is a Cambodian flag. And I have two immediate reactions, which is number one, "how did people find like 5,000 Cambodian flags? And number two, how did they know not to send me the memo to put a Cambodian flag in my window?" But that was the nature of Swarthmore. In fact, Swarthmore was very well known. It was a student group that picketed the president's office; they would not let anyone in or out. The President had a heart attack in the office and they did not let EMS in, so, he died. That was a national story, *the demonstrators killed the president of Swarthmore*, which was not too far off [from] the truth.

I found myself at this school. It did not really reflect my politics or my values very much. At the end, it was probably the best place I could be. It [Swarthmore] taught me not to be worn down. It taught me that even though everyone may have a different opinion, if I have a different opinion, I should stick to my opinion. It refined my skills at advocating for my position. I was in very small classes. My classes had eight people [or] twelve people. My biggest class probably had twenty people, and the professors all got this. When we were debating something, they would always call on me to take the position—defend the Nixon Administration, defend this, or defend that. I would be completely attacked and have to respond to that.

Later when I went back, I said to some of my favorite professors, because at times, it was a little discouraging, I said "Why did you do that? Did you really think that was fair? Is that a role as a professor to set my entire class against me?" They said, "I hope you realize that we did that because we thought you could take care of yourself. We thought this would be good for you to defend your position in this way. And if it ever got out of control, we would have stepped in. But I also hope you see

the respect that you engendered in your classmates, who even though they did not agree with you, even though you probably did not convince anyone of your positions, they respected the fact that you stood up for your positions.” That’s a really important lesson in life, that the majority view is not always the “right” view. The courage to stand up for what you believe in and what you think is right will, at the end of the day, make you a stronger person. It may improve the overall environment in which you’re functioning.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: I’m thinking about Joe Biden when he decided to run for President this last time, those of us who’ve been around a long time, knew that he would be a great president. But also, he’s probably the only one running that could win. You understood that. But that’s the whole thing, Joe’s been true to himself, and this is one of the more authentic politicians you’ll ever meet. But it’s interesting, isn’t it?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: I guess I was the only person, I’m one of the people who Joe Biden spent a lot of time talking to as he was deciding whether to run or not. The principal argument that most of his team and his close friends were giving is that “you can win. And you may be the only person who can win.” And I said to him, “I do think you can win, and you may be the only person who can win. But as a friend, I’m going to tell you, that is not a good enough reason to run for president. It is too disruptive to your life. It will completely transform your family relationships.” I said to him, “Bo will be in the middle of a hell storm for the entire candidate and if you’re successful, beyond that. And I know you too well, you have to think about those family implications. And I want to challenge you to think about why you want to be president, what do you want to do other than winning the campaign?”

He had unbelievable answers. I mean, unbelievable answers to those questions which you’ve seen play out in his presidency. That’s the reason in the end, why Joe Biden ran for president, not because he thought he could win or was the only one who could win. He had a program that he thought would improve the quality of life for all Americans, and he thought he was in a position to bring that to the table and to execute on it, and then to make all those things happen.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: It’s interesting. Early in 2019, I was at an [small] event honoring Nancy Pelosi. I’ve known her for many years, even since college. I didn’t bother her. I’m over, trying to get some Chinese food at the end and she comes over alone and says, “Jim, you know, Joe Biden, you got to talk to him.”

“Yeah, I’ve known him for 40 years, but I’m not close to him. Everyone, we’ve all known him. I’ve known him.”

She said, “No, he’s got to run. You can’t quote me. I can’t get involved. I’m the Speaker. Jim, he’s the only one that can win. You’ve got to talk to him.”

“Well, everybody’s going to have to talk to him.” I heard the same thing from Chris Dodd who said, “I think he is running, and he’s the only one that can win.” But it is interesting that after all these years, it would be clear that someone like Joe was the only one that could win, and also do a good job.

People asked me in Michigan, “*why are you supporting Biden, you have all these young people*”. I said, “he’ll do a good job, and [he] can carry Michigan.” I can’t say that about any of the others. By the way, they wouldn’t have.

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: Joe Biden's superpower—it's a dual superpower. Number one, for most of his career he has been underestimated. When we all just think about it, so many people thought he wasn't going to win because he was too old; he had missed his chance. The fact that he is consistently underestimated is an important part of his superpower. His real superpower is his ability to connect with people, his ability to look at an audience and connect with them, ability when he's meeting with people to listen and his ability to know how to talk to people about things that really matter to them. And I think that's what makes him such a powerful and effective leader of our country.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: So, getting back to the job in Ottawa, of course, and around the country, what has surprised you?? Any real surprises other than how much more friendly the Canadians are, especially to the US Ambassador?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: They're very friendly to the US Ambassador. I have to tell a funny story about that. This is my mother, who is no longer with us so she can't hear this story directly, but she'd be so happy about this, because my mother always taught me to always be nice to everyone who I came in contact with. You never know when that'll pay off, even if someone's being incredibly irritating. You should just let it roll off your back and be nice to people. That's why I try and live my life in that way.

Jim and Dave will understand this. When you become an Ambassador, there are all sorts of things that happen. To me the most disturbing thing that happened and nobody told me—neither one of you told me this—is that I lose my first name. I mean, nobody calls me David. When I hear David in the room, I always turned around, and it's not me, it's somebody else they're talking to.

But one of the other things is that there is no matter what your personality is there is an element of “regal” treatment to an ambassador, including, whenever I'm going into a building, I'm going with a group of four people, everyone goes, I go first. Which, by the way, I think is inherently ridiculous, because I never have any idea where I'm going. I go through the door, and then I just stand there until everyone else goes through and they tell me where to go. I don't really like that. Particularly—and I hope the women in this room are not going to be insulted when I say this—I'm a pretty chivalrous person. When I go up there and meet with women, I hold the door for women. When I'm in the elevator, I wait for the women in the elevator to go out of the elevator. And that's just the way I am. But it's hard to do that as an ambassador because they everyone wants to push me out first, right? And Dave is nodding his head.

I was at an event this past week. And I was in an elevator with a large group of people, we were leaving the event, which was packed. Large group of people, half of them women, we get the freight elevator, we get to the lobby, and I stand back, and I hold the door open, and I make everyone get off the elevator before me. But turns out either there was a reporter there, or someone told the reporter that I did that. And then it was in a tweet, and then the commentary of the tweet is: “so David Cohen has caught the niceness disease of Canadians.”

I felt good about that. I mean, it's good, people are going to write something it's not so bad, to have it written that you were nice and polite, and let everyone off the elevator before you got off the elevator. What's the biggest surprise? I think I was

vastly prepared for this job. The Canada desk, including Russ, did a fantastic job preparing me. I think, on the one hand, I was worried I was driving them crazy. Because they do this big briefing memo and I edit it. I go through it repetitively. And so I expressed concern whether people were going to get irritated with me. They said, “no, people like it, because you’re like the first person we’ve ever prepared this memo for who’s obviously read it. So, we do all this work, and then we wonder whether anyone reads it or pays attention to it.” On the substance, I thought I was completely prepared.

What surprised me was what I referenced in the speech and what, as I went around the country talking to elected officials, the press, regular people, real people, and the hotel concierges and staff, waiters and waitresses, what surprised me was the voluntary, unprompted statements about what’s happened to the United States-Canada relationship. “Why don’t you like us anymore? We used to be your best friend. And now, we don’t know where we stand.” It has really informed my approach going forward because it hurts when I hear that and there isn’t any reason for that to be the case. I talked to the President about this. And he says, “well, what do you want me to? What do you want me to do when I’m there?” And I told him, I said, “the most important thing you can do is to make the case that the United States is back, and that we’re worthy of the trust, and the friendship and the relationship that we used to have.” And that’s the message that he delivered. That to me was the one thing that surprised me was the depth of the unhappiness and the wonder about what happened to this great relationship.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: That’s what happens when somebody at the top is impolite and reckless. It’s a shame. You mentioned losing your first name. Whenever I’m in Michigan I hear the Governor, I turn around and there’s a crowd rush into our Governor Gretchen Whitmer.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: Now, do people talk to you about what’s going on in America with guns? Do they raise that with you a lot? Are they polite about it?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: Well, they do raise it a lot, but they’re polite about it. The prevalence of guns in the United States is a stain on our country. And if I have one more person give me the NRA tagline of “guns don’t kill people, people kill people” [then] the evidence to me is indisputable: the plentiful supply and availability of guns in America is killing people. Plain and simple.

I do hear about it. I do hear about it in Canada, and we try and work together in figuring out, not necessarily how to control guns in the United States, not really part of my job here, but how do we limit the free flow of guns across the border and try and prevent the gun violence epidemic in the United States infecting Canada.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: The former Defense Minister Peter Mackay is here, also previously Attorney General of Canada. You may have a question on defense or anything but tell me what we need to know about NORAD modernization. That is the North America Regional Air Defense Command.

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: By the way, it’s a binational military command, the only binational command in the world. By binational, I mean Canada and the United States. It is our joint command for the defense of the Arctic, the defense of the continent, but it’s primarily directed at the Arctic.

I'll answer your NORAD modernization question in a few pieces, which is when I first got here, I think there was a lot of concern about Canada's commitment to NORAD. Not that they wanted to dismantle it, but there was more rhetoric than action. I think that's chapter one.

Chapter two is that Canada stepped up, and they stepped up in a meaningful way, with a series of announcements around NORAD modernization, which is basically commitments to make additional investments in some of the key elements of NORAD, particularly around surveillance—air and water surveillance. That's the focus of the Canadian commitment. That was chapter two. And I got to say, plenty of positive things about Canada, which I think Canada deserves for the scope and the reach and the breadth of Canada's expressed statement of support for NORAD modernization.

[When] you got a little bit under the hood, although the verbiage was all right, the hardness of the commitments were a little more questionable. In the sense, were these commitments going to come? The big number, the headline number was an almost \$30 billion commitment to NORAD modernization, and then a little fine type over the next twenty-six years. So all of a sudden, almost \$30 billion, which sounds like a pretty good number, turns out to be a billion dollars a year, without any timing specified.

Canada, one of the glaring needs in NORAD now is over-the-horizon radar, next generation radar system. United States committed to paying for, building, and deploying four of those systems, Canada committed to building two of those systems. But the timing for the Canadian commitment was 2032 for the first of the systems. The military people—both the US and Canadian military—came to me saying “2032 is too late when we need it now. If we can't have it now, because there's a timeline to order it, procure it.” “Have it built.” 2032 is the wrong year.”

We began to have conversations around timing. In connection with the President's visit, in the joint statement released, there were a number of adjustments and timing commitments made by Canada for NORAD. The first over-the-horizon radar system will now be delivered by 2028, which our people tell me is about as fast as it can be delivered because you have to order it and have it built up. We can't ask for more than that.

The other timing commitment is around the almost \$30 billion, a lot of which was for infrastructure improvements, with no timing attached to it. Talking with the Canadians, we said, “well, why do we think that these infrastructure commitments, which are runways, hangars, maintenance facilities, etc., [are important]?” They say, “well, they're important for the F-35 that we've ordered,” which, by the way, the Canadian decision to proceed with the purchase of eighty-eight F-35 future fighter aircrafts is one of the most significant positive statements for defense and supportive defense in the history of the Canadian government.

Why did it take them so long? This could have been done in 2015. I wasn't around in 2015. From the time I got here, to when that announcement was made, it was less than a year. It was a number one defense priority for the United States. We can't question the importance of Canada's decision to proceed with that, but it's not good enough to have eighty-eight F-35s showing up if you can't launch them,

maintain them, or land them. That's what those infrastructure improvements are going to be about.

The joint statement following the visit, Canada committed to a timeline to have those infrastructure improvements in place, coincident with the arrival of the F-35s. Which again, couldn't ask for anything more than that.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: I have a lot of questions, but I think we should go to the audience.

BRENDAN DELAY: I met Joe Biden before he became a Senator, Vice President and then President because he was dating, at that time, Nelia Hunter from Auburn, New York. I was in Syracuse, New York, where she had her first teaching job at Bellevue Elementary. I became very inclined to vote and register as a Democrat because when I was a kindergartener. He came by, he didn't have his car then, and he called me "sport". That was my first nickname. It seemed alright, I liked that; he was friendly. He would talk to all these other little children as he would have his fiancé at the time, and walk her home up Stinard Avenue, six blocks away. When I was a first grader, I saw that he had a green, two door, Corvette convertible [and] it had brown leather interior, which had been restored, maybe you've ridden in it. He was a person who was able to get a lot of attention, he liked that car. Then, he changed my nickname to "champ", so he would say, "hi, champ," and I would look at him, "hi," and that would be about our interchange. One time he did ask me to look at his car, and I walked around his car, and that was fine. He had picked kids up the street with some of my neighbors and a good friend of my father, he drove him to work in the Corvette, so he wouldn't have to take the bus and he would go to Carrier Corporation. That's how I became a Democrat, and you probably figured out what my vote was.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: Thank you. I trust you voted for him, then.

BRENDAN DELAY: It's a secret ballot in our country. But yes, I did.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: That was up at Syracuse. Is that where you were?

BRENDAN DELAY: Yes, and he always maintained his ties in Syracuse, and especially in Auburn. He would go back there a lot after his wife passed away. You could see he really was a coalition builder. He liked people, and he would maintain these ties. I could see that as he built all these groupings. He was really building voters when it came down to it later on.

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: It's such a quintessential Joe Biden story, because as I talked about his superpower. The other superpower is he's just a normal Joe. He is not carried away with himself. Every time I talk to him, I say "Mr. President" he says to me, "you can call me Joe." I say, "Thank you, Mr. President. I'm not quite comfortable doing that." But he's, he's just a normal person.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: Questions?

JAMES McCARTEN: Hi, ambassadors—James McCarten [of the] Canadian Press. Sorry to be the skunk at the garden party, Ambassador, but I do have to ask about The Washington Post story from yesterday. First of all, what's your official take on what the Prime Minister reportedly said about Canada's NATO spending levels? Secondly, if I could, what is it about Canada, or what have you gleaned in your time there so far, that makes this issue of defense spending such a tough nut to crack, north of the border?

HON. DAVID L. COHEN: Actually, I don't view you as the skunk in the garden. I was hoping to get that question. So let me say a couple of things. First of all, I have nothing to say about The Washington Post story. I'm not in a position to comment on leaks of documents, likely illegally obtained and disseminated. I have nothing to say about the story.

In terms of the Prime Minister's comments, this may surprise some people, but the real story here is the nature of the US-Canada relationship. I've commented on this in a few different contexts today, but I want to have the opportunity to comment on it, specifically in the context about defense—Canada's commitment to defense. When I stand up and say this, I'm not suggesting that Canada should or should not honor a 2% of GDP spending on defense.

I do note for the record, this is not something that was imposed on Canada. It's a commitment that Canada made when they made a choice to agree to that level of defense spending. This is not a matter of anyone interfering with Canada's sovereignty and making its own decisions about how to allocate its budget. It would be a bad mistake. I think that too many people are making this mistake. Led by the press, somehow we [think we] need to assess Canada's commitment to defense by one metric: *the percentage of its GDP that is being spent on defense*. I don't think that's right. I [have] talked to enough military people—both Canadian and US—on a repetitive basis to realize that the level of defense spending and what Canada, the United States, [or] any other country puts into defense has a multi-dimensional aspect to it.

I prefer to look at it in the following way: which is, first of all, deal with threat assessments. What are the threats? And how [are] Canada and the United States stepping up to deal with those threats? So, I think the two biggest threats we've had since I've been ambassador are Ukraine and the Arctic.

Let's start with Ukraine. Forget about the percentage of Canada's defense spend as compared to GDP. Canada has stepped up at every opportunity, whenever requested by the United States or by the UN to provide military support to Ukraine, over a billion dollars since this war began, which is way disproportionate to Canada's size, population-wise to the United States. Canada is 12% of the size of the United States, and they've done one billion dollars; the United States is \$35 billion.

Every time there's been a need, Canada stepped up. There was a need for tanks, Canada stepped up and bought tanks. Before the United States got the tanks there, Canada had tanks there. People said, "well, it was only eight tanks." Well, proportionately, that was a fair share of the tanks that Canada should provide.

I was in meetings with the Secretary of Defense, the Minister of National Defense, where she asked "what is, in your opinion, the biggest need for Ukraine now? I have \$500 million that I can spend between now and March, where should I spend that money?" She turned said, and whatever the Secretary's answer is, she calls him Lloyd, "whatever Lloyd's answer is, to that question, I'm going to need your help to figure out how we can procure and do that." The answer to that question, are the NASAM systems, which, coincidentally had a price tag of about \$400 million US, that is roughly the number that Canada was prepared to spend. And we helped Canada procure those NASAM systems. Again, what's your number one priority US?

NASAM systems and Canada says, “okay, we’re doing it and they did it.” That’s the Ukraine threat. Then there’s NORAD and the Arctic.

I’ve already talked about stepping up on NORAD—NORAD modernization. We couldn’t ask Canada to do more than what they’ve done in the NORAD context. When you look at this on a threat assessment basis, and not just looking at a single data point, Canada has stood up. They have been responsive; they have been our partner; they talk to us. We talk all the time about this. Ironically, I had a long meeting with Defense Minister Anand this week, talking about these issues the day before, actually the day that The Washington Post article came out that evening, but it wasn’t out yet. And this is the conversation we were having, and it’s a conversation that happens all the time. I think that’s what everyone should want the relationship to be.

Second point, I will say, for me, trajectory is important. Is Canada moving backwards and spending more money? You can measure it however you want to measure it. But the trajectory has been good. \$8 billion in the current year’s budget for defense is, the way my mother would say, “it’s not chopped liver. It’s real money.” If [from] when President Obama was in office Canada’s defense spending is higher, it has moved up and so trajectory matters.

The third thing I would say is that you have to remember that in the in the Joe Biden view of the world no country should be judged or assessed out there on their own for what they’re doing in the defense space. The question is, what kind of a partner are you? How are we participating? We think of Canada and the United States is inextricably intertwined in our defense policy and our defense objectives. It’s why we talk to each other. A surprise, Jim, you asked me that before. [I’m surprised by] the proportion of my time that I spend on defense issues, I would not have thought that was the case. It’s all productive conversations to advance the ball and to make sure that we have a secure continental defense, first and foremost, and that Canada and the United States are joined at the hip for protecting democracies and setting an example for democracies around the world. So that’s why I hoped someone would ask me that question, because it is not a perspective that is talked about very frequently, but it is the perspective that this administration has, and I think it’s the perspective that Canada has as well.

In terms of your political question, my team will not be happy about this because my answer to that question should be I’m the United States Ambassador to Canada. I’m not going to get into Canadian politics but it’s an irresistible area for me. I still read a lot of polling, and I think the I think the answer is that budgeting, budgetary decisions, resource allocation decisions are still very political by nature. And historically, for Canada, defence simply has not had the passionate support of the Canadian voter.

I think the reason for that in part is, Canada is surrounded by water on three sides and the United States on the fourth side. Realistically, if you’re, if you’re a regular Canadian citizen, are you really worried that you’re going to be invaded? Where’s the invasion coming from? And as a result, there is a greater priority on things like dental care and childcare, and equitable investments, and economic growth, than there is for a defense. But in the teeth of those headwinds, Canada’s made very substantial investments in defense over the past few years, which I think shows the value of leadership. And my job is not to promote Prime Minister Trudeau, just as

President Biden's job was not to promote Prime Minister Trudeau, but he has demonstrated leadership of balance, leadership in the sense that he understands the importance of defense, and he has led an administration that has continued to invest in defense that has incrementally moved the ball along and will continue to do so.

And the last thing I'll say and this is what people don't talk about: the ongoing defense policy review which is occurring. We don't really have that in the United States, but in Canada, it is the mechanism by which the government steps back, looks at what is happening in a particular space, in this case, defense policy, and makes an honest assessment whether we should be investing more in that space and that review is well underway. We are expecting results, public statement by the end of this year. That means probably sometime in [20]24. Not by the end of this year, but I fully expect that that the completion of the defense policy review will result in continued allocation of resources to defense.

HON. JAMES BLANCHARD: It sounds like Canada's very lucky to have you as the United States Ambassador to Canada. We are lucky to have you represent[ing] the United States. Thank you very much.