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Canadian leaders promote U.S. trade

Houston Business Journal - by [Greg Barr](#) Senior Reporter

Three prominent Canadian politicians from that country's energy-rich western provinces offered a united front Wednesday in urging the United States to stay the course on free trade during a one-day, whirlwind trade mission to Houston.

Speaking at a breakfast meeting sponsored by the **Greater Houston Partnership**, Premier Brad Wall of Saskatchewan, Premier Ed Stelmach of Alberta and Premier Gary Doer of Manitoba expressed concern over recent rumblings from some members of the U.S. Congress about inserting "Buy American" provisions for iron and steel products and other protectionist measures into the economic stimulus package proposed by President Barack Obama.

They pointed out that Canada and the U.S. — and Texas in particular — have a strong trade relationship. Annual trade between Texas and the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba totaled \$6.4 billion in 2007, while seaborne trade between Houston and Canada grew by 45 percent in 2007 to \$904.3 million. Some \$12 billion in Texas exports headed north to Canada that year, including \$297 million from Houston.

Two resource-driven skirmishes between the two countries over commodities such as steel and softwood lumber have proven to be thorny topics in the past, when the countries have accused each other of inserting unfair protectionist subsidies into the mix.

After the meeting, Wall said he was heartened that comments on the issue from the White House this week took a positive tone, and he was confident cooler heads would prevail in order to preserve the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"It's not Canada that the U.S. is losing jobs to. Thirty-five of 50 states in the U.S. already have Canada as their No. 1 (trade) market," Wall said.

Considering that Canada and Texas have such strong trade ties, Doer acknowledged in his comments that he was preaching to the converted, but said criticism of NAFTA from some U.S. circles would threaten to unscramble the complex free-trade "omelette" that has been created since the free trade agreement went into effect in 1994. Changes to NAFTA, he said, would only increase job losses.

In fact, the final provisions of NAFTA only went into effect in 2008, removing final trade restrictions on certain agricultural products moving between Mexico and the U.S.

The premiers urged both countries to take a balanced, multifaceted approach to energy development, focusing on the areas of carbon capture and sequestration and alternative energy development. Rather than promote wind or solar power as a total solution to North America's energy needs, Doer said they should be viewed as part of a comprehensive energy solution, in concert with environmentally responsible extraction of fossil fuels.

Canada is the No. 1 source of foreign oil shipped to the U.S., with nearly two million barrels of crude oil sent across the border each day.

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