



**Testimony of Dr. Laura Dawson  
Executive Director of the U.S.-Canada Future Borders Coalition**

**for a Hearing before the HoU.S.e Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on  
Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability**

**Tuesday March 28, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Bishop and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Dr. Laura Dawson and I am the Executive Director of the Future Borders Coalition – We are a U.S.-Canada organization dedicated to building better borders for travel and trade.

**First, I'd like to talk to you about the importance of the northern border for U.S. prosperity and jobs.**

The United States and Canada boast the world's longest international border, spanning 5525 miles, adjacent to the territory of 13 U.S. states and eight Canadian provinces and territories, under the management of 119 official land border crossings

Every day, 400,000 people and \$2 billion in trade cross the border. The vast majority of those crossings are problem free.

**On the trade side**, Canada is the largest buyer of U.S. products for 30 U.S. states

Canada buys \$300 billion in goods and \$100 billion in services annually from the United States.

Canada buys more from the U.S. than do the UK, Japan, and Germany combined.

The United States and Canada build things together through integrated and effective supply chains, building good jobs at in both countries and competitiveness in the world.

**On travel**, Canada is the United States' largest source of tourists and tourism revenue. Valued at around \$23 billion per year during the pre-COVID period, tourist services used to be the United States' sixth largest export to Canada.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Travel Canada Factsheet 2018

[https://www.U.S.travel.org/system/files/media\\_root/document/Research\\_Country-Profile\\_Canada.pdf](https://www.U.S.travel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Country-Profile_Canada.pdf)

I use the past tense, because while air travel numbers have recovered post pandemic, passenger vehicle crossings and day trips have not.<sup>2</sup> This is especially difficult for border communities in remote areas such as Grand Forks, North Dakota, and Sault Ste Marie, Michigan which are closer to Canadian population centers than American ones.<sup>3</sup>

Adding new impediments to cross the border hurts the prosperity of Americans and Canadians. This does not mean abrogating our shared commitment to border security but it does mean having a realistic view of what our challenge areas are and how to address them.

We have heard recently about multi-thousand percent increases in CBP “encounters” on the U.S.-Canada border in recent years but it’s important to compare apples to apples. The data presented by the Northern Border Security Caucus compares the present day with early 2021 when land borders were closed due to COVID for all non-essential travel.<sup>4</sup>

It’s also important be clear on what we’re talking about so that we respond appropriately.

What do we mean by “encounters”? These can be anything from an irregular migration crossing to someone showing up at the border without a passport or vaccination record.

Clearly, the security priority should be irregular migration that takes place between border crossings. Of the 165,000 northern border encounters reported by CBP since the start of FY2022, only 2.7 percent of these occurred between official border ports of entry.

In absolute terms, we are talking about some 4500 people being stopped from migrating from Canada into the U.S. This is not nothing, and this challenge must be dealt with appropriate tools, border staffing, and cooperation between the United States and Canada.

And, while my role here is not to pit U.S.-Canada border against the U.S.-Mexico border, it is important to maintain a sense of proportion. Between October 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023, just 0.5 percent (one half of one percent) of U.S. Border Patrol encounters outside normal Ports of Entry occurred along the U.S.-Canada border.

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<sup>2</sup> In January 2023, Canadian residents returned from 2.7 million trips to the United, four times the number taken in January 2022 (690,200) and 89.4% of the pre-pandemic level from the same month in 2020. The number of trips returning by air was 1.1 million, higher (+18.2%) than the same month in 2020, exceeding the pre-pandemic level for the fifth consecutive month since September 2022. Of the total return trips by Canadian residents in January 2023, 1.6 million trips were by automobile, nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of which were same-day (Source: Statistics Canada).

<sup>3</sup> See Tu-Uyen Tran, “Canadian shoppers and tourists return to border cities but in smaller numbers than pre-pandemic,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis* (July 25, 2022). <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2022/canadian-shoppers-and-tourists-return-to-border-cities-but-in-smaller-numbers-than-pre-pandemic>

<sup>4</sup> See Alexander Panetta, “Republicans talked about the Canadian border. They skipped all sorts of details,” *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (March 3, 2023). Data cited from U.S. CBP and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) sources. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/republicans-canada-border-analysis-1.6767883>

## **What does safe and effective U.S. Canada border management look like?**

**On immigration**, the first thing to keep in mind is that Canada, as a sovereign nation, may have different rules when it comes to immigration but these are not looser or easier than the U.S. -- just different. Canada has a well-developed skills-based migration program, it has temporary foreign worker programs that welcome specialized workers for ongoing work periods in Canada punctuated by returns to home countries, work authorization that is unconnected to citizenship. Canada also has a successful program for community-based sponsorship of new refugees. Many of the lessons from the Canadian program have been U.S.ed as a model for the [U.S. Welcome Corps](#) program.

As we look to the future, Canada and the United States must work together to help manage the push factors that are sending asylum seekers to our borders. Both countries have a role to support democratization and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean, thereby helping to help mitigate the crisis on the U.S. southern border and ensure the burden does not rest on the U.S. alone.

Where there are frictions, Canada and the U.S. have a long history of working together to find equitable and effective solutions, such as the recently-announced amendments to the [Safe Third Country Agreement](#) which contributed to surging numbers of asylum seekers crossing into Canada at non-border posts. To help share the burden with the U.S, Canada agreed to accept an additional 15,000 asylum seekers per year from Western Hemisphere countries and work with the U.S. to promote lawful labor mobility pathways.

**On law enforcement**, one of the great strengths of the United States-Canada relationship is that American and Canadian officials have a personal relationship with their counterparts and are in communication every single day. There is no other country for which this is the case. When there is a question or problem U.S. and Canadian officials have each other's backs.

But, sometimes person-to-person relationships are not enough. There are also formal mechanisms for collaboration such as the [Shiprider](#) program where jointly crewed vessels enforce the law on both sides of the border in international waterways. There are trusted trader and trusted traveler programs, joint deployments U.S. ATF and DEA officials and the RCMP, and numerous intelligence-sharing agreements to share information on cross border crime and prevent immigration fraud. Many of these initiatives are advanced through the [Cross-Border Crime Forum](#). Launched in 2022, this is a bilateral effort to tackle such joint challenges as cybercrime, violent extremism, human smuggling, and firearms.

### **Support for CBP**

I am firmly convinced that the U.S.-Canada Border is strong, secure, and a conduit for prosperity and employment in both of our nations. But that doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement. I urge all members of Congress to support investment in U.S.-Canada border infrastructure, bilateral economic development programs, and to provide the dedicated men and women who are our border officials with the financial resources, tools,

and technology they need to build and sustain the smart and secure border of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

An investment in northern border staffing and infrastructure helps both security and commerce at the same time. Sufficient staff means that trusted traders can sail through designated corridors without excessive wait times. Infrastructure modernization means that bridges, tunnels, road and rail crossings that can meet volume demands and are resilient in the face of climate challenges and cyber attacks.

State-of-the-art technologies such as AI sensors for vehicles and facial biometric tools mean that officials don't have to make on-the-spot judgements about admissibility with insufficient data. With the right technology and the staffing to use it, officers can confirm admissibility using data collected and verified before the vehicle reaches the border crossing.

Airports and even cruise ships play a role in securing the U.S. border. U.S.-Canada preclearance and trusted traveler programs filter out bad actors before they reach U.S. soil. They are also good for the economy, inspiring even more Canadian tourists to spend money and time in the U.S.

The secure, and prosperous U.S.-Canada border is unique in the world and cannot be taken for granted. It is both a shared benefit and a shared responsibility for our two nations.

### **Additional Information**

Cross-Border Crime Forum

<https://www.jU.S.tice.gov/opa/pr/U.S.-and-canada-reestablish-cross-border-crime-forum>

Canada Travel

[https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/subjects/travel\\_and\\_tourism/international\\_travel](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/subjects/travel_and_tourism/international_travel)

U.S. Travel

[https://www.U.S.travel.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/inbound-travel-market-profile\\_ca\\_mx\\_fin.pdf](https://www.U.S.travel.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/inbound-travel-market-profile_ca_mx_fin.pdf)