



### **Obama endorses Canada's bid to join Trans Pacific Partnership talks**

Prime Minister Stephen Harper emerged from a three-nation summit Monday pledging to work with his counterparts on joint efforts to boost economic growth and trade, fight organized drug crime and promote energy development.

While he secured a public endorsement from U.S. President Barack Obama for Canada's aspirations to join negotiations in the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership, there is still no guarantee the U.S. and others won't demand stiff concessions from Harper. Harper met with Obama and Mexican President Felipe Calderon at the White House. After the two-hour meeting, the leaders issued a joint written statement outlining future areas of cooperation, and met with reporters in the Rose Garden.

"Canada places the highest value on the friendship and partnership among our three countries," said Harper. "We form one of the world's largest freetrade zones, which has been of great benefit to all our nations."

Harper also said he was pleased Obama has once again "welcomed" Canada's "interest" in joining talks for the TPP, a proposed free-trade zone that promises to be one of the world's most important trade agreements.

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Written by Mark Kennedy, Postmedia News | Vancouver Sun  
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The TPP is a nine-member AsiaPacific free-trade proposal being negotiated among the United States, Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

Canada, Japan and Mexico have all signalled they want in on the talks but Canada's entry into the TPP is being blocked by some countries, and it's believed the U.S. and New Zealand have had the most serious concerns.

The opponents say Canada should not join the negotiations until it first, as a precondition, promises to abandon the long-standing supply management system that protects fewer than 20,000 dairy and poultry farmers. The system protects farmers behind tariffs, assigns them production quotas and forces Canadians to pay higher prices for products such as milk, cheese, chicken and eggs.

Asked if Canada is prepared to end its supply-management system to get a seat at the negotiating table, Harper did not answer directly but appeared to suggest he's not ready to bow to those demands at the outset.

"Canada's position on TPP is the same as our position in any trade negotiation," he said. "We expect to negotiate all manner of issues, and we seek ambitious outcomes. In those negotiations, Canada will attempt to promote and defend Canada's interests."

Obama said he's "pleased" Canada wants to join the TPP, adding "consultations" have begun among the nine nations involved in negotiations "on how new members can meet the high standards of this trade agreement."

"Every country that's participating is going to have to make some modifications," said Obama.

Among the other major issues discussed was the dangers posed to all three countries by the drug cartels in Mexico and the growth of organized crime.

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Calderon, whose country has been battling the drug trade, said it is critical for North America to take action to stop the demand for drugs from Mexico, crack down on money laundering and squeeze the cross-border shipment of weapons.

"Thinking that what happens in Mexico doesn't have anything to do with the security of the citizens of this country or of any other citizen of North America is a mistake," said Calderon.

Among the other priorities and actions outlined in the joint statement:

### .REGULATION

The countries pledge "to introduce timely and tangible regulatory measures to enable innovation and growth while ensuring high standards of public health, safety, and environmental protection. We will continue to reduce transaction costs and improve the existing business environment." The statement says by eliminating "unnecessary regulatory differences," smaller businesses are better equipped to participate in an integrated North American economy.

### . BORDERS

The leaders say "continued North American competitiveness requires secure supply chains and efficient borders. We remain committed to achieving this through cooperative approaches."

### .ENERGY

The leaders say cooperation on energy "reduces the cost of doing business and enhances economic competitiveness" for the three countries. "We recognize the growing regional and

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federal cooperation in the area of continental energy, including electricity generation and interconnection and welcome increasing North American energy trade. We commit our governments to work with all stakeholders to deepen such cooperation to enhance our collective energy security, including the safe and efficient exploration and exploitation of resources."

### . PANDEMICS

The countries have released a new plan to provide more cooperation "to strengthen our response to future animal and pandemic influenza events in North America and commit to its implementation." The leaders also used the summit to prepare for another meeting they will attend in mid-April in Cartagena, Colombia. That gathering - the Summit of the Americas - involves leaders from the nations that comprise the Organization of American States.

After that meeting, Harper will travel to Chile, where it's expected he will make a pitch for Canada's request to join negotiations in the TPP.

Chile is one of the original signatories to the nine countries from Asia and the Americas negotiating access to the free-trade partnership.

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