

CIFFA'S Director, Policy and Communications Julia Kuzeljevich attended Future Borders Coalition Summit in Washington, D.C. October 12 and 13.

Laura Dawson, Future Borders Coalition's Executive Director, opened the full-day conference session on October 13 noting that between Canada and the U.S., there are very few "true disputes". Most issues between the two countries can be resolved with consultation or discussion.

Matt Morrison, the Executive Director for the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, and the Co-Chair of the Future Borders Coalition, noted that the U.S. and Canada have the largest trade relationship.

He called for more members to come into the coalition and bring their significant user experience to the table to make the Canada-US border work better.

Solomon Wong, President and CEO of InterVISTAS, who wrapped up the day of presentations, and discussed the FBC's next steps, made note of the FBC's latest release, a report on the digital border:

<https://www.futureborderscoalition.org/post/new-report-on-the-digital-border-september-2022>

Wong also commented that a "divergent" border policy is re-emerging.

The FBC will continue to work on strategic areas around both goods and people, evolving pre-border clearances, maximizing work before borders, creating a digital roadmap around advanced screening, and taking a longer-term view of the border not just from today's conveyances, but also from the view of new technologies.

Kirsten Hillman, Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. , kicked off the early morning session of the conference in a **fireside chat with FBC Executive Director Laura Dawson**. Her key observations about her role and the management of the U.S.-Canada relationship were the following:

Hillman noted that the job is enormous; it's multifaceted, and a "huge honour" to perform.

"Our job is different from that of other countries which deal primarily with the State Department. We do that too, but we also have 15 agencies represented here (i.e. finance, agriculture, police, border).

Domestic policy changes in the U.S. can have an effect on the U.S.-Canada relationship. "All policy is local."

Commenting on the pandemic and on U.S.-Canada cooperation throughout, Hillman noted that it was an unprecedented, personal, global phenomenon with so many layers to it. Protecting the health and safety of citizens was the overriding concern, as well as reinforcing the openness between the two countries.

There was literally a daily conversation/exchange between the countries.

Hillman said it was an opportunity to learn about giving guidance and advice when the situation on the ground was constantly changing. Thanks to the strength of the existing relationship between the two militaries they were able to have a breakthrough on many aspects (of how to manage logistically through a pandemic.)

In terms of action items still left to do, Hillman mentioned the bilateral Nexus program which has been stalled by the U.S.'s attempt to renegotiate the terms of a 20-year agreement.

The U.S. and Canada share a good relationship, but Hillman noted that “good friends have to be able to say when something isn’t working as well as it should.”

(read more details here:)

https://mcusercontent.com/fea968051b7b6149c63aaa0c5/files/1db07b64-5039-1ee2-e27e-5cecd56dda3/Canada_says_U.S._holding_NEXUS_travel_program_hostage_CBC_News.pdf

Erin O’Gorman, President, CBSA:

Commented that there are 117 border crossings between Canada and the U.S., and daily conversations between the two agencies.

The urgency of border facilitation was paramount during the pandemic.

The pandemic underscored our ability between the Canada-U.S. governments to find solutions. There were different approaches but the two countries managed through it together.

Moving forward, the foundation is solid, and our approaches won’t interrupt the flow of people and goods.

CBSA has had to manage “crises within crises”, she said, notably, truck blockades at the borders, the floods situation in B.C., and most recently, facilitating hydro crews into the Maritimes after the hurricanes.

Looking at cargo and courier preclearance, and the topic of biometrics, it will take time to modernize things. We will have to be realistic and do it right.

Expectations on the use of technology is high. The Arrive Can experience from the pandemic is a cautionary tale-“but we are going to try and save the brand. People expect BOTH ease of travel and transparency in the post-pandemic world,” O’Gorman said.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Chris Magnus addressed the audience saying that:

“When it comes right down to it, we all want the same thing.-the safe, secure flow of goods. Our partnerships developed with our Canadian counterparts is foundational.

The USMCA has bolstered trade-there has been an increase in Canadian preferential trade.

“We are working hard to develop a more sustainable supply chain. CBP is also working in tandem with other organizations to develop a targeting method for illegal timber, fishing, etc.” he said.

Magnus also announced that on June 25, Ian Saunders was nominated to become the next Secretary General of the WCO.

Laurie Trautman, Director, Border Policy Research Institute, WWU, held a discussion with Michael Keenan, Deputy Minister, with Transport Canada.

The discussion focused, among other topics, on the recovery of cross-border trade post-Covid.

Keenan talked about Transport Canada having to shut down a whole chunk of trade but keep goods flowing, making decisions hour by hour, minute by minute during the height of the crisis.

Trust across governments was key:

“CEOs were watching their revenues decline. In terms of people moving, in Canada, we really flatlined for over a year,” he said.

It is harder to restart things, than to shut them down. The system showed a lot of stresses and strains. But there was a high level of trust among the operators.

“It’s unimaginable how much we’ve been able to change basic things. From a Covid perspective we are back in peacetime. When we had to, we found a way. I think we can do that moving forward. You can figure out how things work when they’re broken. For example, during Covid we found out just how integrated the North American supply chain is.”

Supply chain went from a geeky, obscure thing to something in the common lexicon.

The realization is that when you’re building a supply chain in Canada, you can’t ignore the role of the U.S.

Commenting on the ArriveCan app, Keenan noted that it fulfilled a purpose when it was a million times better than the alternatives. Systems that government builds also have to work for people. There is a lot of room for improvement on the visibility curve, he said.

When asked how industry was supportive during the Covid pandemic, and how it could do better, Keenan noted that industry helped immensely by implementing changes even before they became mandated.

“We got through things, as awful as it was, because of industry taking a leadership position,” he said.

What could we have done better?

Canada was particularly tough. But we can do better by managing the interdependencies and interactions, making the system stronger and finding a way to carry people through it.

Trautman asked Keenan if government has engaged in an “after-action” review of how it handled the pandemic.

Keenan said that “ a lot of work has been done to pull out resources/feedback loops/dynamic learning as we go. We are working to do a deeper dive inside the Canadian system, and we have a strategic intent to pull everything we can. One of the pieces of advice through the Supply Chain Task Force is to work with the U.S. to build resilience into the system,” he said.

Keenan added that the supply chain is definitely in a fragile state, but it is still remarkable how well things are going, all things considered.