

**TRILATERAL BORDER ISSUES SYMPOSIUM
MARCH 18-19, 2013 - ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY**

Executive Summary

The inaugural Trilateral Border Issues Symposium, held in March 2013 at Arizona State University in Phoenix, Arizona, brought together leading academics, business groups and government officials from Canada, the United States and Mexico to examine and evaluate a variety of trilateral border challenges. The purpose of the symposium was not to reach a consensus on border issues or on the future of NAFTA but to act as a springboard for ideas, discussion and debate. Several themes highlighted the day-and-a-half of discussions. There was a general consensus that the movement of goods and services in North America is disrupted by bureaucracy and inefficiency that inhibits productivity; that “smart” security is necessary for facilitating trade; and that the border is no longer a linear demarcation separating states.

Most participants lamented the “stalling” of NAFTA, the 1993-94 trilateral trade deal that set the standard for future global trade agreements. In spite of increased attention on Asia as the future driver of global trade, participants still valued the importance of NAFTA, especially for North American prosperity. Nevertheless, there was no consensus on the best approaches to further advance NAFTA. Some experts advocate a “big idea” approach – such as moving the agreement forward in less than a decade to create a customs union, a North American border pass and a single continental energy market, just three examples of several recommended initiatives. Others advocated an “incremental” approach of moving forward pragmatically in smaller steps. Throughout the symposium, the importance of Mexico was stressed (currently the fastest growing economy of the three partners), as the “lynchpin” of North America’s future success.

Although implementation of the biggest pieces of the North American project will always require the action of the federal governments, the symposium experts encouraged tapping into expertise and governance well beyond the federal level. Investigating more private-public partnerships, establishing University-business-government collaboration and better utilizing the best practices from numerous successful pilot projects on both the Canada-US and US-Mexico borders were all encouraged. Furthermore, it was suggested that provinces and states, who face the reality of day-to-day border concerns, could directly tackle specific border management issues at the local/regional level.

The symposium also served as a reminder to think of North America’s borders as no longer a linear demarcation where physical goods and people cross. Borders are increasingly virtual with, for example, on going challenges in the cross-border movement of capital and credit. Indeed, the movement of money and services were presented as an expanding frontier of North American cross-border relations.

The six panels and two keynote addresses that compared and contrasted government and private sector trade and security challenges on the northern and southern borders offered symposium participants greater insights into how some of these issues may be resolved. The first Trilateral Border Issues Symposium set the stage for ongoing dialogue and debate, on both the future of NAFTA and specific border challenges. With that in mind, the symposium hosts intend to continue the discussion in an annual event, with a Trilateral Border Issues Symposium II already in the early stages of planning for March 2014, once again in Phoenix.