

Canada and Wisconsin: Friends and Partners

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Sen. Kathleen Vinehout writes about “Canada Day” in the Capitol. The Canadian General Consul visited with state legislators and shared information about the incredible partnership between Wisconsin and Canada.

MADISON - Did you know a third of everything Wisconsin sells to the world we sell to Canada? And more visitors come to Wisconsin from Canada than any other country?

Wisconsin recently celebrated Canada Day at the Capitol. We welcomed Canadian Consul General Roy Norton. He brought along a host of facts about Wisconsin’s relationship with Canada.

Many of us think the ideal summer vacation is going north – this summer my husband and son enjoyed a canoe trip in Canada. Fortunately, Canadians like to head south. Wisconsin welcomed over 300,000 Canadian visitors who spent \$65 million last year.

Even Canadians who don’t venture to the Badger state help our economy. Canada is the largest buyer of Wisconsin products. Our state sells more to Canada than we sell to our next six foreign country markets combined. Wisconsin goods bound for Canada include paper, plastics, beverages (including alcohol), electric motors, engines and motor vehicle parts. Nearly 160,000 Wisconsin jobs depend on trade and investment with Canada.

In return, Wisconsin buys plastic, wood pulp and wood products, fertilizer, natural gas, cereals and live animals from Canada. Surprised by live animals? Spend a day at the World Dairy Expo

and you will see the importance of Canadian cattle to Wisconsin. The story of dairy cattle breeding is one of Wisconsin ingenuity perfected by Canada and brought back to us.

Like Wisconsin, Canada has a long environmental history. Back in 1911, while the Wisconsin Legislature passed a host of progressive bills including workers compensation legislation and nonpartisan local elections, the Canadian Parliament created the world's first national park system. Today Canada has a park system that would cover the landmass of the state of New Mexico.

Usually state lawmakers don't do much by way of international relations, but a few years ago, my legislative colleagues and I worked to pass the Great Lakes Compact. This international agreement updated protections for our Great Lakes.

The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement added modern concerns including an international approach to controlling invasive species, like Asian Carp, efforts to prevent further loss of habitat and species, and efforts to consider climate change impacts on our shared Great Lakes resources.

Canada continues to do its part worldwide to slow global deforestation. Almost 30% of the world's boreal – or coniferous- forests are in Canada. The forests absorb carbon dioxide helping to protect our planet from global climate change. Over 90% of forestland is under public stewardship for responsible habitat protection and timber management

Waterways also provide habitat. For nearly thirty years, the U.S and Canada have worked jointly to protect our waterfowl through an agreement known as the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Over the years, various partners conserved 13 million acres of wetlands and raised over \$3 billion for conservation efforts

The Consul General came to Wisconsin with a message of shared democracy, gratitude, friendship and cooperation. But, he also reminded us of what Canada prefers in return.

He reminded us that half of Wisconsin's gasoline comes from Canadian oil. His country contains

the world's third largest oil reserves. Canada would like to see the Keystone XL pipeline built. Mr. Norton told us the pipeline would take eight 100-car oil trains off the rail tracks every day.

Mr. Norton shared with us the importance of Wisconsin to Canadian railroads. Two major Canadian rail companies traverse Wisconsin every day. The lines run north to the Canadian border and then east and west across the Canadian countryside.

One popular Wisconsin program the Consul General did not like was "Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin". He referred to this type of program as a barrier or preferences' and said "Buy Wisconsin discriminates against your best customers. You must remember that Canada does not compete with Wisconsin on labor, health, and environmental standards. We value these as much as you."

Mr. Norton told the Senators, "I think the 'Buy Wisconsin' might be aimed at the other country with a name that starts with 'C'!"

I do not see Wisconsin stopping promotion of Wisconsin products anytime soon. But I did suggest that a "Buy Canadian" campaign might be successful in the Badger state. And I highly recommend buying Canadian winter gear.

Mr. Norton laughed and said, "Yes, we do know winter."

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