



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Janet Napolitano has a message for Canadians: It's a border. Get used to it.

The new Homeland Security Secretary had only stern comments yesterday about the state and future of the Canada-U.S. border, at a symposium hosted by the Brookings Institution.

Her goal seemed to be to throw a bucket of reality on anyone who hoped that the arrival of Barack Obama's new administration would herald a loosening of new restrictions on cross-border traffic.

The days when Canadians and Americans moved back and forth across the border—"it's as though there's not a border at all," as she put it— are over.

"It's a real border, and we need to address it as a real border," Ms. Napolitano said, calling on both Americans and Canadians to accept this "change of culture."

That culture changes most emphatically June 1, when the United States will require anyone entering from Canada to produce a passport or its equivalent.

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, whose district encompasses Rochester, Buffalo and Niagara Falls, believes she knows what will happen that day.

"There will be pure chaos," she predicted. Lines will lengthen, people will be denied entry, tourism and business will suffer. And with the addition of the Olympics it's going to be even more so."

Tourist industry officials are predicting major declines in cross-border traffic, because only about a quarter of Americans carry passports.

States and provinces now offer enhanced drivers licences, which are an acceptable alternative, but in many cases they cost more and take longer to acquire than a passport.

Ms. Slaughter said she plans to introduce legislation to delay implementation of the passport requirement for one year. Although she has been successful in persuading her congressional colleagues to grant a previous extension, those who know the issue said there was virtually no chance of a further delay.

These days, the Canada-U.S. border faces worsening challenges, as a plethora of new charges, regulations and red tape, mostly imposed by Americans in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, amount to the equivalent of a new tariff on goods and services.

This tariff-in-all-but-name leaves manufacturers increasingly concerned that the integrated Canada-U.S. economy could begin to rupture. Some are already looking at contingency plans, such as additional warehouses or alternative suppliers, in case of disruption in delivery cycles.

Campbell Soup, for example, is moving “from just-in-time to just-in-case,” warned Kelly Johnston, an executive with the company.

Canadian politicians, and industry leaders on both sides of the border, hoped that the arrival of a new, Democratic administration would lessen the emphasis on security that Mr. Napolitano's predecessor, Michael Chertoff, placed on border relations.

It was on his watch that Congress passed the passport requirements, and it was Mr. Chertoff who vetoed a planned initiative that would have made it easier for goods to pre-clear customs, easing lineups.

Ms. Napolitano confessed that, having lived most of her life in either New Mexico, where she was raised, or Arizona, where she was governor, “I've never actually spent much time on the Canadian border,” though she plans to visit it later this spring and this summer.

To educate herself, she commissioned a study of the border, chastising Canadian journalists who speculated that this was an ominous sign.

Nonetheless, Ms. Napolitano said she discovered there were differences in the way the two countries screened people and goods, and in their risk-assessment policies.

And there were also differences that were “nuanced but very real in immigration and visa procedures,” she added.

Given these differences, she said, the challenge was: “How do you make the U.S.-Canada border a futuristic border,” even as the United States moved to “change the culture of no-border to border.”

The day was not entirely discouraging for open-border enthusiasts. Transport and Infrastructure Minister John Baird assured the gathering that a new bridge between Windsor and Detroit,

through which one-quarter of all Canada-U.S. trade flows, “has been and will continue to be the number one infrastructure project for Canada.”

And Roberta Jacobson, who is Deputy Assistant Secretary for Canada, Mexico and NAFTA at the State Department, said that Canada and the United States should talk about border issues without involving Mexico, the third member of the North American Free Trade Agreement partnership.

“This is one where we ought to start with Canada,” she said. This has long been the wish of Canadian officials, who believe that bringing Mexico into border discussions prevents agreements in areas where Canada and the United States could work co-operatively.

But Ms. Napolitano doused that idea as well, reminding the gathering that “one of the things that we need to be sensitive to is the very real feelings among southern border states and in Mexico that if things are being done on the Mexican border, they should also be done on the Canadian border.”

It seemed to be another lesson learned: when it comes to national security, the Obama administration's policies are often consonant with its Republican predecessor.