

## Trade relations top priority; Border group also told Michigan No. 1 state buyer of exports from Canada CAREERS

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Illustration: Leonard Edwards

Within sight of the busiest trade and border crossing in the world, Canada's deputy minister for international trade said Friday that furthering Canada-U.S. trade relations is his most important objective.

It is "the top political, economic and security concern and priority for Canada," said Leonard Edwards, guest speaker at the quarterly meeting of the Southwestern Ontario/Southeast Michigan Canada-U.S. Business Association (CUSBA).

Michigan is the No. 1 state buyer of Canadian exports, he said. "Our efforts are about creating the conditions for growth toward greater economic opportunities and prosperity, security and nourishing privileged neighbourly relations. Michigan alone exports nearly \$20 billion US worth of goods and services to Canada and buys somewhat more than twice as much from us."

The ultimate goal, he said, is to increase Canada's market share from the current 17-18 per cent of overall U.S. imports to 20 or even 21 per cent. This would encourage a greater flow of two-way investments and broaden and deepen regulatory co-operation between the two countries.

Measures to simultaneously tighten security and expedite truck and passenger traffic through border crossings are being tried, he said, "and excellent progress has been made on the Smart Border Action Plan."

Canadian and U.S. citizens are not subject to congressionally mandated entry-visa tracking, known as the U.S. VISIT program. This is significant, given that 90 per cent of border crossings are made by Canadian and U.S. citizens.

### Reducing delays

"Regardless of this exemption, both our governments are committed to reducing any and all possible delays at the land border associated with the U.S. VISIT program."

The Free and Secure Trade and NEXUS programs, he disclosed, are "programs which expedite the movement of pre-approved low-risk goods and

travellers across the border, allowing our border agencies to concentrate scrutiny on the high-risk crossings. They are designed to keep the border moving, both on a normal day but, more importantly, in the event of a heightened security alert. Border agencies on both sides know that under all circumstances, FAST and NEXUS cardholders are trusted travellers who can be waved through," he said.

"My friends, we are, literally, in the centre of North American integrated trade. No crossing is bigger, or more crucial, to our economies and key, just-in-time industries, than the one right here in your neighbourhood," Edwards said of the 10,000 to 12,000 trucks that cross the border every day.

"If you add the Sarnia-Huron crossing, we have 43 per cent of the Canada-U.S. total two-way trade. The Province of Quebec also relies on the Ontario/Michigan crossings to carry one third of that province's exports. At some \$450 billion US per year, this is, quite simply, the single largest, most diverse and mutually beneficial bilateral economic relationship on the face of the planet."