

**Testimony of Dr. Laura Dawson  
Executive Director of the U.S.-Canada Future Borders Coalition**

**for a Hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on  
Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability**

**Tuesday, March 28, 2023**

Good morning, Chairman Bishop and members of the Sub-committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Dr. Laura Dawson and I am the Executive Director of the Future Borders Coalition –a U.S.-Canada organization dedicated to building better borders for travel and trade.

**The northern border is a vital gateway for U.S. prosperity and jobs.**

Our two countries boast the world’s longest international border, spanning 5525 miles, alongside 13 U.S. states, and eight Canadian provinces and territories.

**Every day, 400,000 people and \$2 billion in trade** cross the border. The vast majority of those crossings are problem free.

**On the trade side**, Canada is the largest customer for 30 U.S. states. Canadians buy more than \$300 billion worth of American goods annually. That’s more than the UK, Japan, and Germany combined.

**On travel**, Canada is the United States’ largest source of tourism revenue. At approximately \$20 billion per year, tourist services are a top U.S. export to Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Adding new impediments to cross the border hurts Americans, especially in vulnerable northern border communities,<sup>2</sup> so before we start piling on new barriers, we must have a realistic view of the risks.

We have been hearing about multi-thousand percent increases in CBP “encounters” on the U.S.-Canada border. These numbers will get your attention, but the data presented by the Northern Border Security Caucus compares the present day with early 2021 when borders

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Travel Canada Factsheet 2018

[https://www.U.S.travel.org/system/files/media\\_root/document/Research\\_Country-Profile\\_Canada.pdf](https://www.U.S.travel.org/system/files/media_root/document/Research_Country-Profile_Canada.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Tu-Uyen Tran, “Canadian shoppers and tourists return to border cities but in smaller numbers than pre-pandemic,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis* (July 25, 2022). E

<https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2022/canadian-shoppers-and-tourists-return-to-border-cities-but-in-smaller-numbers-than-pre-pandemic>

were all but closed due to COVID, so of course we're going to see a much busier border nowadays.<sup>3</sup>

And what do we mean by "encounters"? It turns out these can be anything from an irregular migration crossing to someone who forgets to bring their passport to the border.

Clearly, the risks we should be worried about are people crossing between official border posts. Of the 165,000 northern border encounters reported by CBP since the start of FY2022, only 2.7 percent – I repeat, 2.7 percent of these occurred between official ports of entry.

In absolute terms, we are talking about approximately 4500 people. This is not nothing. Canada and the United States must work together to bring these numbers down.

But, to give you a sense of proportion, between October 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023, just 0.5 percent -- one half of one percent -- of border patrol encounters outside normal ports of entry occurred along the northern border.

### **What does a secure and efficient U.S. Canada border look like?**

**On immigration**, we must remember that Canada is a sovereign nation so it will have different immigration rules from those in the U.S. These are not necessarily looser or easier -- just different.

For example, Canada uses employment skills as a deciding factor for immigrant applications. Canada also welcomes temporary foreign worker to do specific jobs. Their work authorization is unconnected to citizenship.

Canada and the U.S. have a long history of working together, such as last week's amendments to the [Safe Third Country Agreement](#) which will stem the tide of asylum seekers crossing into Canada at non-border posts.

Both countries have a role to support stability in Latin America and the Caribbean, thereby ensuring the burden does not rest on the U.S. alone. <sup>4</sup>

**On law enforcement**, one of the great strengths of the United States-Canada relationship is that officials speak with their counterparts every single day on issues big and small.

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<sup>3</sup> See Alexander Panetta, "Republicans talked about the Canadian border. They skipped all sorts of details," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (March 3, 2023). Data cited from U.S. CBP and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) sources. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/republicans-canada-border-analysis-1.6767883>

<sup>4</sup> A good example is the [Los Angeles Declaration on Migration and Protection](#) which sets out concrete steps to address irregular migration and forced displacement in the Americas.

There are also formal mechanisms for collaboration such as the [Shiprider](#) program and the [Cross-Border Crime Forum](#).

Compared to what most other countries are dealing with, the U.S.-Canada border is the envy of the world, but there's always room for improvement.

Here are some areas where investment should be sustained or increased:

Sufficient staffing means that trusted traders can sail through designated corridors without excessive wait times while bad actors are more easily identified and dealt with.

Preclearance and trusted traveler programs filter out those who mean us harm and prevents them from reaching U.S. soil.

Infrastructure modernization means that bridges, tunnels, road and rail crossings can meet volume demands and are also resilient in the face of climate challenges and cyber-attacks.

With technologies such as facial biometrics, officials don't have to make on-the-spot judgements about who to admit. With the right technology officers can confirm admissibility using data collected and verified before the person or vehicle reaches the border crossing.

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The secure and prosperous U.S.-Canada border is unique in the world and cannot be taken for granted. It is both a shared benefit and a shared responsibility for our two nations.

Thank you

### **Additional Information**

Cross-Border Crime Forum

<https://www.jU.S.tice.gov/opa/pr/U.S.-and-canada-reestablish-cross-border-crime-forum>

Canada Travel

[https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/subjects/travel\\_and\\_tourism/international\\_travel](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/subjects/travel_and_tourism/international_travel)

U.S. Travel

[https://www.U.S.travel.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/inbound-travel-market-profile\\_ca\\_mx\\_fin.pdf](https://www.U.S.travel.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/inbound-travel-market-profile_ca_mx_fin.pdf)