

## Canadians' NAFTA fears rise as Trump sours on dairy, poll finds



Donald Trump's campaign pledge to renegotiate the North American trade deal with Canada and Mexico will shift from an abstract political promise to a formal negotiation with high stakes for all three countries when officials meet for the first round of talks Aug. 16 to 20 in Washington.

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Canadians are increasingly concerned about the renegotiation of the North American free-trade agreement as U.S. President Donald Trump's rhetoric has shifted from suggestions of a tweak to slamming Canadian dairy policy as a disgrace.

A new Nanos Survey found fewer than half of Canadians – 46 per cent – now feel confident or somewhat confident that Canada can protect its interests in the negotiations, which begin this month in Washington. That's down from 59 per cent in a February survey.

"What the research is showing is that as the NAFTA discussions are becoming more pointed and more substantive in terms of content, the level of confidence has slid," said pollster Nik Nanos, who conducted the survey for The Globe and Mail.

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Mr. Trump's campaign pledge to renegotiate the North American trade deal with Canada and Mexico will shift from an abstract political promise to a formal negotiation with high stakes for all three countries when officials meet for the first round of talks Aug. 16 to 20 in Washington.

market access to Canadian dairy, wine and grain sectors as a priority, as well as expanding the existing NAFTA deal to include a chapter on the digital economy.

In advance of the negotiations, Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland recently expanded Canada's diplomatic team in the United States and announced a NAFTA council of outside advisers who will provide regular advice to the government during the negotiations. The 13-member council includes former interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose; former Conservative industry minister James Moore; veteran NDP strategist Brian Topp; and a mix of senior business, labour and diplomatic leaders.

Recently leaked transcripts of a late January phone call between Mr. Trump and Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto revealed that Mr. Trump's trade focus was clearly on Mexico, not Canada.

"Canada is no problem," Mr. Trump told Mr. Pena Nieto, according to a transcript published by the Washington Post. "We have had a very fair relationship with Canada. It has been much more balanced and much more fair. So we do not have to worry about Canada, we do not even think about them."

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Those comments were consistent with the administration's public comments to Canada at the time. When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau first met with Mr. Trump in Washington in February, the President said he was only looking to "tweak" the trade deal and that he wanted a stronger trading relationship with Canada.

Mixed messages have since followed. Mr. Trump attacked Canada in April, telling a Wisconsin audience that "what they have done to our dairy farm workers, it's a disgrace."

The U.S. negotiating objectives released in July were vague in terms of U.S. plans on agriculture policy, but they did say the United States "will work to eliminate unfair subsidies, market-distorting practices by state-owned enterprises, and burdensome restrictions on intellectual property."

The United States is also calling for the elimination of Chapter 19, a trade-dispute panel that is viewed as crucially important to the Canadian government.

The Nanos survey in late July asked participants whether they are confident, somewhat confident, somewhat not confident or not confident that Canada can protect its economic interests if the North American free-trade agreement is renegotiated.

The response found 13 per cent were confident; 33 per cent were somewhat confident; 27 per cent were somewhat not confident; and 22 were not confident. The results marked a clear deterioration in confidence since February, when Nanos asked the same question.

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In February, 20 per cent said they were confident; 39 per cent said they were somewhat confident; 21 per cent said they were somewhat not confident; and 16 per cent said they were not confident.

The July survey also shows that Canadians are almost evenly divided on whether or not they agree that Canada has a lot of leverage or bargaining power in the negotiations to protect Canadian interests. Thirty-seven per cent said they somewhat agree with that view and 13 per cent say they agree. Alternatively, 30 per cent said they somewhat disagree and 16 per cent said they disagree.

A third question found that 47 per cent of Canadians say it is better if Canada forms a united front with Mexico to support and defend each other's interests during the talks. In contrast, 37 per cent of Canadians surveyed believe that it is better for Canada to solely pursue its own interest.

"It's pretty clear that Donald Trump's personal preference, just as a negotiator, is to have bilateral discussions – basically a divide and conquer. What the survey shows is that Canadians believe that we will have a better outcome if we have some sort of united front with Mexico," said Mr. Nanos. "I think this probably speaks to the underling view that 'Canada vs. US,' we are just kind of outgunned in terms of heft. By co-operating and collaborating with Mexico and engaging the U.S. on modernizing NAFTA, it gives us a little more leverage than we would have on our own."

an omnibus survey. The margin of error for a random survey of 1,000 Canadians is plus or minus 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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