House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

FAAE • NUMBER 003 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

Chair

Mr. Kevin Sorenson

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Wednesday, February 11, 2009

● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues.

This is meeting number three of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, Wednesday, February 11, 2009. Today we're going to begin our review of key elements of Canadian foreign policy.

As a witness, from Ekos Research Associates we have Frank Graves, the president.

Recently, on December 8, 2008, Mr. Graves made a presentation to the Canada-U.S. project at the Government Conference Centre in Ottawa entitled “Public Perspectives: Emerging Opportunities for Canada-U.S. Cooperation”. I've seen part of this presentation on the website. It contains a wealth of information concerning what the Canadian public thinks about a wide scope of issues in regard to the Canada-U.S. relationship.

Our committee is very interested in what you have to say to us, Mr. Graves. Certainly we recognize that the United States is our largest trading partner, our closest neighbour and our closest ally, so we look forward to your testimony.

I would also like to say that we very much appreciate your coming on such short notice. I guess that's one of the advantages of being close to the city, but we do appreciate your being here today.

Mr. Graves, the clerk passed on the order here. We'll give you time for an opening statement of approximately ten minutes, and then we'll go into the first round of questioning. Each party will have seven minutes. Then we'll go into the second and third rounds.

Mr. Frank Graves (President, Ekos Research Associates Inc.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I'm delighted to be here to speak with the committee.

This is a topic I'm extremely interested in. I've been studying this topic in some depth for over a decade, comparing not just Canadian attitudes but also looking at what Americans and sometimes even Mexicans think about these issues. Our research has been supported over that period of time by all three governments as well as significant parts of the private sector.

I have a fairly useful time series. Instead of saying how things look at some snapshot in time, I can give you a sense of how things have been evolving, what's changed and what hasn't, and what's particularly relevant in the current context. In many respects it is quite different from some of the features of this relationship we've seen in the past.

I do have a bit of missing data on the American side—my data are about a year old—but the rest of the data are quite timely.

I'm only going to take a few minutes. This is an extremely complicated topic. I can't think of another topic in social research or polling that provides the same combination of complexity, interests, and relevance.

I could take the time to show you a presentation that would give you a decidedly different view of what I think the overall conclusions are. The public opinion and public attitudes, more importantly, are a much more stable way of looking at things. We don't just look at opinions. We look at attitudes, we compare values, and we find that they are rife with contradictions. Finding out what Canadians really think about this relationship is a pretty daunting task. It's much more difficult than a lot of the more routine assignments in public opinion research.

I want to stress two fundamental conclusions that we're seeing about the relationship right now.

Despite some ambiguities and contradictions in Canadian and American attitudes and values, the similarities are far more impressive than the differences. More importantly, through time we're seeing a pattern where the differences between the two countries in terms of core values and attitudes are actually getting smaller and not larger. That's important, because it contradicts a lot of the perceived wisdom about the relationship between the two countries.

I would argue that the differences are magnified in the minds of Canadians by a narcissism. Many Canadians feel they would like to have the differences be larger than what they are. But in their heart of hearts, Canadians do acknowledge that they believe the differences are relatively modest and that they are actually getting smaller, which is consistent with a lot of the serious academic research.

There are significant differences, certainly; there are enough to sustain a separate sense of national identity. But overall you could argue that you would be hard-pressed to find two countries in the advanced western world that share more similar value systems than Canada and the United States.

The second point I want to make is that there are recent shifts in our reciprocal outlooks—how Canadians look at Americans and how Americans look at Canadians—coupled with political changes that have actually strengthened the opportunities for returning to a more ambitious bilateral, perhaps trilateral, North American agenda. I'll try to give you a few pieces of information in support of those claims, but I'm not going to go through these in any depth.

I'd like to start by noting that there is a sharp distinction between asking Canadians if we're becoming more or less like the United States and when we ask what we would like to happen. We find a very sharp difference. The clear majority of Canadians say they'd like to become less like the United States. In fact this is part of this point of difference. One of the things in the past that sustained a sense of national identity in Canada was that we're not sure exactly what our identity is, but dammit, we're not American, and that's a good thing.

When you ask, as well, if we are becoming more like the United States, by an equally clear margin in the reverse direction Canadians say that in fact we are becoming more like the United States. As I mentioned earlier, when we do the comparisons through time, and with some of our value comparisons, which are consistent with the international literature, they suggest that the value differences separating Canadians and Americans are relatively modest and the differences are getting smaller, not larger.

We find another area of considerable ambiguity in the U.S.-Canada relations and the Canadian optic on this. Despite the fact that at various times Canadians express deep reservations about the United States, its foreign policy, leadership, and so forth, we find the interesting statistic that about 95% of Canadians say it's at least somewhat important to strengthen relationships between the two countries. What do we find when we ask that question in the Untied States? It's exactly the same number. Despite the proliferation of irritants that have characterized the relationship over the last decade, there is a deep belief that the relationship should be strengthened and that there are mutual interests for both Canadians Americans in doing so.

● (1535)

What's also interesting is that the strains we see in the relationship over the past several years have actually dissipated to a large extent, and we've seen a warming in the outlook of both Americans on Canadians and Canadians on America. By the way, this movement pre-dated the change in administration. It started a couple of years ago. So Canadians would also acknowledge that the relationship has in fact improved and that that's an important thing to do.

It is the case that the American outlook on Canada, for the most part, ranges from being very favourable to benign. There are very few Americans who have a negative impression in the United States. In fact the incidence is less than 10%. It never goes much above that. In the Canadian public we do find a higher incidence of unfavourable attitudes, but again I would connect that back to that narcissism of difference and note that they aren't that deeply felt, because in contrast to the incidence of people who say they have an unfavourable view of the United States—roughly 30% or 40% as it oscillates through time—about 75% of Canadians say the United States is our best friend. And as I also mentioned earlier, almost 100% say we should strengthen that relationship. The instance of those who have a favourable outlook on the United States has actually been improving.

Another point that I thought was interesting as a point of comparison, which is an antidote to a lot of received wisdom within each of those countries about true attitudes to NAFTA and free trade, is we find, for example, that both within our country and in the United States, by commentators like Lou Dobbs, there is a sense that there is violent and growing opposition to free trade and protectionist sentiments are on the rise. There is no question that the United States has experienced a period of what borders on isolationism following the exuberant internationalism that emerged in the aftermath of September 11 and the perceived failure of the foreign policy to deal with that. What we have found is that notwithstanding those views, there are problems with the external world and a growing desire to pull up the drawbridge. We do find that the incidence of Americans who still support free trade is in the 60% to 70% range, and in fact it is somewhat higher in Canada.

We have seen some wobble in that support in recent years, and this is something we should be quite mindful of. Generally speaking, when we look at attitudes to trade, the free movement of Canadians throughout American society, the concerns with security threats emanating from Canada and so forth, we see that the general characteristic of the American outlook on Canada is that it is relatively benign. In fact, there is no country in the world that is seen as relatively less threatening than Canada. That's not to say that Americans aren't concerned about security with respect to Canada. They are. They are concerned with security with respect to the entire world, including their own country.

There is some evidence that the security ethic that has gripped upper North America since September 11 shows some signs of fraying, particularly in the United States. That will be interesting to watch.

By the way, in the theme of contradictions and ambiguity, again, there is the fact that we find majority support for free trade in both Canada and the United States, and indeed in Mexico as well, which is something that hasn't always been the case. If we go back to 1990, the obverse was the case: the clear majority in all three countries objected to free trade. But we find that this co-exists with the sense that free trade hasn't necessarily been all that good for me and my country. All the member countries think that the other partners did better than them. But it is important to recognize that beyond those irritations there's still a pretty strong commitment to free trade.

I already mentioned that there had been a warming in the relationship between the two countries that predated the change in administration, but Canadians have expressed almost a collective degree of Obama envy. As this phenomenon to the south has gripped the United States, they have looked at that with a considerable amount of intrigue and some degree of envy, but there is a sense that this is something that has the potential to fundamentally alter the relationship. About half of Canadians say it won't have much effect, but fully half of Canadians believe this is going to profoundly change the relationship between the two countries. And when we probe further and ask if that is a good or bad thing, by a very decisive margin virtually all of those people think the changes will be for the better. That's not to say that Canadians are not critical in their unabashed admiration for President Obama. When asked further about certain types of policy issues, like concerns about trade, they express deep concerns about possible protectionist sentiment. They also express a fair degree of resistance to a potential request to extend the mission in Afghanistan. So there is a mixture of admiration but a fairly circumspect view in terms of some of the policy questions that affect the relationships between the two countries.

● (1540)

I'd like to wrap up with one of the intriguing areas that seems to develop the highest levels of support. We asked what areas should be a focus, in terms of having a more ambitious renewed bilateral agenda. There's the idea of a blended approach to dealing with climate change, the economy, and security, where we would collectively figure out a strategy for dealing with the potential obsolescence of our manufacturing automotive sector. There is a sense that although Canadians strongly support the Kyoto ratification, trying to manage an entire globe is a good idea in theory but in practice extremely difficult. A continent now looks like a fairly appealing alternative.

There's also a sense that energy self-sufficiency as a bargaining tool couldn't help relax some of the tensions people have seen growing at the border. There has been a growing recognition by Canadians that the problems with the border have made it more difficult to travel to the United States to do business, and the hard economic data seems to support that there has been a downturn as well.

I think I've taken ten minutes, so I'm going to stop now. I'd love to answer any questions. I have all kinds of other data if you would like to ask questions on what I've presented, or any other related areas.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

We'll move to the first round of seven minutes with Mr. Pearson, please.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Graves, thank you for coming. We really appreciate it, especially on short notice.

Obviously, the way Canadians looked at the Obama thing was quite transformational. It seems to me—even my own staff were very much like this—that people drew a distinction between Mr. Bush and the American people, but when it comes to Mr. Obama it's indivisible; they join the two things together.

I realize you're saying that Canadians might have certain issues they disagree on, but is it your sense too that Canadians no longer separate the presidency from where the American people are?

● (1545)

Mr. Frank Graves: That's true to a large extent, but I believe it's important to recognize that Canadians disentangle some of the important substantive issues in our bilateral relationship. They don't bestow a halo effect that says he has carte blanche because he's such an overwhelmingly impressive guy—which they believe. They aren't saying at the same time that basically any ideas he comes up with are fine with them.

For example, Canadians will say they are quite impressed with the level of economic preparation President Obama seems to have generated in advance and as he took office. On the other hand and at the same time, Canadians expressed considerable concerns about the fiscal consequences of that program down the road.

Similarly, when we look at issues around protectionism and free trade, they express considerable concerns. The majority say they're quite wary and mindful of comments that President Obama made before he was elected about opening up the NAFTA agreement. When confronted with the question of whether they would be amenable to participating in a surge in or an extension of the Afghanistan mission—which President Obama has identified as an area of foreign policy he'd like to shift attention to—the answer comes back with a pretty decisive two-to-one margin saying no, they wouldn't be along.

The negative approval rating for President Obama was 3%. That's a pretty heady number. It will be difficult to sustain that, but nonetheless it gives you a sense that the people who don't think President Obama is a really terrific guy could have a meeting in a phone booth in Canada. So it's a view that is pretty well universal. But it is important to recognize that doesn't carry over to areas of public policy.

By the way, the separation of the administration and the American public is something the public has made for some time. At no point did we see Canadians say they didn't like Americans or didn't admire American society. They just weren't very impressed. And by the way, the numbers who didn't like the last administration weren't all that terribly different from what we saw in the American public.

Mr. Glen Pearson: So in a situation like Afghanistan, I realize the Canadian people feel somewhat or maybe decidedly negative about that mission, but where are the American people on that file?

Mr. Frank Graves: The Americans are relatively divided on that issue. They are much more amenable to that than Iraq, where the attitudes are much more negative.

These issues have been moving around in both Canada and the United States. It's important to recognize, for example—we forget this in the aftermath of history—that within a month before the Iraq war was engaged, the majority of Canadians supported going to Iraq. The vast majority of Canadians—about 75%—supported the Afghanistan mission from the outset. That devolved into about an equal number who supported and opposed it as time went on, and it has remained relatively stable. But in the fall we saw a significant shift, largely caused by a growing sense of fatigue and frustration that the objectives of the mission—which everybody agrees are good—may not be achieved. We have seen a fairly precipitous decline in support for the mission.

So it's difficult to disentangle the fact that Canadians would reject President Obama's appeal from the fact that we have seen a downward movement in Canada in support of the mission in the last few months.

Mr. Glen Pearson: On the issue of things like smart power that Secretary of State Clinton is throwing out there, we've talked about how Afghanistan is perceived a little bit differently in the United States than it is here. But let's take something like Darfur or Sudan, which have been on the agenda for some time. A well-known Canadian published a piece a couple of days ago in which he was calling on Canadians to start working with Mr. Obama on something like Darfur, and there is a pretty strong representation of Canadians who would like to see something done there.

In your interpretation, do you think that Canadians would feel re-energized around files like that—I'm not speaking of just Darfur, but other things—now that Mr. Obama is there? Do they feel there's more possibility?

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, I do, but let me hasten to point out that they've never not felt energized about these issues. When I mentioned the polarization in Canadian society about the Afghanistan mission, that applied almost exclusively to the military mission, which has produced high levels of division. When we asked Canadians, "Do you support the humanitarian and development components of the mission?", 90% of Canadians said they support that, and that number has remained fairly robust.

Secondly, I mentioned the fact that Canadians were in fact supportive of going to Iraq even before the hostilities actually ensued. The main reason that their support dissipated was the fact that it didn't occur under a multilateral aegis of the UN or some other body similar to that. So the appeal by President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton to smart power and multilateralism will resonate very strongly with Canadians who have already been quite strongly committed to these things.

● (1550)

Mr. Glen Pearson: Thank you.

Finally, on an issue like Iran, President Obama has shown a certain inclination to hold discussions. How is that perceived up here? How do we Canadians look at that part of the world? Are we basically insecure about it, or would we tend to follow his lead?

Mr. Frank Graves: I don't have specific data on that, but I do have data on how Canadians view the so-called "clash of civilizations" thesis, which argues that there are fundamental normative differences between the Islamic world and the western world. Although there is some support for that view in Canada, it would be roughly about half the level of support that we would find, for example, in the United States.

Canadian society, by the way, unlike both American and European, has remained fairly tenaciously committed to multiculturalism, and this is one of the distinguishing points. Just to give you one interesting point of comparison, in 2000 American opposition to immigration, predating September 11, ran in the same numbers as that of Canadians—about 40% said there were too many immigrants; in Canada it was 30%. Both countries jumped up, unsurprisingly, by about 10 points. What happened following that is really quite surprising. American opposition to immigration, which is at one-third of the levels of what it is in Canada, continued to rise and is now in the 60% range; in Canada it's in the mid-20% to 30% range. And that's true not just of attitudes to immigration, but attitudes to multiculturalism, diversity, and so forth. So Canadians are sort of taking a separate path.

I spoke about a world of convergence; it's not unique to Canada and the United States. The rhythms of post-materialism make most of the advanced western world look more and more similar with respect to values. This is one key area where Canadians are taking a different route.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pearson.

Monsieur Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As someone who has been quite involved with the Canada-US Interparliamentary Group over the past few years, I have to say that perception is not an indicator of knowledge. Have you assessed at all how well Americans know Canadians and vice-versa? The members of the Interparliamentary Group observed that Americans, even ones who hold high office, are not as knowledgeable about the features that make Canada distinct as they really should be.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: That's an excellent question. Do Americans know much about us? The answer is no. In fact, the levels of public fluency on Canada are relatively abysmal.

I'll give you one anecdote. I haven't updated this, but I know that when we tested in the early part of this decade the number of Americans who could identify our Prime Minister—who'd been around, at that point, for 11 years—it was about 7%. At the same time, they were able to name the Mexican president—who had just taken office and who did less business with them—to the tune of 25%.

Now, that's a good and a bad thing. Obviously, on some issues it would be best to have higher levels of fluency, because in some cases a higher level of fluency produces higher levels of sympathy. The trade and borders issue is a crucial one on which I think we should be summoning public opinion. One of the reasons I'm regretful that I don't have the most recent data to tell you about what Americans think about these issues is that I believe it would be highly useful for our embassy—and I think even at a sub-national level, for Canadians—to lobby to make the point of view known that the American public itself is not all that concerned about security threats emanating from Canada. In fact, there are other areas where, for example, it would be important to point out that the majority of Americans remain committed to free trade despite some concerns about what's going on with the economy.

I do think it would be important in certain areas to get some of the information in a more timely fashion and to share that with some of the key decision-makers. It's not just the American public. As you rightfully point out, the level of knowledge in even key decision-makers in Congress and so forth is not really what we had hoped it would be. I think this would be an area that requires concerted attention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I have a question for you on an entirely different subject,

Have you collected data by region in Quebec, Canada and the United States? I have travelled to different parts of the United States and let me tell you that Americans are very different, depending on where they live. Americans who live in New England are very different from their fellow citizens in Wisconsin. The same can be said of Americans who live in Pennsylvania and California. Have you compiled any data on this, from the Canadian as well as from the American perspective?

● (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, I do. I studied these in some depth.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Is this data available?

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: Absolutely. I've already published some of this. I have a number of articles that have been published in scholarly journals. I have some other ones that are in a more accessible format, which I'd be glad to pass on to the committee.

The regional differences in Canada with respect to attitudes in the United States are relatively straightforward and fairly easy to understand. For example, generally speaking, we find Albertans and, almost to the same extent, Ontarians more sympathetic and favourably oriented to the United States.

We have found one difference, really, which is for Quebec. Quebec went through a period of relatively negative views of the United States. The recent data I've seen suggests that's really improved quite significantly. It looks maybe a little more like it used to during the original free trade debate, when Quebeckers were ahead of the curve in some respects on attitudes to free trade in the early 1990s.

There are some other interesting differences as well. The really interesting differences, I think, occur more along demographic than social class lines. In the United States, the regional differences are extremely difficult to understand. American regional differences are very complex.

I mentioned that Americans and Canadians overall look relatively similar on many key issues and values, but the internal heterogeneity, the internal differentiation, within the United States is much more diversified than it is in Canada, and not just on a regional basis. American society is much more divided on issues of social class and race. We find much more consensus in Canada on many of the key issues than we do in the United States.

Yes, there are differences, certainly, that would occur across border states, but some of them are quite puzzling. I can pass those along. There are some recurring patterns, but there, they're considerably more challenging from a research perspective than understanding the more stable, familiar, and frankly less exaggerated patterns of difference across region and demographics that we see in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: The North American economy is very integrated. During the manufacturing process, a product often criss-crosses the border four, five or six times. Do people realize that our North American economy is integrated, or do Americans, Canadians and Quebeckers think that all products are manufactured at home and that barriers can be thrown up to protect jobs? Do we have any statistics on people's perception of the situation?

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: Again, in Canada there is a very high level of awareness of the interdependent nature of our economies. Part of this sense of the importance of the relationship is focused not just on the fact that we think Americans are our best friends, but on a real politic understanding of the maturing business opportunities that go along with this.

As for American society on the levels of awareness, no. For example, we've tested whether Americans know that Canada is their strongest trading partner. No. It would rank sixth or seventh, well down the list. Do they understand the value-added process whereby goods flow back and forth across the border? No, they don't.

But what is interesting is that Americans, unlike their neighbours to the north, think Canadians are just like them, and they would consider that a compliment. They think Canadians are “just like us”, that they're a little different, that they're up north and a little colder, but basically they're just like Americans and therefore they don't have to worry about us that much. They would think that would be saying a good thing. Canadians would bridle at that, as I pointed out at the beginning of my presentation, and would say no, we're really quite different, and we shouldn't be reduced to being just like Americans, even if on many issues we are just like Americans.

By the way, the pattern of ignorance in the American public about what's going on in Canada, which is perhaps much more of a concern in the elite portions of American society, can be a mixed blessing. For example, we tested at one point whether Americans were aware that Canada was fighting alongside their soldiers in Afghanistan. No, they weren't, for the most part, or they had limited awareness. When you told them, they said that was a good thing and it made them feel a little more favourable. Interestingly enough, in the same survey we asked if Canadians were fighting alongside Americans in Iraq, and they replied yes, they were. So raising public fluency could be a mixed bag here. Let's be careful.

I'm also not a strong believer in American public opinion, which is very favourable to Canada. It's a pretty difficult beast to move. It's pretty inert. The idea that some kind of a rational discourse will raise this fluency and therefore everything will be fine is a bit of a mug's game. I believe that we have to be much more focused and strategic.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Crête.

We'll move to the government side, to Mr. Abbott, please.

Hon. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Thank you.

Mr. Graves, your input is really very helpful. When you use the word "inert", it strikes me that in other words it's not moving, it's just there. Canada just exists, the frozen north, and they're nice people and so on and so forth. Out of 300 million Americans, in your judgment, how many would give a thought to Canada in these next seven days?

Mr. Frank Graves: It would be a very small number, but I do believe there are portions, and we've done some segmentation analysis dividing up American society into certain groups where we should perhaps be focusing our efforts. One of the problems I've detected is that the most positive views of Canada tend to be among older Americans.

So a lot of the more cosmopolitan, well-educated young Americans, who are the folks who are going to be influencing the policy and the economic agenda of the next ten to twenty years, have basically almost no awareness of what's going on in Canada. That's not to say they wouldn't have very favourable attitudes if they were introduced to them. So we should be making a little headway on some of those groups, because a lot of our constituency isn't going to be around that much longer.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Let's just pick a number—60 million out of 300 million, 20%—just so you and I are talking about the same thing. Regarding that 60 million who might have had some interaction, might have a relative in Canada or somebody who moved down there, or might like Rich Little, or whatever—showing my age, I guess—my question is this. Do you have any research that would give us an idea of the perceptions Americans hold of Canadian values? In other words, which of our values, if we did an ink blot test and said "Canada", would they choose? What value?

Mr. Frank Graves: I have tested what they think about our values, and as I mentioned earlier, they think our values are largely consistent and resonant with American values, and on that point they're right. If you look at the top values rated by Canadians and Americans, the hierarchy is almost identical. Freedom is at the top of the list. There are a few differences if we move into things like equality, for example, which is rated a little higher in Canada, but the differences are not that impressive.

When you ask them, top of mind, what's the first thing that comes to mind about Canada, as I mentioned, they tend to think of Canada as being like the United States, a little colder, a little smaller.

If you were to put a summary metaphor on how the countries look at each other, Canadians tend to look at the United States like this big turbo-charged Humvee, and it's really exciting—they wouldn't mind driving one, but they're a little concerned about its effect on the environment. So Canadians admire both the power and the wealth, but at the same time are wary of it.

Americans kind of look at Canadians as a Prius, kind of a little bit of a hectoring aunt who's very responsible, but they don't think they'd rather trade their Humvee in on the Prius, not yet. Maybe when the price of oil hits $1.50 they'll think about that.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Maybe it's because of our good environmental policies, but that's another thing, which brings me to the issue of climate change, where there has been an apparent shift. At least the words of the incumbent president are different from those of his predecessor. I realize this isn't anything directly to do with foreign affairs, but in a way it is. In your judgment, what areas of cooperation can you see on major issues like that or on energy? Again, this is all based on your research. Where do you see us being able to make a connection?

Mr. Frank Graves: Well, we have tested that explicitly, and we've tested it at different points in time.

We've found, for example, that when you ask Canadians, Americans, or Mexicans for that matter, should we have a bilateral or trilateral approach to various things, the environment has always been one of those things where people say, you know what, the environment doesn't respect political geography, species move across borders, and air and water moves, so it makes sense to cooperate on these issues—and more so than on other issues, on which they'd say, well, I'm not so sure I want to have a joint immigration policy.

What's interesting about the environment and climate change is that when you look at the issue of climate change and you blend it with issues of energy self-sufficiency—which is a much more attractive proposition for the United States, which would like to free itself from some of the geopolitically unstable regions where it currently goes to get oil, which they think increases their security risk—and when you factor in what's on the table for Canadians, and Mexicans for that matter, freer access to a less thickened border, for example, would be something of interest to us.

There seems to be a growing consensus among everybody that doing something about the climate and climate change is the single largest long-term challenge, not just in terms of social virtue, but as a real economic exigency, as people look at things like the faltering manufacturing sector and wonder how upper North American society is going to evolve to meet the challenges of a post-carbon society.

So when we blend energy, borders, and climate change together, we find that support dramatically increases in all three countries: Mexico, Canada, and the United States. That becomes a very attractive North American project.

I do hasten to point out that it's much easier to talk about things in a bilateral framework, but on some of these issues where you want to have the political emphasis behind it, perhaps this kind of a question is best framed as a North American issue, including Mexico as well. That's something that would take a little bit more time to get into.

● (1605)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

We'll move to Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Thank you.

It's good to see you again.

I'd just promote the fact that some of us who are a little younger know well that Rich Little, as well as Paul Anka, is a product of Ottawa—like you. We're quite proud of that.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Ah, it's because he's from Ottawa.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Absolutely.

One of the things we've been concerned about as Canadians are the effects of the downturn in the economy, particularly where they started from, south of the border by all accounts, with the sub-prime phenomenon and its trickle effect here. It turns out that we haven't been untouched by this, because we were actually investing in sub-prime mortgages too, as were Europeans.

When you look at regulation of financial markets—and put aside for a second the free trade component, which I will get to—have you done any polling on this since the collapse of the markets in the States and the ripple effect on us, the whole analogy of the elephant and us? Are people saying that they're concerned our economy is a little too connected to the States when it's in regard to financial markets? Certainly we saw that with the sub-prime issue.

Mr. Frank Graves: I have polled Canadians on their attitudes to the economy and integration since this has happened. I've also looked at American attitudes to some extent, but not since. But I do have Canadian attitudes.

For example, during the collapse of the whole technology sector, which was a similar sort of period, with a lot of carnage, particularly for Canadians holding Nortel stock, where Freedom 55 became Freedom 95 overnight, and that was my problem....

Mr. Paul Dewar: Slavery 95.

Mr. Frank Graves: Right.

But the answer is that Canadians disentangle questions of the economic integration of North America, which they largely support, unlike in the past, but they are very concerned and mindful about the different levels of oversight of the financial markets. There's very little support, for example, for any type of unified regulatory regime. Canadians don't want North American banks, they don't want a North American currency, and I don't think they'd support a potential North American potential pact. If there were some cooperative things that could strengthen and stiffen oversight in both countries, they'd support those. They're pretty well decided—and this has been a point of consensus for some time—that they'd like to reap all of the maturing business opportunities that go along with free trade, but that doesn't mean they'd like to go down the road of having common regulatory regimes.

There are some areas where they would now consider common regulatory regimes, but I don't think these would apply to the financial services sector. They would apply possibly to things like food safety, or maybe automotive safety and whether you should have daylight running lamps, for example. I think that people think Canadians and Americans have similar attitudes to health and safety, but when it gets to financial markets, I think there's still a desire to have a made-in-Canada approach.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Thank you for that, because I think people were concerned with the exposure we did have, notwithstanding that our banks were more highly capitalized and had stronger requirements. Nonetheless, it turns out that a number of our banks were investing in sub-prime mortgages. According to the document we were just given, we're talking about up to 5% of mortgages in Canada. That is a very low number, but I think it was a surprise to many that we were involved in that fiasco.

You mentioned that we should be focused and strategic, and Canadians probably want to see that as well. You mentioned the borders. I noted that the former foreign affairs minister, David Emerson, has been out talking recently. His thesis is that the thickening of the borders has really created problems, and he's talking about an approach that is different from what we have had in the past in this country, a kind of customs union.

Based on your research, is there any consensus about where Canadians would like us to be more engaged with the Americans when it comes to manufacturing and markets? You mentioned food safety as regulatory, but I'm talking in terms of working sectorally in our economies.

● (1610)

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, I think there is a fairly clear hierarchy. Definitely auto and manufacturing are areas in which Canadians recognize that there are high degrees of interdependence, and these would probably be areas for which having common regulatory approaches would make sense.

Security is another area, and Canadians say this mindful of the problems of a border that has become increasingly less porous and more difficult to negotiate, and that has had a corrosive impact on trade. The figures are actually quite alarming if you look at the patterns over the last six or seven years. They work hand in hand with the rising protectionist—perhaps even isolationist—sentiment that's been present in the United States. I don't think you'd have to go much beyond those areas to identify some areas on which Canadians would like to see some attention focused. This is not necessary just at the Washington-to-Ottawa level. A lot of this is probably just as effectively, if not more effectively, handled at a sub-national, province-to-province, business-to-business level.

Right now I am concerned that we aren't in a position to make this case very forcefully. We hear a lot of spurious claims about what Americans think about Canada and its relative threat value and so forth. I think it would be really valuable to quickly, with key audiences, assemble the case that some of those perceptions are in fact inconsistent with what members of the American public themselves are saying.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Regarding the issue of the environment and cap and trade, we have a new president who not only agrees that there is something called climate change and agrees with the science—which is helpful—but believes that the way to deal with it is through this approach.

It's not clear at our end how we're going to deal with that. If we don't have a clear road map for cap and trade, from your data and the research you've done, what would the Americans do in that case? In other words, if we're not ready to dance with them, are they just going to go ahead and do it anyhow? And what will be the cost to us if we don't involve ourselves significantly with them?

The Chair: Answer very quickly, please, Mr. Graves.

Mr. Frank Graves: I can only comment, mostly, although I do survey elites in Canada and the United States as well. The likely success of Canadian petitions rises as an issue becomes a bigger-picture item. If they see things as simply condominium issues from the complaining, hectoring aunt up north, then, yes, they'll be polite. But if you can come up with a bigger picture that frames these issues in terms of energy self-sufficiency, climate change, long-term goals, negotiating to a post-carbon economy, and dealing with the security and borders issues, then I think you have a nice big-picture North American project that would grab the interest of the public in both Canada and the United States and I dare say probably Mexico as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

We'll move to Mr. Goldring, please.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Thank you for being here, Mr. Graves.

Looking at the charts here—and this one in particular about Canadian attitudes and whether they're favourable or unfavourable towards the United States—they seem to follow along roughly a fifty-fifty proposition—

The Chair: There's just one thing, Mr. Goldring. This came from our Library of Parliament; it didn't come from Mr. Graves.

Mr. Peter Goldring: This is from Mr. Graves.

The Chair: Oh, you have that from his presentation? I'm sorry. Continue.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Maybe not from your presentation, but from your website.

Mr. Frank Graves: From the earlier website, the report that we did, yes—

Mr. Peter Goldring: Yes, from your website.

Mr. Frank Graves: —the North American part.

Mr. Peter Goldring: It's just a general comment here that it seemed to indicate about fifty-fifty, other than a period of time that might have been associated with some rather anti-American rhetoric that went on here on Parliament Hill a couple of years back. But it's interesting to see that overall it's about fifty-fifty, and yet on another slide here, on what people view President Obama as being, whether he will fundamentally be a good thing for Canada, it seems to indicate 74% do feel that and 12% are a little negative.

So with such a high percentage of people, and understanding there's quite a bit of emotion involved in that type of a decision, can you tell us of any substantive reasons people might have to be encouraged to that extent for that large a number, what policy changes, what policy directions would lead people to think that? Would you know some?

● (1615)

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, those are excellent questions.

I want to point out one technical point.

The 75% and 12% numbers you pointed to are only of those who think the relationship will be fundamentally different, which is about half of Canadians. Another half of Canadians say they think it's going to be business as usual. We're only looking at the very sizeable 50% of Canadians or so who think the relationship's going to be fundamentally different.

I'd be careful with the favourable and unfavourable. I believe those ratings, where now the plurality of Canadians have a favourable rating of the United States, are in fairly stark contrast to some of the other data, for example the 70-odd percent who say the United States is our best friend.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Maybe you can enlighten us on what you think might lead people to think there seems to be a real groundswell of public support for him. What can he physically, fundamentally—

Mr. Frank Graves: Okay, that's a good question.

I do want to point out that some of the improvements that we saw in Canadians' outlook on the U.S.-Canada relationship predate President Bush. There had been a warming. I think solutions on softwood lumber and a few other things had a positive impact.

But to your point, I think the key driver of low regard for the administration of the United States and President Bush was a belief that the foreign policy was fundamentally wrong-headed. There were other factors as well, but this was probably at the top of the list.

And this was not unique to Canada; this was something that went on in most western countries. There was a belief that the pursuit of so-called viral democracy, going over and fusing capital markets with democracy in Iraq and other places, was going to inoculate us against terrorism. There was a sense—and this also emanated from American society—that was possibly theoretically true, but in reality it seemed it made things worse.

So I think a lot of the very low regard that Canadians had for the administration was focused on the fact that they believed the foreign policy was fundamentally wrong-headed and perhaps destructive.

Mr. Peter Goldring: Do you think with this new president and administration they can get beyond that stalemate of the Helms-Burton Act with Cuba, given that Cuba is a substantial partner with Canada on many initiatives, and certainly for tourism?

Mr. Frank Graves: I think they'd be very optimistic. I don't have specific data. It would be an interesting question to ask. But I believe, yes, they would believe that this new administration, with an increased emphasis on reaching out to the world again.... Americans have always fancied themselves internationalists, probably correctly so, except for different periods in their history, so the idea that this was identified as such a prominent consideration by the President, even in a period of economic angst, and with a return to looking at issues of multilateralism and so forth, is something that would have been music to the ears of many Canadians, who have always been very supportive of those kinds of approaches to the international stage.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Graves, if you were advising a government on how to engage the American public with respect to the kind of initiative you're describing, as well as some of the immediate problems we face, how would you go about doing it?

Mr. Frank Graves: Well, frankly, I think it's almost shocking that we don't have the basic kind of data that every large corporate entity would have to make its case to the American public in a period of difficulty, and not just the American public, but the key decision-makers. As far as I'm aware, the data we've been assembling for the last 10 or 15 years has basically petered out, and there's none of that being supported by our government or others. The shelf life of the materials we do have isn't really up to the task. Beyond that, I believe that we have to focus on the areas where we're really likely to make a difference and get a return on the investment, which are more or less the areas we've been discussing this afternoon.

I also believe that it's folly to try to generally change American attitudes towards Canada. I think what we need to do is find the segments of American society, the key groups, that we could call, perhaps, the "influentials"—the folks who are most likely, for example, to participate in the political process, write letters to the editor, perhaps belong to political parties, and so forth—and try to figure out messages that would resonate with those particular groups. There are ways, as researchers, to segment and refine the messages and target the messages using appropriate media to places where you could make a difference.

It's also essential that our key representatives in our consuls and also in our provincial governments and so forth are equipped with the basic information needed to dispel some of the false images about what Americans are thinking about Canada and the border and that they are also, by the way, aware of areas where difficulty exists. For example, it's extremely disturbing to find out that three years ago, 48% of Americans wanted to build a wall at the Canadian border. Now, we could be comforted that 87% wanted to make a wall at the Mexican border, and they actually started building it. But I personally found it pretty chilling that 48% of Americans.... Now, that number's gone down a bit, and it coexists with a lot of other data that would suggest that it's not a very sincere belief on the part of Americans. But I think it's important for us to know where the problems exist as well as what our exposed flanks are. And where we do have points of advantage that are highly significant, we should be able to assemble those in some focused communications to the key decision-makers we're capable of influencing.

● (1620)

Hon. Bob Rae: What I'm hearing you say is that in order for us to be successful with this relationship, which is the most important foreign relationship we have, we need an unprecedented degree of coordination. We need a major public affairs strategy with respect to how we would deal with such an important relationship. We need to look at the key critical points of intervention where we can in fact make a difference so that we can overcome some of the challenges we face. And we're not doing this right now.

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, exactly.

Hon. Bob Rae: You're ruling out a major advertising campaign. That wouldn't be necessary or desirable. It would be more a question of looking at how you focus on the key decision-makers to get them to see things a little differently.

Mr. Frank Graves: I wouldn't rule it out, but I would say that we don't have the empirical ingredients to really give us a good sense of where the return on investment would be most likely to be realized right now. We're basically just shooting in the dark. Given the stakes involved, I find it really kind of astonishing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

We'll move back to Mr. Lunney and then to Madame Deschamps.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Graves, thank you for leading us in an interesting discussion here, or for creating the forum for that to happen.

Mr. Pearson mentioned Iran. I just wanted to pick up on whether in fact your polling shows that either population on either side of the border is significantly engaged on the nuclear issue in Iran. I know that the former U.S. administration did a lot of talking about Iran, and the new one has mentioned Iran and a different approach. Is the significant threat of Iran's nuclear proliferation really on people's minds, considering that they just launched a satellite and so on? Is that on people's minds?

Mr. Frank Graves: That's a good question. I don't have any data since they launched a satellite, but I do have earlier data, and yes, it's very much on people's minds. It's perhaps on people's minds at least as much, and maybe more so, than the threat of Iraq ever was.

Mr. James Lunney: Okay, thank you.

I know that the Arctic is going to be something that certainly, in Canada, we have a lot of interest in. Developing the Arctic is a big concern to Canadians. I think Canadians are engaged a bit in the notion of the Arctic, and always have been. But is that an issue on the radar of Americans, particularly, other than the administration?

Mr. Frank Graves: The general public, no. But I believe that there will be a huge issue that's kind of percolating out there. There will be undoubtedly massive movements of human populations in the first half of this century, perhaps unprecedented, as a consequence of climate change, even if you take the most conservative estimates. And some of the recent work by some very respected economists suggests that countries like Russia and Canada will in fact, even though everybody is going to suffer to some extent under climate change, become relatively more attractive. And the question of how we will deal with those kinds of potentially massive shifts of human population, coupled with the navigable Northwest Passage and so forth, are extremely challenging questions that I think deserve some attention sooner rather than later. Even though it probably won't be a particular concern for me in my lifetime, it's going to be something that's going to be of great concern to many younger Canadians in their lifetime.

● (1625)

Mr. James Lunney: I think we will be discussing it a lot more in the future.

I want to pick up on your comment about the wall at the border from the American perspective. Then of course as some of our colleagues would remember, we had a Manitoba premier not too many decades ago who talked about damming up water at the border, the Red River, when there was concern about flooding. After all, it was American water. And of course that got some interesting discussion going and the floodway was built, which really saved Winnipeg. But coming to the border, there was a lot of angst in the U.S. after 9/11 after it was inappropriately implied that these 9/11 terrorists had actually penetrated the U.S. from Canada. It turned out not to be true.

Does your polling show that there's a bit of angst or a fair bit of angst among the American population about our Canadian border being in fact problematic for them?

Mr. Frank Graves: That's a very good question. Yes, I have polled regularly. I've polled almost monthly since September 11 in Canada and the United States on issues like borders. It's interesting to note for example that the western hemisphere travel initiative is the most recognizable piece of public policy in Canada today. Ninety percent of Canadians can give you a working definition of WHTI even if they don't know all the letters, how it works, when it came in and so forth, which eclipses any policy in our Canadian panoply of policies, which is interesting. They're very concerned about this.

The issues at the border are ones for which we've seen some changes through time. Basically, we've seen in both Canada and the United States in the period from 2002 to about 2006 the idea that maybe we should be strengthening our borders. And in the United States, it wasn't surprising. It was pretty well just driven by security concerns, but Canadians would be saying we have to keep out undesirable things like guns, handguns, and drugs and so forth. And unfortunately this co-existed with a period when the border actually did become more difficult to negotiate. WHTI was implemented. We were starting to arm our border guards. And I really wonder whether or not in the long term this is not something that is going to have a deleterious effect on the ability of the two countries to do business with each other, to move freely, which basically the majority of Canadians and Americans still strongly support.

So I'm quite concerned not just about the practical significance but also the symbolic significance of what's gone on with the border. I think it would be an optimistic read now that we see some relaxation of the concerns with security in the United States, particularly among some of the younger cohort that were responsible for propelling President Obama to victory. The concerns with things like civil liberties and the economy and trade were more important and would have eclipsed the traditional balance points that have been put askew by all the concern in the post-9/11 world. Now there's some sense that maybe things might be moving back. And as the relationship between the two countries shows some sort of improvement, it would be nice to believe that maybe we could see some thawing and some better movement. And then maybe we could see as well strong support for again raising the notion of focusing on a perimeter rather than necessarily raising walls within North America.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

Madame Deschamps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Graves. You are providing us with some very interesting information today.

From a more sociological perspective, when people talk about the United States, one event remains a constant in their collective memory, namely the attacks of September 11, 2001. No one can ignore the serious economic crisis currently unfolding in the United States. In light of the events of September 11 and the current economic crisis, how do Canadians now view the United States? Is it not true that the events of 9-11 have distorted to some extent our relations with or our perception of the United States? Conversely, is it not true that the United States may have felt victimized somewhat by this tragedy and are now feeling even more victimized by the crisis that is battering their economy?

Are we sensing a complete shift to the left, with the election of U. S President Obama? There is a renewed sense of hope in the air. Canada is trying to strengthen its relations with the United States. What impact is this likely to have? Are we now identifying more with our Canadian values as a result of President Obama's election? Because of its close association with the Obama effect, does Canada not run the risk of losing its independence on the international stage?

● (1630)

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: Those are good questions. I'll try to respond to a couple of them.

It was quite shocking to see in the aftermath of September 11—which was the most viewed event in Canadian history as well as American history.... People were riveted to this for the immediate period and thereafter. It had an enormously profound impact, which all the evidence suggests was generational—it didn't dissipate. To best sum up the view, Canadians almost felt embarrassed about any of the more churlish or negative views they had about the United States. The overall sentiment was that we were all Americans now.

That sustained the strong support we had for such things as going to Iraq and Afghanistan. But we also saw it dissipate considerably, some time out, as we became much less convinced that Americans were going the right way. Now there is a greater sense of a common plight, with the economic woes that confront both countries. Despite the fact that there are some differences, there's also a greater sense of resonance or sympathy for the political administration in the United States right now.

Do I think this poses a danger that Canadians will perhaps relinquish or sacrifice their sense of their unique identity? I think we should be mindful of that possibility, but I also think the more likely answer is that it won't. Part of the maturing of the Canadian sense of identity that has occurred over the last 20 years has been a sense that we don't necessarily need to define ourselves now as not being American; we have a positive sense of what it means to be Canadian. It's more a sense of what we understand to be a positive conception: of being Canadian rather than of not being American. We see some evidence of that in our data.

Another point worth noting is that when free trade came into existence, the arguments were that both a pre-condition and a result of free trade would be a greater unification of values and subsequently of identity. In fact, we saw in Maastricht—in Europe—that precisely that happened, although there were different reasons. In Europe now, the instance of people who see themselves as both French, say, and European is almost equal, whereas at the outset of free trade the numbers were dramatically different.

What we've seen in North America is quite startlingly different. In North America, despite the fact that the levels of economic interdependence are as high as or higher than in Europe, national identities have actually been increasing through time. If we measure them over the last 20 to 30 years, the incidence of people who see their principal identification as being with their country, in Canada and the United States and probably Mexico, is much higher now than it was at the outset. What has declined is attachment to local community. In Europe, attachment to continent and local community have been rising. In Canada, attachment to North America has been relatively trivial, unlike the case in Europe.

It really is a different sort of trajectory. I would describe it more as a mosaic of strong identities co-existing within a common market. I don't see anything that will disrupt this in the near future. Perhaps another huge security shock is something that could do it, but I personally think that identities in Canada, the United States, and Mexico are relatively robust.

For the kinds of risk that were predicted by a lot of Canadian nationalists in the 1980s, the evidence is that we've sustained a very strong—in fact, perhaps a stronger—sense of identity during this period of trade liberalization. It's one that is in some respects improbable, but I think it answers the question: there's a good chance we'll be just fine, and our flirtation with the new administration does not mean we're going to be surrendering a sense of sovereignty or identity.

● (1635)

The Chair: Committee members, we have scheduled for the second hour, as you know, committee business. I'm not certain how much time we're going to get on committee business; we still have two more on the second round.

Do you want to continue and allow them to proceed or move to committee business?

Do we stick with the agenda?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Why don't we allow everyone to ask questions?

The Chair: All right. Then we'll go to Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Graves. There's certainly some interesting information here today.

Could you expand on border issues? You were talking earlier about areas of cooperation. You talked about environment, food and product safety, and trade. I believe we have already signed the safety and security protocol as it relates to health issues, for instance. The United States is required to let us know, if there is a communicable disease, and vice versa. We're already stepping forward in those kinds of things, and yet at the same time we see the United States asking for passports now for entry into the States, which I think is going to hamper tourism both ways.

How do we go about addressing these issues? From our perspective as Canadians, we want the rapport to be there. We realize there are issues that are critical for health—and when I use the word “health” I don't just mean physical health, but health in a more esoteric understanding. How do we go about addressing those issues while yet maintaining safety and security as well?

Mr. Frank Graves: Again, that's an excellent and complicated question. I believe this should be a really prominent focus for us in the coming year, because I do believe that this thickening of the border, which is a term the Americans don't like, has not been particularly healthy.

Our research shows that there will be sizeable portions of both the American public and the Canadian public who are simply not going to travel as a consequence of WHTI. It's more focused on those people who are not particularly affluent, on people who are going to be crossing the border in their vehicles. With air travel, the effects largely have already been dealt with and 95% of people got their passports.

The numbers would be very, very large in terms of the economic consequences of people who would have travelled but aren't going to do so now because of this.

My optimistic scenario is that in terms of sheer risk analysis, there are better ways to deal with this with less economic cost, and there might be some receptivity to that, given some of the shift in both the public mood in the United States and the administration as well.

There are also other interesting ideas that we see emerging from some of the research that we've been doing on security and borders. For example, Canadians and Americans both seem to favour a shift to using electronic technology, information technology, as a method for reducing the intrusiveness and costs, time, and inconvenience of the border. If they acknowledge that this stuff is a necessary evil, then there is a sense that perhaps it could be dealt with, that rather than being patted down or asked to take off your belt and remove your shoes, maybe there would be technologies. In an ideal world we find that Canadians in growing numbers support the notion of a national identity card with a biometric. It sounds like something that would be very scary. In fact, we find the vast majority of Canadians now say that would be a good idea. I found as well when I polled the United States, which supposedly would be completely allergic to national identity, given their libertarian traditions, that a slim but significant majority of Americans would support a national identity card.

Ideally, in Canadians' best world, they would have a system of virtual passports that would be triggered by facial biometrics, and bad guys would be ferreted out by machines, and I wouldn't have to be annoyed by the nuisance of all the bells and removing my shoes and so forth. I think there's reason to believe that in the absence of achieving the more obvious goal of trying to soften or eliminate some of the WHTI initiatives, progress on the technology front will help to at least provide a more manageable and convenient world. There is growing resistance in consumers.

The other interesting area is that Canadians would like the idea of a unified approach to managing security so they would go along with the idea of a North American no-fly list. They don't like the idea of an American no-fly list being imposed, particularly in travelling in Canada, but they would be in fact supportive of one that was managed jointly. This is an area where Canadians and Americans would support shared approaches to dealing with the intelligence information. The solutions for Canadians more and more lie in the merger of intelligence and technology.

● (1640)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Graves.

Mr. Patry said he had a very, very short question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

You spoke at length about security considerations between the countries, about passports and about the Arctic. Do both countries cooperate on immigration matters? I'm talking here about immigration and the movement of workers.

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Graves: Yes, I do. As I mentioned, there are sharp differences in Canadian and American outlooks on immigration, which have been going in a different trajectory. Now, it's very important to recognize that American attitudes to immigration are so heavily influenced by concerns about what goes on at the southern border that it's difficult to disentangle. Even trying to take that apart, it's still the case that Americans, as part of this more protectionist and isolationist sentiment that's emerged in the last few years, have been more wary and concerned about immigration than they have been at other periods in time.

I do also point out that of all the countries in the world, Canada is seen as the least threatening. That doesn't mean Canada is seen as harmless. All countries are seen as potentially harmful, as is the domestic movement of people within the United States.

We have found for some time that Americans would support the free movement of workers from Canada through the United States, and Canadians would also support that. When we extend those questions to include Mexico, we find that Canadians do still support this. Canadians say they would support the free movement of Mexican workers in Canada, but Americans know the support level drops 20% or 30%. There's still a sizeable constituency that would support it, but there is a real asymmetry in attitudes to Canadian and Mexican labour among the American public.

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

Thank you again, Mr. Graves. We certainly appreciated your information. You mentioned earlier that you had some other resources or charts or whatever. If you have something, although maybe I had better be careful what I'm asking for—

Mr. Frank Graves: I'll keep it small.

The Chair: If you do have some that you could pass on to the committee, I know it would be very much appreciated.

We're going to suspend for one minute and then move into committee business.

Thank you very much.

● _____ (Pause) _____ ●

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

First of all, under committee business, we want to let you know that we have confirmed a couple of witnesses for February 23. The department is able to appear that day as well. If you have a calendar, you may want to put this into that time slot.

We have a number of motions. We have two motions from Mr. Dewar on the order paper—

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): And mine.

The Chair: —and Mr. Obhrai's.

Paul, did you want to move these forward today?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It would be nice.

The Chair: Okay. You have the first motion.

Pardon me?

● (1645)

Mr. Bernard Patry: You didn't let him finish.

The Chair: He wasn't at his chair.

Both motions or one before the other or what?

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes, certainly. I'd like to just get through the first one because part of it we've already done. We mentioned this last time. Now that we have the Afghanistan report, which will be coming on whatever date we agreed to, it's just the two parts that are left to table, because the first part is redundant since we agreed to have that done for February 26. I think that was the agreement.

It would be to move the sixth and seventh—

The Chair: All right. So you're moving that motion forward.

Is there any debate on that first motion that Mr. Dewar has moved forward?

Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As was already mentioned, we discussed the tenth report yesterday, so that is already out of there.

With regard to the next two motions, the government has a serious problem on the basis of the fact that the motion on CSR, the corporate—

The Chair: No. We aren't on that motion. We're on the first motion.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: But that's the report he's talking about. It's part of that.

The Chair: Oh, I'm sorry.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: CSR is basically under the jurisdiction of the Minister of International Trade, not the Minister of Foreign Affairs, so it would be appropriate that whatever this is go to the trade committee. The trade committee can handle that since it is not the responsibility of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. We suggest that Mr. Dewar contact his colleague in the trade committee and have this go on to the trade committee.

As far as the third report is concerned and why I opposed this, the government's position on this file has been very clearly stated. There are going to be no changes. The position is there.

The problem we are having with this, Mr. Chair, and why we are opposing it, is that it takes a lot of government resources to do that and we would rather carry on with a lot of what is more important, specifically some of the motions that I put forward, most likely on Sri Lanka. As you know, things are happening there.

It will take a lot of effort on the government's part, so for that reason the government feels it cannot support this motion. It uses up resources and basically has no value for this committee in reference to CSR and the report on Mr. Omar Khadr.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Obhrai.

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Chairman, there are two things I want to say.

One, I would hope that as a matter of style and practice, the steering committee would be able to work hard on the agenda and give us a sense of direction. There'll be some trade-offs, and we all have our special interests and subjects. I mean, we could spend a lot of time debating motions that come before us, but we have to say, okay, how do we want to organize our schedule? What are the issues we want to deal with? How do we want to go forward? I would hope that as a matter of just working style, we'd be able to do that.

We made a decision last time that we'd do this broad study, that we'd begin to pull together the people we want to look at. There are a couple of issues that I've mentioned, and Mr. Obhrai has moved a motion on them—Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, areas of particular crisis where we need to be able to respond and to have, on an ongoing basis, sessions on.

I would just prefer that we do that. We have to understand that if we say we're going to consider this, then we're going to consider that, and then, by the way, we're going to consider this in addition, that kind of unfocuses us, that's all. I think we have to try to stay focused. Otherwise we can spend time debating motions.

As I've suggested to people, I'm happy if we can have a day where we talk about Sir Lanka, get a couple of witnesses in who can give us some information, and have an engaged discussion on that. That's worthwhile, and we can move on that basis.

I'm not quite sure, for example—speaking about both of Mr. Dewar's motions—when we would do this. Would it take time away from other stuff? How would we integrate it into the rest of what we're doing?

I really think these are the things that need to be traded off in the steering committee much more. In my view, that's what the steering committee should be doing.

The Chair: I think sometimes in the steering committee we bring forward, or we try to. You know, where we really make the recommendations is when we should have a consensus. When the steering committee comes here, we're still going to pass it by the committee, but we should be pretty close to a consensus on some of this.

So yes, I would agree with much of that: we have to try to get clearer consensus at steering committee. I actually thought, at last steering committee, we did that fairly well.

Mr. Dewar.

● (1650)

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll respond to Bob's point, and I guess to the parliamentary secretary's point as well.

The motion that's on the table right now is just follow-up from what we'd debated last time. These three items were ones that this committee had passed. In the case of CSR, we'd passed it here.

Mr. Obhrai, you will recall that. It was your amendment that I accepted to get it through, and I thank you for that.

It's the same as the Afghanistan report; by the time that got through, it never got beyond.... I think it was just tabled in the House and then we recessed.

So in the case of the CSR, that's the mop-up, if you will, Bob, on that.

Hon. Bob Rae: It has already gone to the House.

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, it hasn't. The House rose. We had, like, five minutes to talk about it and it was over.

It's the same with the Khadr report. I'll just say, quite frankly, if you want to withdraw the Khadr report from that, I don't know...fine, but I thought....

These three items were items that the previous foreign affairs committee had worked on, had passed, and had just gotten to the House before we recessed.

So that's the intent. Just so you know, that's why that's there. It's not about doing extra work. It's not about delaying us. It's actually finishing the work that this committee had done in the last Parliament.

I think it's important that this committee does its work and that it also finishes the job. The job, as you know, is not just the work here; it's also sending it to the Commons. If we don't do that, then we're working on another planet. It actually wastes our time.

So those three items I've brought back simply to clean up, to do mop-up.

On the second item, I'm happy to fold that in, Bob or anyone else, to the work that we're going to do. The issue I put down here, on resolutions 1325 and 1820, is something the government signed onto and is actually doing work on. This isn't playing gotcha. This is actually, in light of what we had talked about at committee, when I was bringing up the Congo and Darfur, the role of Canada...as a resolution that was passed, 1325, which is the role of women in peacekeeping, and 1820, which actually goes further and prescribes how to do that.

Instead of saying we should take a country, I was wanting to apply these principles, which we've passed in the UN, and take a look at it. But I'm happy to fold that into the approach that we'd taken at the steering committee.

No problem; if that's...but I just want to make sure that's part of our study. If we're trying to actually move this along, fine. But these other two items, as I said to Mr. Obhrai, he helped amend, in the case of CSR, to the liking of the government, I assume, at the time. It's simply to make sure that these two items, along with the Afghanistan report, get out of this committee to Parliament. We never had that opportunity, because the House rose.

The Chair: Mr. Crête.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I'm rather in favour of referring these motions to the steering committee for its consideration. That body could then look at the motions and recommend if some should be brought back before the full committee. We could consider Mr. Obhrai's motions, in particular. At least six of the eight, or five of the seven motions do not deal with urgent matters, but rather topics that we will be examining in the course of our larger study. Normally, the steering committee could have decided that the motion on the Arctic would be integrated when this matter came up for discussion. However, this does not preclude the possibility of other motions or urgent matters.

For instance, the conflict in Sri Lanka is an urgent matter. We could decide to hold one or two meetings to discuss the situation. We're trying to decide how the committee will proceed. If we are confronted with a stack of motions every week, then we will spend all of our time dealing with them and we won't be doing any in-depth studies. However, we could agree to send the motion to the steering committee for further consideration of how it ties in with our larger study. If the motion does not tie in, then it can be referred back to the full committee for debate. This approach would help us filter out a number of issues.

The Arctic is already one of the topics on our agenda, along with the United States and Africa. There are two motions pertaining to international cooperation. The steering committee could also look at whether international cooperation should be part of our study and if so, when it should be on the table for discussion. I'm not sure if we need to move a motion, but in any case, I think we should refer these motions to the steering committee and await its recommendation to the full committee. That way, we will potentially be saving the full committee many hours of fruitless additional debate.

● (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: I know there are different reasons why people bring forward motions. I remember back in 2001-02 the NDP had an individual who was very good at bringing forward motions, leaving them there so that he could get his media and everything else set up, and then at the right time bring them forward. So those are the reasons, and they're politically sound. It makes sense. But sometimes it's frustrating.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Members are still free to table motions, but at least there would be a process in place to determine if a particular motion on the table ties in with the larger study.

[*English*]

The Chair: I agree with you, but what it does is that everything being vetted takes the opportunity away from some other MP. If they really have an issue they want to put forward, the steering committee can vet it all and it can hamper them doing it. So it's a warning.

I think we have to try to do something—you're right—but there's a caution here as well.

Mr. Abbott.

Hon. Jim Abbott: In the spirit that I think we're getting to here, I certainly agree with Mr. Rae.

If I may, with your indulgence, Chair, just refer to the next motion by way of illustration—I don't want to debate the motion. The point that Mr. Dewar himself made is the fact that this is a work in progress. He may be unhappy or dissatisfied with the progress the government is making, but nonetheless the government is already undertaking work on those two resolutions. So this motion wouldn't lead to any new policy. It just would reflect on what we've done, and if we were trying to create an aura here, we'd probably say yes, let's have it, because it would put us in very good stead.

I'm afraid I'm not very good at procedure, and I don't know how to phrase this, but my suggestion would be that if we could set these aside.... I don't want to use what I think is the appropriate word, because that shuts off all debate. But if we could set these aside, I think there is a great deal of interest in Mr. Obhrai's second motion on the back of the English page, in any event. I think there is a lot of interest on the part of all people on the committee and a sense of goodwill toward doing a study on Sri Lanka, because it's so urgent.

I don't want to use—

The Chair: I understand what you're saying here, except that we can't do that. We are debating the motion that's been put forward. Mr. Dewar has every right to bring forward that motion.

Mr. Rae.

Hon. Bob Rae: I'm just saying this as a factual matter, but we agreed that we would resubmit the report on Afghanistan to the House and the reason for that was because it didn't report until the summer, until we were adjourned as a committee. Is that right?

The Chair: That's correct. Every report there has been tabled in the House.

Hon. Bob Rae: Except the report on Afghanistan was not tabled in the House.

● (1700)

The Chair: Yes, it was.

Mr. Paul Dewar: All three are the same. That's why they're in here.

Hon. Bob Rae: I thought it didn't appear until—

The Chair: No, we tabled it in the House in...whatever the wording is—

Hon. Bob Rae: In June?

The Chair: It was in July, because the House had risen. We had passed a motion—

Hon. Bob Rae: The House wasn't sitting.

The Chair: The House was not sitting.

Hon. Bob Rae: That's my point. My point is the House wasn't sitting.

I think the House was sitting for the—

The Chair: Yes, the others were all passed through the House.

Hon. Bob Rae: That's the difference. So I would argue, Paul—just to niggle about it—that the difference between the Afghanistan report and the other reports is that they were reported to the House. They are there. People can refer to them. We adopted them. You and I referred to the Khadr report, Mr. Crête, at the press conference this morning. It exists.

The Chair: It's on the website.

Hon. Bob Rae: The difference with Afghanistan is the House wasn't in session. We were on summer recess, so we never really had an opportunity. There is the argument that not everybody accepted it, but at least we got it through, so that's going forward.

I don't see the parallel with the other cases.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Rae.

Mr. Obhrai, are you ready for the question?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I have just a quick comment back on Paul's thing and Rae's thing. We were talking about the road map, and I think we should go back to the subcommittee. All the motions I put forward were part of the road map that we had discussed yesterday and gave to the committee. It's all there now, right?

The difficulty with these things is that these two motions that Mr. Dewar has put forward are not urgent. We really need to focus, because the Sri Lankan thing is highly important. It's up to Mr. Dewar what he wants to do; he's put it forward. We can have a vote on that, but basically the argument that has been put forward here is to send it back to the steering committee. We'll come out with all the things here, including the Sri Lanka one. You have just indicated we have witnesses and the department. After that we have the steering committee and we can bring it out and move forward. We are fine with that.

I would say this is our argument. It's up to Mr. Dewar, and you can call the question.

The Chair: Mr. Dewar.

Mr. Paul Dewar: It's nice of Mr. Obhrai to tell us to call the question. He's been on the other side of the equation more times than I have and in fact hasn't done that. I'm speaking about talking out the clock. I don't want to do that.

I want to underline the point—probably to Mr. Rae more than anyone—that we are not talking about rewriting the report here. We're talking about the work that was done in this committee. The difference was a matter of hours, particularly on the CSR report—which was a motion amended by the government, so I'm not sure why they would be against it. By the time we got it into the House, the House had risen for the summer. So in terms of opportunity for us to actually shine light on it, you know how these things work.

Basically what you're saying is that you don't want to have the work that this committee had done in the past Parliament in the House, Bob. That's what you're saying.

Hon. Bob Rae: No, Paul. It can be referred to. It can be dealt with.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Well, no, it cannot be brought up. It cannot be concurred. Let's be clear about this. If we can't bring a report into the House, then it doesn't mean much, other than it being a nice document hung out there.

The key thing for us is to be able to bring our work right into the House. Otherwise, let's be honest, it is a report that's out there and it's on the website, but beyond that, it's not able to be debated and it cannot be concurred in, because this Parliament has not adopted it. That's why we had the Afghanistan report resubmitted. That was my intention.

So this isn't about extra work. The work has been done.

Hon. Bob Rae: But we are resubmitting the Afghanistan—

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, the work has been done, but as for the opportunity to actually have it concurred in the House, you can't do it. Procedurally it can't be done unless we ask for it to be resubmitted, and that's all.

Hon. Bob Rae: But we have resubmitted the Afghanistan report.

Mr. Paul Dewar: That's what I'm saying, and these other two reports cannot be referred to unless we do that again in the House. So it means they disappear. I don't know how else to put it.

● (1705)

The Chair: I don't either, because—

Mr. Paul Dewar: We can't refer to them in the House. We can't concur—

Hon. Bob Rae: What do you mean you can't refer to them?

The Chair: You can refer to the Muslim reports from three Parliaments ago.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Okay, should I be really blunt about it? We cannot do a concurrence for those other two reports in the House because they were from the last Parliament. With the Afghanistan report, because we're resubmitting, we can then concur in the House and debate.

Unless you're able to do that, Bob, it's a nice little bit of paper we wrote, but it's nothing that we can concur in in the House. Those three items were ones that we had done in this last Parliament, that this committee had worked on, that got to Parliament right at the end, and in the case of the Afghanistan report, it was tabled with permission of the committee after the House had done its business and gone. But the other two, we weren't able to actually concur in to have a full debate on it, because the House rose by the time that happened.

Hon. Bob Rae: Procedurally, what would a full vote be on these two reports?

Mr. Paul Dewar: It means there could be a debate and a vote. I'm being very upfront. That's why I put them in there. It means there could be a debate on those two items. What it means is that if we don't resubmit....

All I'm doing here is saying this is the work we had done. Parliament recessed, and we weren't able to do that. So all it is a matter of doing, just like the Afghanistan report, is to allow it to be resubmitted, and it will be put through this committee and could be concurred to the House, so we could actually have it concurred in the House. That's the key piece here.

I'm in your hands on this, because the government's pretty clear about what it wants to do.

The Chair: We have the motion before us, and there's no one else to speak to it. Are you ready for the question on this motion?

Hon. Bob Rae: Can we just confer with the clerk for a moment?

Mr. Paul Dewar: There seems to be some confusion. Can I get clarification from the clerk about the sixth and seventh reports that I'm referring to? If they are not resubmitted and passed through this committee, they cannot be concurred in the House—is that correct?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Angela Crandall): Exactly. If they're not presented to the House as a report of this Parliament and this committee, then—

Mr. Paul Dewar: Yes. So we will not be able to debate corporate social responsibility or Khadr. I just want to be clear about what we're doing here.

The Chair: Are we ready for the question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: If we pass this motion, that doesn't mean that we are going to debate this question again in committee. Correct? Thank you.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: No, just vote and go.

The Chair: I'll call the question on Mr. Dewar's motion.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

Mr. Paul Dewar: As I said around the table, I'll ask that my other motion—

The Chair: Do you wish to withdraw it?

Mr. Paul Dewar: I'll withdraw it and talk about it in the steering committee.

The Chair: All right. We haven't moved it forward, so we'll just take it—

Mr. Paul Dewar: But leave it on the paper for now.

The Chair: Mr. Obhrai isn't here to deal with any of his motions.

Mr. Crête, and then Mr. Rae.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: So then, if I understood correctly, the other motions will be sent to the steering committee. However, with respect to Sri Lanka, do we need to move a motion stating that given the urgent nature of the situation, the committee should consider devoting one meeting to this conflict?

[*English*]

Hon. Bob Rae: Is that okay with Mr. Abbott?

Hon. Jim Abbott: I'm sorry?

The Chair: We haven't passed any motion. There's been no motion other than Mr. Dewar's, which we passed.

We can't move the motion forward on Sri Lanka because Mr. Obhrai isn't here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Mr. Obhrai's motion was on our agenda. Therefore, there is no need to wait 48 hours to move forward. I'm merely trying to make things easier. Can we proceed today to adopt a motion that would allow us to schedule one or two meetings on Sri Lanka, given the urgent nature of the conflict?

[*English*]

The Chair: My understanding is that if Mr. Obhrai isn't here, and if he hasn't....

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: Unless there is unanimous consent.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm listening to the clerk on the procedure here.

Unless there is unanimous consent to move that motion of Mr. Obhrai's forward, we can't move it forward.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête: I would like the unanimous consent of the committee to move forward with this motion so that we can schedule one or two meetings on the conflict in Sri Lanka, given the urgency of the situation.

[*English*]

The Chair: It is urgent, except, again, the mover of this motion is not here, and I know he wanted to speak to this motion.

Do we have unanimous consent to move forward with this motion, or do we decide to wait until Mr. Obhrai comes? Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

The Chair: Okay, so there's not unanimous consent to move it at this point. If it were someone else's motion, you could.

Mr. Rae, did you want to say something?

Hon. Bob Rae: No, no. I'll talk to Mr. Patry. I think we can probably get....

What I'd like is to see us get on the steering committee, get some agreement as to how we're going to go forward, and do it in a very reasonable way. I think the Sri Lankan question should be debated, and I'm sure we'll reach agreement on that.

The Chair: Mr. Abbott.

Hon. Jim Abbott: Based on the conversation I had with Mr. Obhrai previously, I'm sure he will be bringing this forward as quickly as possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbott.

If there's no other business, we will adjourn.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
http://www.parl.gc.ca
