

# Trudeau Broaches His Dinner With Trump, Retaliatory Tariffs, Anti-Incumbency Trend in MSNBC Interview

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Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says the conversation about making Canada the “51st state” was quickly dropped after he proposed trading two U.S. states in exchange during his meeting with President-elect Donald Trump in Florida last November.

Trudeau spoke about the discussion during a [Jan. 9 interview](#) with MSNBC. He was referring to his visit to Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate on Nov. 29, where the incoming U.S. president first floated the idea of annexing Canada.

“[Annexation] actually sort of came up at one point, and then we started musing back and forth about this,” the prime minister told anchor Jen Psaki, the [former White House press secretary](#) under President Joe Biden’s administration.

“When I started to suggest, ‘Well, maybe there could be a trade for Vermont or California for certain parts,’ he immediately decided that it was not that funny anymore and we moved onto a different conversation.”

Since Trump won the U.S. election in November 2024, the president-elect has [repeatedly referred](#) to Canada as the “51st state” and called Trudeau the “governor” of a “great state.”

In a press conference at Mar-a-Lago on Jan. 7, Trump went on to say he would use “economic force” to merge Canada with the United States, as combining the two countries and getting rid of the “artificially drawn” border would “really be something.”

[Trudeau responded](#) on social media platform X that same day, [saying](#) “there isn’t a snowball’s chance in hell that Canada would become

part of the United States.” He added that “both our countries benefit from being each other’s largest trading and security partner.”

The prime minister reiterated his stance during the interview with MSNBC, which [aired on Jan. 12](#).

“This isn’t out of the blue he’s doing this, but my focus has to be not on something that he’s talking about that will not ever happen, but more on something that might well happen,” Trudeau said.

Trump has said he will [impose a 25 percent tariff](#) on all Canadian imports if the country does not take adequate steps to improve border security and stop the flow of illegal drugs, particularly fentanyl, and illegal immigrants into the United States.

## ‘Robust Response’

In the interview, Trudeau maintained that Canada “is not a problem,” as “less than 1 percent of the illegal migrants, less than 1 percent of the fentanyl that comes into the United States, comes from Canada.” He said Canada, nonetheless, will strengthen its border security. “[Trump is] negotiating for more secure borders, which we’re going to be giving him.”

Tom Homan, whom Trump has selected to be his border czar, has [said](#) during his career he'd seen a lot of “special interest aliens” from countries sponsoring terrorism trying to reach the United States from Canada, and that the northern border is an “extreme national security vulnerability.”

Trudeau said that should Trump decide to proceed with the tariff, it would “raise the cost of just about everything for American citizens,” and on top of that, Canada will have “a robust response.”

“We’re ready to respond with tariffs as necessary,” Trudeau [said](#), pointing out that Canada [did so](#) in 2018, after Trump imposed tariffs on Canadian steel and aluminum earlier that year.

“We responded by putting tariffs on [American products] like bourbon, Harley Davidson [motorcycles], orange juice, playing cards, these sorts of things that Canadians could find replacements for, so they wouldn’t have to pay more for those,” he said.

At the same press conference on Jan. 7, Trump [said](#) the United States doesn’t need to rely on Canadian products like lumber, dairy, and automotives, and that his country was losing hundreds of millions of dollars per year to “subsidize” Canada.

Trudeau told Psaki that Canada remains the largest export partner of the United States, and any move by Trump to enforce the tariff would cost Americans and their jobs, as well as Trump’s mandate as president.

“I know he got elected to try and make life easier for all Americans, to support American workers. These are things that are going to hurt them,” Trudeau said.

Psaki, noting that the Canadian Parliament is currently suspended, asked Trudeau what “levers” he has and what he is prepared to do if Trump doesn’t respond in kind to Canada’s call to retract the proposed tariff before the prime minister’s potential [resignation in March](#), once the Liberal Party selects a new leader to replace him.

“I have all the tools as prime minister to be able to respond whether Parliament is sitting or not,” said Trudeau, who on Jan. 6 [announced](#) his intention to step down after a Liberal leadership race, also saying that Gov. Gen. Mary Simon had granted his request to prorogue Parliament until March 24.

## ‘Political Cycle’

Trudeau’s announcement came after weeks of turmoil within the Liberal caucus and amid declining poll numbers.

For his part, he said there is currently a global “political cycle” where incumbents, particularly those who steered their countries through

the COVID pandemic, are being targeted.

“There is still a lingering frustration towards incumbents,” Trudeau told Psaki, adding that “Canada did extraordinarily well through the pandemic” as compared with peer countries. “Tens of thousands less, fewer deaths proportionately than our friends and allies around the world,” he said.

“And I think right now, we’re seeing a time in politics where emotions and social media is carrying an awful lot of weight in how people feel about things.”

Trudeau said progressives, whether the Liberals in Canada or the Democrats in the United States, should focus on the cost of living and the economy. He said his government has lowered barriers for minorities, women, and vulnerable people to join the workforce. At the same time, he took shots at his critics who “turn that [narrative] into a woke argument that says, ‘Oh, you’re just working for minorities and women and you’re not taking care of the economy.’”

## California Wildfires

Trudeau also touched on the wildfires currently ravaging Los Angeles, saying Canada will offer all possible help in the battle.

“We went through some horrific fires over the past years as well, and American firefighters showed up for us, and we’re glad to help out in any way, ... whether it’s transport planes or Coast Guard cutters or water bombers or even firefighters,” he said.

The prime minister said he looks forward to “spending more time with my kids” after he leaves office.

*Matthew Horwood contributed to this report.*

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