

Anthony Furey: The Best Way Canada Can Avoid Tariffs Is to Seriously Tackle the Concerns Raised by Trump

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Trucks from Canada head through the Peace Bridge Port of Entry in Buffalo, N.Y., one of North America's busiest portals for international travel and trade, on May 23, 2023. The Canadian Press/Cole Burston



Commentary

For the past few weeks, Canadian political and business circles have been absorbed in navigating the threat of tariffs imposed from the United States.

Will President-elect Trump make good on his threats? How will the Canadian economy be affected? And, most importantly, what needs to be done to avoid these tariffs?

The business world thrives on stability. If the rules change midway, such as an adjustment in costs on imports, that can disrupt entire industries.

The other week, Trump posted to social media that he would impose a 25 percent tariff on all goods imported from Canada and Mexico unless the two countries stopped both fentanyl and illegal border-crossers from getting into the United States.

It would be ill-advised to doubt the seriousness of these threats. During the last Trump term, the United States not only imposed tariffs on China but briefly added them on Canadian imports of steel and aluminum. The latter was lifted, but only after significant back-and-forth.

While these tariffs may be a negotiating tactic, they are negotiations that must be taken seriously. Trump is clearly genuine in his concerns about illegal immigration and fentanyl, and tariffs are a mechanism he has used in the past.

When it comes to the ramifications of tariffs, they are many. Canadian industry would feel the costs of them and pass them on to workers and consumers.

Right now, there is a full court press underway from multiple levels of government in Canada as well as business associations to remind

American politicians and business leaders of the interconnectedness of our economies.

This kind of charm offensive has its merits. The Ontario government has rolled out an ad campaign in select U.S. jurisdictions to promote the province as a key trading partner of many U.S. sectors. The ad was in fact prepared before the threat of tariffs was even mentioned, as the province had wisely anticipated that they would need to highlight this relationship whatever happened after the election. For this reason, the campaign doesn't even mention tariffs.

Likewise, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his team were well-advised to make their pilgrimage to Mar-a-Lago. Trump and those around him were unimpressed with some of the critical remarks the Trudeau team had made about him during his first term. The Liberals needlessly created friction between the two leaders. Trudeau and the Liberal cabinet have largely kept away from that this time.

All of these efforts will be beneficial in smoothing over relations and minimizing the risk of tariffs and other economic damage. But the best possible solution is to seriously tackle the concerns raised by the president-elect.

Trump is not wrong that the Canadian border has lax security and that fentanyl is a growing problem in our country. These are problems that need to be addressed.

Canadian leaders should be the ones to be making domestic policy decisions, and they should be doing them because the decisions are in the best interests of Canada. It's not up to a foreign leader to call the shots.

Then again, we shouldn't be avoiding smart policy choices just because a foreign leader is urging us to do so. In this case, what Trump is pushing Canada to do for his own political and policy reasons happens to largely align with what Canada should be doing for our own benefit.

The drug crisis has tragically worsened in Canada in recent years. A recent University of Toronto study found that between 2019 and 2021, the number of [accidental drug deaths rose](#) from 3,007 per year to 6,222 in the last year studied. According to Health Canada's most recent numbers, which track up to March 2024, there are on average 21 people per day now dying of overdoses. The department says that since 2016, there have been [close to 50,000 such deaths](#).

Likewise, the problem with illegal border activity in Canada is apparent for all to see. The illegal Roxham Road crossing made a joke of our border integrity. The absence of an orderly asylum strategy has seen communities like Niagara Falls struggle to deal with the unplanned influx of people to their communities. And the lack of enforcement and inspections is playing a role in gun crimes, car thefts, and drug trafficking.

When it comes to tariffs, the current outreach undertaken by multiple levels of government as well as industry leaders is a wise approach to avoiding unwelcome tariffs. But so is a commitment to implementing the sorely needed policy adjustments that Trump is urging. It's what Canada needs right now, so let's do it.

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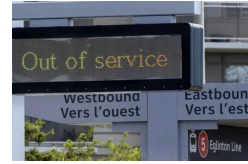
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