

The following op-ed by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte first appeared in the *Times-Picayune* in New Orleans April 22, 2008, and is in the public domain. There are no republication restrictions.

(begin byliner)

Three-nation partnership growing strong

By John Negroponte

Tuesday, April 22, 2008

Sometimes success is too big to see and is reported by historians, not the headlines. But there's a chance that the North American summit meeting in New Orleans this week is different because its focus is on all of us -- Americans, Canadians and Mexicans -- in three great countries each making the others' lives better every day.

Our nations' leaders have been discussing unprecedented levels of cooperation among our three governments, at every level, that are making us all safer and more competitive in the world. And they also have been discussing the dynamic force and power of a trilateral relationship that is driven by millions of decisions made by millions of Americans, Mexicans and Canadians every single day -- people in each of our countries who decide it is in their interests to travel, to purchase and to sell, to study, work, play and invest in their neighboring countries.

We are connected by social, family, educational, commercial and cultural ties that are staggering in their size and continuous growth.

Americans, Canadians and Mexicans have a trading relationship in goods and services that is fast approaching a trillion dollars a year. Canada and Mexico together are the United States' largest source of imported oil. About 65 million cars, 7 million trucks, and 1.5 million railroad cars crossed our land borders last year. We invest close to \$35 billion of our own dollars in each others' countries. Thirty-two thousand Canadians and Mexicans are currently enrolled in U.S. universities, and over 11,000 Americans are studying abroad in Canada and Mexico.

The big message here is that the North American relationship brings enormous benefits, like jobs, energy security and lower prices, to the citizens of all three countries on an historic scale. And it does so peacefully, legally and cooperatively. This enables North America's

increasingly integrated manufacturing sectors to compete more effectively in a quickly expanding global marketplace.

Today, the North American relationship is undisputedly a dynamic platform for our long-term success in the world, just as it is a critical platform for confronting -- better, quicker and more cooperatively -- the big challenges of transnational crime and regional emergency preparedness that threaten that success.

It is the fourth meeting of our leaders since launching the Security and Prosperity Partnership. President Bush, Mexican President Felipe Calderon and Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper are talking about what our governments can do to better support cooperation between our three countries. They will discuss updating border infrastructure that was put in place 40 years ago to handle border crossings that were a quarter of their current volume. They will discuss strategies for coordinating our response to global health risks, to unsafe products, to natural disasters and to terrorist threats.

Of course, there is a positive symbolism in the selection of New Orleans as the site for this meeting. It is a tribute to the tremendous, spontaneous support that the people and governments of Canada and Mexico provided to the citizens of that city and neighboring communities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

There is no other example in the world of three countries, with so much pride in their distinct identities, traditions and values, and yet so committed to their common success.

Historians will ponder and document this continental transformation for decades to come, and the headline writers will have their chance to capture the essence of North American success as well: It lies in our citizens' determination to trust and cooperate with one another.

Canada and Mexico are two of the United States' most important partners in the world. Sometimes we take this fact for granted, or overlook it, but it's true.

[John Negroponte is the U.S. deputy secretary of state.]

(end byliner)