

## The U.S. and its Neighbors Work on Agreements

On June 7, 2019, Mexico agreed to a verbal deal to take steps to stem the flow of migrants in order to forestall the United States' imposition of harsh tariffs. The agreement was reached only two days before Trump had intended to impose an across-the-board, 5% tariff on goods from Mexico. Mexico released a one-page document, signed by representatives of the U.S. and Mexico, providing a framework that both countries will follow to help curb illegal immigration. In the document, both countries state that they will establish a "bilateral agreement" that will allow them to assign responsibility for illegal immigration and share its consequent burden with the other country if they find them responsible. This "burden-sharing" requires that both countries accept the return of third-party refugees who traveled through their country to reach the U.S.-Mexico border. To successfully employ this agreement, Mexico agreed to examine its laws and regulations, making changes where necessary. After 45 days, the two countries will discuss the success of the agreement, and if illegal immigration across the southern U.S. border has not decreased substantially, Mexico will implement additional policies to "bring the agreement into force" within an additional 45 days (Halaschak, 2019).

Both countries, as well as Canada, have progressed towards ratifying a separate, tri-country agreement, the USMCA. The USMCA (United States – Mexico - Canada Agreement) is the agreement intended to replace NAFTA. Mexican President Obrador expects his country's Senate to ratify the USMCA as early as the week of June 17<sup>th</sup>, while Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Freeland claims that Canada will ratify the agreement "in tandem" with the U.S (Graham, 2019; Leonard, 2019). U.S. House Democrats, however, want to address some remaining issues before voting on it. Speaker Pelosi appointed Democrats to lead the discussions. Richard Neal will discuss

the agreement directly with Robert Lighthizer. Earl Blumenauer and Janice Schakowsky will negotiate drug-pricing provisions; Mike Thompson and Jimmy Gomez will share Democrats concerns with labor measures; and Suzanne Bonamici and John Larson will discuss environmental measures. Finally, Terri Sewell and Rosa DeLauro will handle the USMCA's enforcement provisions, a large concern for House Democrats (Leonard, 2019).

In addition to strengthening enforcement as it applies to labor and environmental provisions, House Democrats have requested that the USMCA correct "a major flaw in the NAFTA state-to-state dispute settlement chapter," which allows the U.S. to block trade dispute panels. Robert Lighthizer declared that the USMCA was not meant to prevent dispute panels from being formed; however, Democrats want to ensure that the USMCA not only allows but also requires the countries to provide panel appointees (Lester & Manak, 2019).

All three countries appear to support the USMCA, and none of them have recently suggested any substantial changes to the agreement.

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