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OBAMA ADMINISTRATION URGED TO “SEIZE NORTH AMERICAN OPPORTUNITIES” ON SECURITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

(WASHINGTON, DC – February 10, 2009) – As President Obama prepares for his first foreign presidential trip to Canada on Feb. 19, leading experts in the U.S., Canada and Mexico are urging his administration to strengthen U.S. partnerships with its neighbors on challenges ranging from border security to global competitiveness and environmental protection.

Their recommendations were released today in a report entitled “*North America Next: Report to President Obama on Building Sustainable Security and Competitiveness*”. The report, prepared by the Arizona State University’s North American Center for Transborder Studies (NACTS), represents more than a year of intensive consultations by its consortium of leading experts and universities in the three countries.

“Despite the multiple crises facing the new administration,” NACTS Director Rick Van Schoik said recognition of the “urgency next door” is required “because a number of significant challenges facing the United States also have created unprecedented North American opportunities for enhancing our nation’s competitiveness, security and sustainability.

Almost 40 million jobs were created in the US, Canada and Mexico between 1993-2007,” he noted, “and today Canada and Mexico are respectively the first- and third-ranked trading partners and foreign suppliers to the U.S. Our challenge should not be to undo NAFTA,” Van Schoik added, “but to build a North American strategy for the 21st century, one that generates economic development and job creation for all three nations.

Post-9/11 border congestion has left the U.S. in many ways poorer, less secure and with major environmental challenges in the border region itself, Van Schoik said. One estimate cited a \$7.2 billion annual output loss, or the equivalent of 62,000 jobs, between just two border sister cities in 2007 due to border congestion, traffic and paperwork.

In contrast, Van Schoik said “smart infrastructure investments can simultaneously enhance U.S. and North American security, competitiveness and sustainability by creating jobs, enhancing outdated infrastructure and facilitating faster and ‘greener’ trade.”

Other urgent challenges cited by Van Schoik include:

- The necessity of increasing **global competitiveness** with other trading blocs, a vital element for sustainable economic recovery.

- **Security threats** to North America from the **narcoinsurgency** waged by Mexican organized crime that is raging along the border, fuelled by guns and cash from the U.S.
- Rapidly accelerating **climate change** that underscores the need to not only deal with emissions, but also water shortages and lost biodiversity.
- The prospect of “achieving **energy security** next door, not an ocean away, if we do a few things right...and *right now*.”
- **Mexico’s** difficult commitment to **economic, legal, and political reform**, which “offers a vital window of opportunity that simply must be supported, as potential risks and benefits extend far beyond its borders.”

Key Recommendations

“These challenges also are opportunities,” said Van Schoik, as he outlined recommendations that are “highly doable” in the near or medium-term, including:

- Strengthening the **Mérida Initiative** in a way that maximizes bipartisan U.S. support and multi-partisan Mexican consensus and buy-in.
- Energizing the **North American Trilateral Leaders Summit** by expanding involvement by the three federal legislatures and other key stakeholders.
- Designating a **North America/borders authority** to coordinate sustainable security, preferably within the National Security Council, with a focus upon all critical border functions.
- Expanding **joint risk assessment and preparedness** for enhanced joint defense and better management of natural and human-generated catastrophes.
- Developing an effective **North American trade and transportation plan** that addresses congestion, bottlenecks, and infrastructure in all three countries.
- Creating a **joint, revolving fund for infrastructure investments** in North America, jump-starting our collective economic engine for global competitiveness.
- Implementing a **North American greenhouse gas exchange strategy** to promote energy independence and climate security.
- Establishing **joint, practical assessment of progress** on key North American issues.

About NACTS

The North America Center for Transborder Studies is a collaboration of leading experts and universities in the U.S., Canada and Mexico. NACTS targets issues of public policy from a framework that looks at their *interconnected* security, competitiveness and sustainability components. It is dedicated to finding North American solutions for shared challenges that are knowledgeable, pragmatic and applied.

Based at Arizona State University, NACTS currently is working with the Department of Homeland Security on a Border Security and Immigration Center of Excellence and with EPA on border environmental protection.

For additional information and the full text of the report, see <http://nacts.asu.edu>