

OPINION

Limp carrot, sharper stick

As every mother knows, you put the alphabet noodles in the soup to sell it to the under-five crowd: Oh look! I've got an E! Enough joy to get them to slurp down their soup without even noticing the vegetables.

Governments and politicians do the same thing when trying to sell their agendas to Canadian voters. With a few carrots sprinkled across a complex issue, voters happy to "see something in it for them" swallow what they are being fed without further scrutiny.

In the hands of mothers, this little game of distraction works well. Learning the alphabet and eating your vegetables are good for you.

In the hands of less-than-ethical politicians, this little game of distraction works against the public interest. Witness the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America (SPP), and the carrots that will undoubtedly be hawked to sell this puppy to Canada's farmers.

Officially launched in Waco Texas in March of 2005 by Canada's then-Prime Minister Paul Martin, U.S. President George Bush and Mexico's then-President Vicente Fox, the Security and Prosperity Partnership has topped the wish list of North America's corporate elite since 2003. In Canada, the lobby was led by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, whose members administer \$3.32 trillion in assets and rake in \$750 billion a year in revenue. In Washington, the powerful U.S. Council on Foreign Relations was the protagonist.

Driven by senior ministers in each country, Ottawa's SPP cheerleaders are Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day, Foreign Affairs Minister Maxime Bernier and Industry Minister Jim Prentice.

The American team includes Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Commerce Carlos Guiterez and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

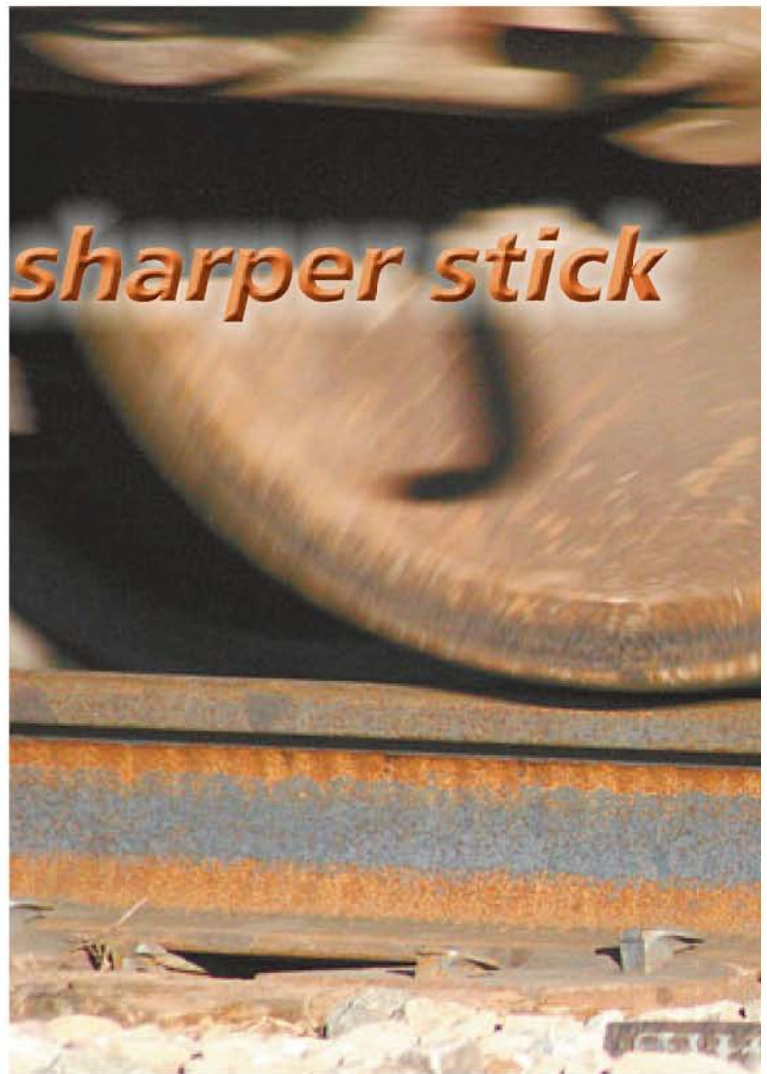
A Secretariat in each country is responsible for driving the process. In Canada this is the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. In the US it is the Council of the Americas, a body that describes itself as "a business organization whose members share a commitment to democracy, open markets and the rule of law throughout the Americas" with the aim of promoting "... free and integrated markets for the benefit of the companies that comprise our membership."

At the second SSP summit in Cancun in March 2006, Leaders announced the formation of a North American Competitiveness Council (NACC) to advise them on private sector priorities.

Comprised of 10 business leaders from each country, Canada's members on the NACC are CEO's from Manulife Financial, Power Corp, Ganong



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Bros Ltd, Suncor Energy, CNR, Linamar Corp, Bell Canada, Home Depot and Bank of Nova Scotia.

In February 2007, the NACC made 51 recommendations in three areas: border-crossing facilitation, standards and regulatory cooperation and energy supply and distribution.

The standards and regulatory cooperation recommendations promise to "ensure the compatibility of regulations and while reducing unnecessary differences in rules and standards"

Three sectors — agriculture and food, financial services and transportation — are targeted.

For food and agriculture, this means harmonizing safety standards, eliminating differences in regulation, ensuring one North American position is put forward to international bodies concerned with food safety standards, harmonization of disease hazard procedures, border inspections, phytosanitary regulations, regulations governing biocontrol agents and plants, audit and certification process for plant commodities, import and tracking regulations for BSE, veterinary medicines, product labeling, allowable pesticide residues, pesticide regulations, animal and plant disease identification, and regulations governing the development and use of biotechnology and its products.

The energy supply and distribution recommendations will "improve cross-border distribution systems" by regulatory collaboration, electricity collaboration, boosting production from the oil sands, boosting production from natural gas, major pipeline projects and liquid natural gas import terminals, harmonization of oil, gas and electricity regulations that impede cross border trade, nuclear collaboration, hydrocarbon cooperation and energy coordination.



A proposed transportation corridor will change the very dynamic of how business is done across the continent. — Anthony Kovats

In the transportation sector, the NACC's recommendations include, among other things, support for a series of North American Intermodal transportation corridors similar to the proposed Trans Texas Corridor (TTC). Described as the largest engineering feat ever proposed, the TTC will be four football fields wide and include lanes for cars, trains and trucks, providing direct access between Mexican ports and the heartland of America.

Multimodal includes pipelines, and that includes water.

According to TTC documents, "Texas proposes to build a new type of transportation system...to move people and goods faster and more safely than ever before... Beyond that, the corridor will feature a wide utility zone for the transmission of oil, natural gas, electricity, data and... water."

From the minutes of a 2004 meeting of the Task Force on the Future of North America, author of the SPP: "No item, not Canadian water, not Mexican oil... is off the table, rather contentious or intractable issues will simply require more time to ripen politically."

Powerful private public consortia such as the North American Super Corridor Coalition are lobbying hard to extend this project north thru Manitoba to the Canadian port of Churchill. Four major corridors – Atlantic, Central Eastern, Central Western and Pacific - and their associated pipelines are planned to transport Canadian oil, gas and water resources south.

Last summer, Harper, Bush and Calderon met for a third time behind closed doors in Montebello, Quebec to implement the SPP agenda.

The North American Security and Prosperity Partnership will no doubt

be sold to farmers as a way to "level the playing field" and make Canadian farmers more "competitive" by giving them what many have been asking for: harmonized regulations governing pesticide use, phytosanitary inspections and labeling/packaging.

For this one little carrot – which is being pursued through other channels anyway – farmers will be expected to swallow the economic, political, social and security integration of North America.

The four page SPP Regulatory Cooperation Framework has as its goal "to strengthen regulatory cooperation, streamline regulations and regulatory processes and encourage compatibility of regulations" including, for example, the requirement that "trade impact be included in regulatory impact analysis to reduce regulatory barriers to trade amongst the partners." Sound familiar? It is difficult to imagine how the regulations governing Canada's supply managed commodities would prevail in the face of the SPP's regulatory harmonization requirements. Ditto the single desk authority of the Canadian Wheat Board. Ditto the producer car system.

Farmers must not allow the distraction of a few perceived benefits to stop them from seeing the big picture. Without policy sovereignty — the right to protect our resources and craft sustainable policies reflective of the current and future needs of Canada's farmers and communities — security and prosperity are fully unattainable.

Forget the carrots, the SSP is actually a sharp stick in the eye of Canadian agriculture. Wendy Holm, P.Ag. is an award-winning Agrologist, economist and columnist based on Bowen Island, BC. She can be reached at wendy@theholmteam.ca and her website is www.theholmteam.ca