

Speech by Foreign Affairs Minister Freeland on the Modernization of NAFTA

Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland attended a meeting this morning at the Standing Committee on International Trade to discuss the government's plan in the NAFTA renegotiations set to begin on August 16th in Washington. The speech plus Q&A affair lasting nearly two hours, at which the Minister was accompanied by members of her cabinet, did not reveal much in terms of specifics and mainly highlighted the preparation and consultation efforts carried out until now. This comes in contrast with the US and Mexican governments which have formally, and voluntarily, released their negotiating goals (see [here](#) and [here \(Spanish only\)](#), respectively). We support Minister Freeland withholding the government's objectives on the main components of NAFTA until representatives from the three nations meet at the negotiating table.

The members of the trade authority underlined the government's priorities for the modification of the agreement, with various nods to the recently-signed CETA as a paragon in matters of international trade pacts. These goals include:

- Modernizing NAFTA to adapt to the changing technological landscape and “reap the full benefits of the digital revolution”.
- Stronger labour safeguards.
- Integrating environmental provisions that support efforts to address climate change.
- Including a chapter on gender rights.
- Including a chapter on Indigenous peoples.
- Reforming the Investor-State Dispute Settlement process (NAFTA Chapter 11)
- Cutting red tape and harmonizing regulation.
- Freer market for government procurement, in line with that negotiated in CETA.
- Freer movement of professionals.
- Upholding Canada's system of supply management.

On the topic of procurement, the Canadian government will not make concessions without adjustments to the “buy American” benefits reaped by producers south of the border. On a parallel note, the Minister remarked that her and her team continue to pursue discussions with the TPP-11 (excluding the US) signatories ‘energetically’. In regards to softwood lumber, an agreement will be worked on in parallel to, and not as part of, the NAFTA renegotiations.

There was no direct reference to specific goals highlighted by Mexican and US authorities during the Minister's speech, and the Q&A session focused on possible disagreements with the US trade representatives while scarcely mentioning Mexico's involvement. This week's meeting between the three nations will mark the first of seven rounds of talks, with negotiators and all parties involved hoping to come to an agreement sooner rather than later with the Mexican presidential election in July 2018 and the run-up to the US congressional elections in November 2018. With the exception of Chapter 11 reform, most of Canada's key objectives form part of the noncore, less contentious parts of NAFTA, presenting a path to a quick, easy agreement.

While an exact copy of Minister Freeland's speech has not been made available yet, she gave a speech earlier at the University of Ottawa that resembles her statement in front of the committee, accessible [here](#).

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