

U.S. Homeland Security assistant secretary meets with chamber head



Alan Bersin, Assistant Secretary of International Affairs and Chief Diplomatic Officer, United States Department of Homeland Security, left, and Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce president & CEO Matt Marchand speak with the media at Riverside Drive and Ouellette Avenue in Windsor on Thursday, Sept. 12, 2013. (JASON KRYK/The Windsor Star)



[Chris Thompson](#)

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Canada and the U.S. must work together as a cohesive economic unit to fight global challenges over the next 50 years, a senior U.S. Homeland Security official said Thursday.

Alan Bersin, the current assistant secretary of international affairs and chief diplomatic officer of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, met with Matt Marchand, president and CEO of the Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce, during the lunch hour Thursday.

“The story of the next 50 years, as we get this right and the president and the prime minister see it, we will be able to compete with east Asia, with the Indian subcontinent, with Brazil, and that will be to the benefit of the Canadian and American peoples together,” said Bersin, a former commissioner of customs and border protection who is attending a Canada-U.S. border conference in Detroit.

“Specifically we need to knock down the transaction costs. We need to specifically be able to make it more economical to move goods back and forth across our border. Finished goods, and goods in process. Those are the kinds of issues I took up with the chamber and I look forward to continuing to work on the issues that affect the quality of life of our two nations.”

Bersin was given a rundown of local issues affecting the border, and Marchand said the focus was largely on expediting the flow of people and goods between the two nations. Bersin is a direct adviser to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano on international affairs.

“We talked about a number of issues including moving from the thickening of the border to the thinning of the border,” said Marchand.

Bersin said the Beyond the Border agreement reached between Prime Minister Stephen Harper and U.S. President Barack Obama in 2011 provides the framework to achieve the goals of both nations.

“I think the Beyond the Border action plan is a movement towards how far can we operate as a continent, how far can we recognize that we are part of a North America that acting together is a powerhouse economically,” Said Bersin.

“If we take care of business now, the future will take care of itself.”

Bersin said front-line border staffing in the U.S. has been largely unaffected by the sequester earlier this year, which slashed spending in U.S. federal departments by about 10 per cent. Cuts came in non-front-line areas and Canadian authorities have been kept in the loop on the situation, he said.

“We’ve been working closely with our Canadian colleagues in terms of keeping our colleagues aware and informed of any changes that take place,” said Bersin.

“For the most part we’ve been able to avoid border-related impacts that were originally feared as a result of the hard work of elected officials on both sides of the border and the CBP and CBSA. Communication levels are up all across the board including on those fiscal issues.”