



EBTC INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Trade and travel problems along the U.S.-Canadian border remain a serious aggravation for the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada's ambassador to Washington said on Monday.

"We call it a thickening of the border," said Canadian Ambassador Michael Wilson, referring to a slew of issues that Ottawa fears will hold up commerce with the United States, Canada's most important trade partner.

Keeping trucks and tourists rolling into the United States is "vitaly important" with two-way trade of about \$1.5 billion every day, Wilson said in an interview with Reuters.

Canada has been frustrated by Washington's decision to impose new fees for Canadian travelers and truckers crossing the 3,985-mile (6,413-km) border with the United States.

U.S. officials say the move, which ended Canada's 15-year exemption from such fees, was needed to ensure the safety of food and other imports. But it brought complaints about costs and worries over shipping delays from businesses on both sides of the border.

The new rules from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and U.S. Customs and Border Protection include fruit and vegetable inspections and a \$5 fee for each airline passenger arriving from Canada.

"This to us is little more than a tax ... it just slows things down at the border," Wilson said.

Also problematic, he said, is confusion about U.S. document requirements for Canadian travelers, which has led to a delay of up to 14 weeks for Canadians seeking new passports.

The Bush administration has moved to tighten document rules for travelers coming in and out of the United States, but it has postponed requirements for some countries like Canada as swamped U.S. passport offices struggle to deliver documents for thousands of would-be travelers.

"The security aspects of this we don't have an argument with ... where we do have a concern is on the implementation," Wilson said.

Canada would like to see the United States consider measures like phased implementation of changes that might avoid interrupting travel and trade "does have a very real economic impact," he said.