

Ambassador to Mexico, how do you see the opportunities in this new trading area of 360 million people?

Ambassador Chrétien: First of all, let me tell you that I spent almost a whole year preparing our Government for this initiative. In 1987 and '88, when I was on the ground in Mexico, I had a certain feeling that NAFTA was coming. Now in Washington I am interested to see the implementation of the agreement which I participated in developing in the late 1980s.

So how will it affect the whole hemisphere? It's too early, of course, to evaluate the impact of NAFTA. We're in just the third month of its implementation, but I think that it will have the effect of drawing the whole southern part of the hemisphere closer to the North.

Q. *What about the impact of the new GATT agreement? You also served in Brussels, the heart of the new Europe. What are the opportunities for Canadian and North American business there?*

Ambassador Chrétien: First of all, we will have to see how it is implemented here. As you know, we are very carefully watching the legislation that will be presented to Congress to make sure that it does not make U.S. trade laws more protectionist in nature. Although it is too early to determine what the effects will be, I do believe that it will be positive for both the Canadian and U.S. economies.

Q. *We had the visit here in early March of Mr. Bouchard, the Leader of the Opposition. Are you getting questions from your American contacts about the future of Canada?*

Ambassador Chrétien: Yes. I was a bit surprised when I arrived to see that the issue of Quebec is certainly present in the minds of our American counterparts since the elections last fall when the Bloc Québécois became the Official Opposition in Parliament. It's very hard for many of our American colleagues and friends to understand. Therefore, I suspect that the situation we have in Parliament is going to receive more attention as we get closer to the election in Quebec.

Q. *The Prime Minister and the President met at the APEC summit in Seattle and they'll meet again at the G-7 in Italy. And, of course, they talk on the telephone whenever they need to. What is your sense of their relationship, how they have hit it off?*



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Ambassador Chrétien: I think it's a good relationship. They met not only in Seattle, but also in Brussels in early January. They have talked on the phone on a few occasions. I think they're off to a good start. It's a relationship of mutual respect, and that's certainly how our Prime Minister wishes to carry on this relationship.

So far, so good. These are two men who have not always had life easy and have struggled hard to be where they are. They certainly have an understanding of people's needs. They know what it means to earn a living, to come from a difficult environment or social structure.

Q. *You've met the President three times in the short time you've been in Washington. What's your quick take on him?*

Ambassador Chrétien: A very likable man, with a warm personality; very alert, very informed on issues. The presentation of credentials was a family affair; my wife and children participated in the ceremony. He certainly made all of us feel very much at home and comfortable — an extremely warm reception.

Q. *How are Americans different from Canadians and Europeans in the way they do business?*

Ambassador Chrétien: What strikes me about my assignment here is how direct they are, how unimportant formalities are when you get down to the heart of an issue. Direct, businesslike—which fits me very well, by the way, because

Canadian Ambassador to the U.S. Raymond Chrétien presents his credentials to President Clinton on February 14.

I tend to be like that myself. But the difference is striking. I've served in other parts of the world where you spend three-quarters of the time discussing, going around the issue, drinking coffee, talking about the weather. It's certainly not the case here. So that has struck me since my arrival here, how quickly you go straight to the heart of the matter.

Q. *Foreign Minister Ouellet said when he was here that Canada wanted to have an independent foreign policy. How do you explain what that means to Americans?*

Ambassador Chrétien: It means that it's a foreign policy decided in Canada, by Canada, for the interest of Canadians. That's what it means. I don't know if it is interpreted differently here, but it means that those are the factors that will come into the decision-making on the issue. It doesn't mean that it is antagonistic to American interests—far from that. But it would take into account first and foremost Canadian interests.

Most often, Canadian and American interests do coincide, and when they do, so much the better. When they don't, then we must agree to disagree and respect each other enough to disagree. That, I think, is the present attitude of our Government. That's what I think the Minister means by an independent foreign policy.