Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s visit to the White House last week marked the first time in nearly two decades that a Canadian leader has made an official visit to Washington. The last time that the White House hosted a Canadian state dinner, Bill Clinton was President, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had been signed, and the World Trade Organization was still in its infancy.

Fast forward two decades, and U.S.-Canada relations have never been more important. Canada, a country that ranks third in world holdings of oil reserves behind only Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, is our vital trade partner to the north. More than $2 billion in goods and services flow between our borders with Canada per day, making our bilateral relationship one of the closest and most extensive in the world. Canada remains a crucial U.S. partner under NAFTA, and recently became a signatory to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Yet the Prime Minister, like President Obama, faces an uphill battle in assuaging his party’s concerns about TPP.

President Obama and Prime Minister Trudeau are set to announce a new partnership that will link economic issues to climate initiatives, in addition to an expected agreement on the expansion of pre-clearance checks. Pre-clearance checks allow goods to be screened for export on foreign soil, representing trust in each state’s respective security screening processes.

The U.S.-Canada Climate pact will pledge to cut methane emissions by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025, says the Environmental Defense Fund, marking a new level of collaboration on emissions. Methane, a gas emitted during the oil and gas production process, poses a threat to climate change, for methane warms the planet more quickly than other gases, such as carbon dioxide.

The Environmental Protection Agency will be compelled to create new limits on methane emissions in order to ensure that excess methane does not seep in to the environment during the production process.

However, challenges to the agreement are certain. The acrimony surrounding President Obama’s other climate initiatives, such as the contested Clean Power Plan, combined with consternation about filling the vacancy left open in the wake of Justice Antonin Scalia’s death, will ensure obstacles to passing any substantial environmental reform.

Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) believes the new climate pact ignores strides taken by the oil industry to cut back on leakage and emissions levels. “We have so dramatically reduced our levels of methane emissions,” Senator Murkowski said, “because it is in the best interest of industry to not allow for the leakage.”

On the other hand, David Doniger, Director of the Climate and Clean Air Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said in a statement that “no credible plan to combat climate change can ignore methane emissions, which are the second largest industrial source of climate changing...
pollution after power plants.”

With the new U.S.-Canada Climate pact, President Obama and Prime Minister Trudeau emphasize their dedication to the historic global climate agreement reached in Paris in late 2015, which both leaders regard as “a turning point in global efforts to combat climate change and anchor economic growth in economic development.” The leaders also reaffirmed their commitments to enhance the integration of renewables on power grids, accelerate clean energy and clean energy technology and align energy efficiency standards.

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