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One big family

By Dominic Patten
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Since his re-election last month, President Bush has been a man on the move. He's shuffled some of the big players in his Cabinet, he's attended a summit of Asian and Pacific leaders in Chile and visited Colombia to reinforce America's commitment to the war on drugs. Now in this whirlwind beginning to his second term, the president has traveled above the 49th Parallel for a two-day visit to Canada.

The president has had a rocky relationship with the Great White North for much of his first term. He and former Prime Minister Jean Chretien may have yakked about baseball every now and then, but, unlike the closeness of Ronald Reagan and Brian Mulroney in the 1980s and Bill Clinton and Mr. Chretien through much of the 1990s, the Texan and the self-styled little guy from Shawinigan, Quebec, had at best a frosty friendship of necessity.

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A majority of Canadians still haven't warmed to the president either. Polls released just before last month's election revealed that only about 20 percent of Canadians would have voted for the victor, making Canada virtually an honorary blue state.

In the chill of the last couple of years, Canada has turned into a punching bag for the likes of Bill O'Reilly. Where Tony Blair and Britain are steadfast in their support, Canada has increasingly been viewed by pundits as, to put it politely, not quite being with the program. Self-aggrandizing loudmouth parliamentarians trumpeting anti-Americanisms, and Mr. Chretien's decision to not participate as a member of the coalition of the willing in the effort to take out Saddam Hussein are admittedly not the most endearing qualities in geopolitical relations. In that context, relations between Canada and America have been more continental divide than happy neighbors.

However, it is important to remember that when it comes to the U.S.-Canada relationship, the best analogy is that of a family. Families will bicker and vehemently disagree, but they ultimately stick together. Over our common border, our two nations do billions of dollars of



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trade every day as our citizens travel back and forth for business and pleasure. We are intrinsically linked geographically and philosophically.

Canada may have taken a pass on regime change in Iraq, but it has taken on more than its fair share of the burden in the war on terror in Afghanistan with troops, in patrolling the Persian Gulf with its Navy, and in continental security coordination to prevent anything like September 11 happening again.

Ongoing issues like soft wood lumber, the U.S. ban on Canadian beef and the North American missile-defense shield are all subjects that our respective leaders will have to address as friends and allies over the president's second term. As always, both sides will be respectful of the other's opinion and common goals. More importantly, beyond the minutiae of policy, both sides will recognize the mutual interests we share on this continent in the acknowledgement that whatever differences there are between Canada and the United States are primarily differences in kind, not in nature.

This is why the legacy of September 11 is one of the strongest testaments to the powerful bond Canada and the United States share. This is why the heart of the president's visit won't be his meetings in Ottawa with Prime Minister Paul Martin or the shouts of the prerequisite protesters, but when Air Force One touches down today in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

On September 11, when all the planes over North America were grounded, more than 40 planes and 7,000 passengers unexpectedly descended on Halifax. Average Americans were met by average Canadians. What did the people of Atlantic Canada do? They opened their homes and their arms and went to work making our stranded guests as comfortable and welcome as possible as they struggled through that horrible day. That's what families do. And it wasn't just in Halifax, it was across the entire country from Gander to Vancouver.

On Sept. 14, 2001, a national day of mourning was declared in Canada, as more than 100,000 joined the prime minister and U.S. Ambassador Paul Cellucci for a memorial on Parliament Hill. The country mourned not just the 24 Canadians who perished in the attacks, but all of the nearly 3,000 who died that day. We mourned as a family.

No matter what, Canada and America's quintessential values of democracy, freedom and inclusion fundamentally bind us together in a dangerous world full of those who hate those very qualities.

This week's visit is the president's opportunity to show Canadians up close and personal the thankful friend he is. Canadians of all political stripes will appreciate his presence in Halifax because one thing you have to say about the president: He takes his love of America and America's friends very seriously. And one thing you might want to recall the next time you hear someone bashing Canada or some Canadian spouting anti-Bush rhetoric — when it really counted, we had your back. Why? Because that's what families do.

Dominic Patten is a Toronto-based journalist.

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