

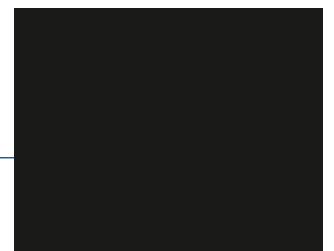
# MAKING NORTH AMERICA A PRIORITY

**Alan Bersin**

Catalyzed by NAFTA in the 1990's, North America emerged as a reality before Robert Pastor articulated "The North American Idea" in his widely read book. While centered in Mexico, Canada, and the United States, however, the North American Region should ultimately reach from Colombia to the Arctic and from Bermuda to Hawaii, a much broader region that Pastor originally envisioned.

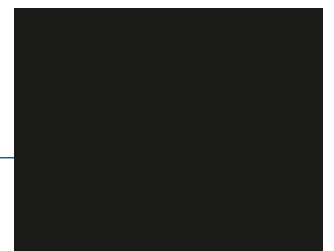
Collectively, this continental and maritime bloc is endowed with unparalleled comparative advantages focused at the U.S., Canadian, and Mexican core: a half billion people with distinctly

favorable demographics; economies that generate 30 percent of global goods and services; shared production platforms with robust trade flows of more than a trillion dollars annually (17 percent of global commerce); a shared (if imperfect and now threatened) commitment to democracy and the rule of law; trade-friendly demilitarized borders; 100 percent energy independence within reach; a huge natural resource base, even beyond hydrocarbons and renewable energy sources, including enormous navigable rivers and copious amounts of arable land; and unimpeded access to the Atlantic, Pacific and Arctic Oceans.



among government regulators and the regulated private sector alike. The result is a dramatic rush to near shoring of production capacity on both ends of the geopolitical spectrum. The next stage of globalization and world trade — Globalization 2.0 — remains to be defined.

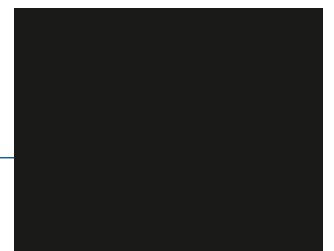
Garnering credibility for North America in this context suggests a narrow not a broad focus. We should avoid, in articulating a way forward, using phrases (alarming to many) like “regional integration,” and resist the perennial siren call for a comprehensive regional agenda encompassing everything from the environment and the arts to cybersecurity and



present and never implemented— concerted development of North America's human capital is [crucial to its future prosperity](#). The principal need here is for reliable data identifying what businesses in the three countries concretely require for their future workforce — and a plan to get there through training, education, and professional development. While this objective may be the most difficult to accomplish of the three priorities proposed here, it also may turn out to be the most important.

Finally, a word on process and evolution of the North American Idea: Let us not get bogged down,

as former US Ambassador to Canada, Bruce Heyman, counsels. In the perpetual debate about bilateral, parallel bilateral, and trilateral approaches to making progress in this space, we should move forward where we can, given the political facts on the ground, in each of the three core countries. We should let the pocketbooks of the people and what they care about most determine the sequence of progress for the foreseeable future, all the while working to better inform them about the benefits flowing from this very productive marketplace.



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