

Why Does Trump Continue His '51st State' Taunt of Canada?

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Global Research, December 23, 2024

[The Epoch Times](#) 22 December 2024

Region: [Canada](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Intelligence](#)

*Incoming U.S. **President Donald Trump** has continually [referred](#) to Canada as the 51st state while calling **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** a “governor” since their [meeting](#) at the Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida on Nov. 29.*

“Many Canadians want Canada to become the 51st State. They would save massively on taxes and military protection. I think it is a great idea. 51st State!!!” Trump [wrote](#) on social media on Dec. 18, one of his latest comments repeating the taunt.

“It was a pleasure to have dinner the other night with Governor Justin Trudeau of the Great State of Canada,” he [said](#) in another social media post on Dec. 10.

Then-Public Safety Minister [Dominic LeBlanc](#), when remarking on similar comments Trump had made at the Nov. 29 meeting in Florida where LeBlanc was also present, said on Dec. 3 that

Trump “was telling jokes, the president was teasing us. It was, of course, on that issue, in no way a serious comment.”

But as Trump has repeated the comments on several occasions since then, some Canadian politicians have resorted to a sterner response.

“We’ll never be the 51st state,” Ontario Premier Doug Ford [told CTV News](#), as [did](#) Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre, who said that “Canada will never be the 51st state of the U.S.”

Trump’s repetition of the taunt prompted some pollsters to survey what Canadians think of the idea of becoming the 51st U.S. state (13 percent said it’s a good idea, 82 percent opposed, according to a Leger poll), while former cabinet minister and Canadian Alliance Leader Stockwell Day even [posed](#) the idea on the X platform as a question to all Canadians, sharing Trump’s AI-generated image of the president-elect standing on a mountain range next to a Canadian flag.

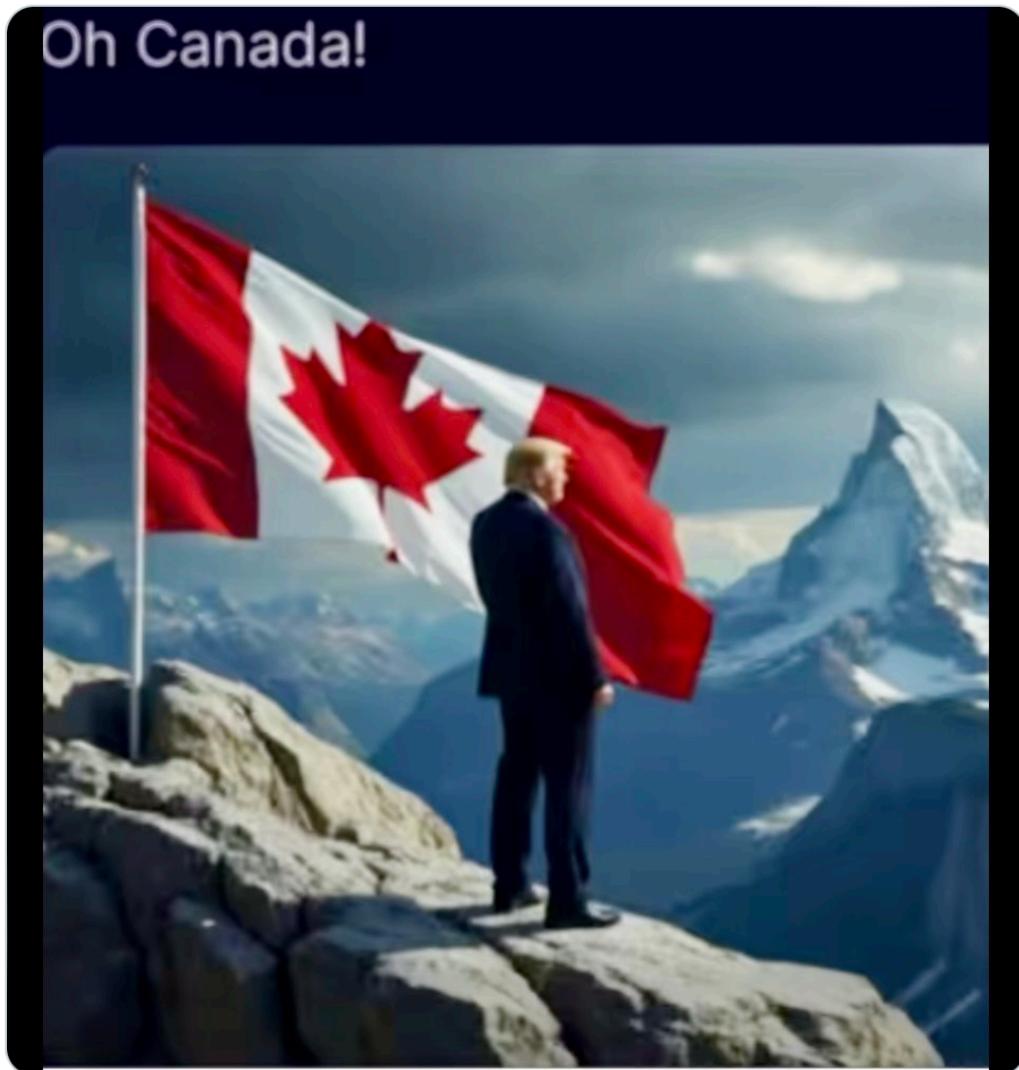


(((Stockwell Day)))

@Stockwell_Day



Dear Canadians! Be honest! If the rumour is true that Trump would offer natural born Canadians immediate citizenship to the US and a trade of Canadian with US dollars at a one-to-one basis... Would you do it?



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But looking at Trump's political history, there are certain reasons for his use of simple catchphrases when talking about politicians and political issues. In so far as his use of the tactic in domestic politics goes, such as his insulting nicknames for Hilary Clinton and Joe Biden, it's clear the endgame is to damage his rivals' reputation.

But he also uses the tactic at times in international affairs, including during his first presidency when he used "rocket man" to refer to North Korean Leader **Kim Jong Un** when condemning Kim's missile tests.

In the case of Canada, which Trump has threatened with a 25 percent tariff unless the country does more to curb illegal immigration and drug flow into the United States, the rhetoric could be meant to dominate Canadian media cycles and get Canadians to “spin their wheels,” says Nelson Wiseman, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Toronto.

Wiseman said that a number of other proposals Trump has made—such as leaving NAFTA, buying Greenland, and selling Puerto Rico—have not come to fruition but have served other functions.

“He wants to control the news cycle, so he throws out there something that’s wild, and he knows that [the media] have to cover it,” Wiseman told The Epoch Times.

Conrad Winn, a political science professor at Carleton University, says Trump’s taunt is a reflection of the weakened state of the economy and military in Canada.

Winn notes that during the 20th century, particularly in the 1950s and part of the 1970s, the Canadian dollar was for years even [higher](#) than the U.S. dollar, whereas it has been declining in recent decades. As well, while Canada’s navy was once one of the largest in the world just after World War II, Canada is now one of the just eight NATO members not meeting the alliance’s requirement to invest at least 2 percent of GDP on defence.

“That kind of contributes to the image of a 51st state,” Winn told The Epoch Times.

Winn says that for Trump, Canada is the “lowest-risk binational relationship” and he may be using it to send a message to other countries: “If the United States can belittle Canada, it can do that to you too.”

And part of this could also reflect how he sees Trudeau’s standing in Canada at this point, Winn says.

The Trudeau Liberals have been trailing in the polls, and there’s been growing division in the Liberal caucus with MPs asking for Trudeau to step down after Chrystia Freeland resigned from cabinet on Dec. 16.

“If Trudeau was popular, the Canadian electorate would be enraged. But he’s not popular, and so it’s low-risk for Trump [to continue his taunts],” Winn said.

“One additional [aspect] is that he is sending a message to the leadership of the Conservative Party in Canada that you better be a real ally and start spending on defence in roughly the NATO standard.”

A Dec. 17 Abacus Data survey indicated that only 11 percent of Canadians want to see [Trudeau](#) re-elected as prime minister. The polls also continue showing the Conservatives with a 20 percent lead over the Liberals, with the Abacus poll showing 45 percent of Canadians intending to vote for the Tories, while the Liberals and the NDP have the support of only 20 percent and 18 percent of the population respectively.

Trump and Trudeau have had a rocky relationship at times in the past.

After a G7 meeting in Quebec in 2018, in response to Trudeau [saying](#) at a press conference

that he wouldn't hesitate to retaliate against any U.S. tariffs, Trump, who had by then left the meeting, said Trudeau had "acted so meek and mild" during the meeting and only made the remarks after Trump had left.

In 2019 during a NATO summit in London, England, Trudeau was caught on a hot mic appearing to mock Trump in front of other world leaders for having a lengthy press conference. Trump later reacted to this by calling Trudeau "two-faced."

Trudeau also issued a statement criticizing Trump after the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol Hill riots, saying they were "incited" by Trump.

However, Trudeau was quick to call Trump after the first assassination attempt against him this year, in July, and he was the first G7 leader to visit Trump after his November election victory.

Tariffs

Amid Trump's 25 percent tariffs threat, Ottawa has announced a \$1.3 billion border plan to strengthen security, which includes creating a new North American task force targeting organized crime and drug trafficking and increasing funding for helicopters, drones, and surveillance towers.

Trump has also long been critical of NATO countries that fail to meet the minimum spending goal of 2 percent of their GDP on defence. He said during a February 2024 rally that he wouldn't defend NATO member countries from Russian attacks that didn't meet the spending requirement.

Canada spent just 1.37 percent in 2024. Although **Defence Minister Bill Blair** has [repeatedly said](#) Canada remains committed to meeting its defence spending target by 2032, [two U.S. senators](#) recently said this timeline is not good enough given the increasing threats from China and Russia.

Since Trump won the election in November 2024, he has frequently brought up Canada's trade surplus with the United States. [The U.S. deficit with Canada](#) in goods was US\$67.9 billion in 2023, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Trump has repeatedly railed against countries that have a trade deficit with the United States, and during his last presidency he took steps to change the situation. He renegotiated NAFTA with Canada and Mexico, requiring that 75 percent of auto components must come from North America—up from the previous 62.5 percent—to qualify for zero tariffs.

As part of the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), the new trilateral trade deal, Canada was forced to adjust its supply management scheme by providing new trade privileges for the United States in the dairy market. Trump has said he will invoke the six-year renegotiation provisions of CUSMA in 2026, and the three countries will decide whether to extend the deal or renegotiate it.

In 2018, during his first presidency, Trump imposed on most countries tariffs of 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum, leading Canada to respond in kind. Those

tariffs were lifted in 2019, and while the Trump administration floated re-introducing the tariffs on Canadian aluminum in 2020, it did not follow through.

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