



IAN SAUNDERS

MARCH 16, 2023

TRANSCRIPT

RECEPTION WITH WASHINGTON DC-BASED CUSTOMS ATTACHÉS AND DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIVES

Thank you, Deputy Commissioner. I want to thank you for that kind introduction and the kind words. It's good to be back with among family and I want to continue my thank yous to CBP for its sponsorship of this effort. This is an undertaking that we as the United States have not started lightly. It's one that took a lot of thinking and consideration to see whether this was the right time and the right thing to do.

And I think the elements aligned such that this made sense, and this is really a reflection of what has been a long-standing commitment of the United States to bring expertise and thought leadership into a community that we know is only as strong as its weakest link. And the WCO is the venue that allows us to have level-setting conversations and supportive conversations across customs administrations so that we are all in a position to do our work better for the safety and security of our respective people.

And in so doing, I think there is a great opportunity for us to continue not just with Ian Saunders as an individual, not just with the United States standing behind me, but with the network of friendships and relationships that we have with administrations that are challenged with doing this same type of work around the world day in and day out.

And they're doing so successfully to keep the right things moving through the system for our economic prosperity and the wrong things out of the system that would do us harm.

I also want to extend my thanks to my colleagues at the Department of Commerce, some of whom were here - I hope they're still around. Because Commerce is my current employer, I need to thank them for their support and their sponsorship of my doing this, because Commerce looks at trade from a very different lens, one that is very informed by the views of the private sector.

But they support this because they understand that for commerce to grow, border clearance has to be efficient. The safety and integrity of the system has to be in place. And this is an opportunity to contribute to those processes that help global investment, that help commercial growth, and help increase the prospects of international trade, which is an engine of growth for many of our economies.

I also want to thank former Commissioner Bonner for being here. Sir, it is an honor to see you. It's been a long time since we've seen one another, and Deputy Commissioner Huffman mentioned that Commissioner Bonner was our first head of CBP. But at a personal level, he's the commissioner with whom I worked the closest at the time of our transition from being the US Customs Service to becoming CBP.

And I could go on and on forever. But suffice it to say, that Commissioner Bonner's thoughtfulness, his leadership, and his commitment to public service are frankly qualities to which I will always aspire. And so, it means the world to me that you're here this afternoon. Thank you, sir.

And finally, I want to say thank you to all of our guests: our non-US government guests that are here. I know that your time is precious and you taking time to be part of this event is very important and actually is a physical manifestation of something that I think is really fundamental to the customs community and that is that sense of community, that sense, that shared understanding of what it is that we do and why we do it, why it's important and why it's critical for us to work together; which very much is the spirit in which the WCO was founded.

It is the work that it continues to pursue; it is the work that I hope to be able to contribute to if the members will have me as the next Secretary General. We are in challenging times where the adversaries that look to circumvent the rules are getting more sophisticated every day. We work in a time of rapidly changing technology

We work in a time of a global public that has the highest expectations of us. Yet this is a category of work that many don't fully understand in its complete complexity, but it's a zero-tolerance proposition for Customs, every day. Things have to work right. Things have to go well. The wrong things can't get through.

And that's the challenge that we all live with every day as customs administrations, and there are within 185 members of the WCO, a spectrum of capabilities, a spectrum of experiences -- all different but all informative. And coming together and understanding one another, where we've been, what we've seen, and what we hope to accomplish together is really fundamental to why I'm pursuing this position.

I've seen over a 30 year period the WCO evolve from being the Customs Co-operation Council in a relatively sleepy place called Brussels, where documents -- very gray A4 documents moved through the system at the speed of snail mail (and I know that because I was the person who actually controlled the mailing list that got them where they needed to go at that time) -- to a to an organization that runs virtual meetings.

It has sophisticated capacity building programs that are running at a high pace with sponsorship from a number of organizations to help its members address the current and evolving challenges of the day. And that's work that will continue to be demanding. It's work that requires leadership and commitment, and it's work that requires the positive disposition of all of the members, because no one of us can do this alone.

And in order to keep pace, I'm mindful that it's not just about the products that the WCO offers. It's about making sure that the organization itself is strong enough, resilient enough, and adaptable enough to have the products reach members timely and in the quality that they expect, and in the sufficiency that is needed so that the vision might be articulated in a framework or a convention or a toolkit is married up with implementation support to help those administrations that can't naturally do those things.

The goal is to get to them [what is in the products] becoming the state of the customs practice locally. So, this is a pretty hefty mantle to take on, but it's one I take on with the comfort of knowing that there are a number of colleagues, not just in the U.S. but across administrations that share the objective of a stronger customs community, a stronger state of customs practice. I see in the future, hopefully for the WCO, an organization that makes the most of its past, that optimizes its current effort and keeps its eye on what a prosperous, secure future looks like for us all based on customs doing its best work.

And I look forward to hopefully contributing to an organization that subsists on strong communication with members, that maintains a solid technical understanding of what needs to be done and how to do it, and that continues an unwavering commitment to its entire membership. And it's by its entire membership, that means the countries that you all represent here, as well as others who aren't with us present.

So, this evening I just offer this snapshot -- and mainly thank yous -- for your time this afternoon. My gratitude [goes] to my government for affording me the opportunity to represent it in this endeavor, hopeful that I contribute something that can be constructive and helpful to the customs community. It's an opportunity for me to give back personally to an organization that has been fundamental to my professional formation.

I'm happy to have this opportunity to talk with all of you, to understand what matters to you, because that is where the work of the WCO begins: understanding what matters to members and finding ways within its means to pursue that.

So, I've talked longer than I expected I would, because the focus of this, as has been mentioned, is talking with one another and making the most of being able to be together as a community.

But as I pause here with a final thank you to all of you for the time that you're spending here, know that I look forward to talking with you all, to continue exchanging ideas so that the collective wisdom in this room, and beyond, informs what the WCO does and helps it do a better job for the customs community.

Thank you,



IAN SAUNDERS
U.S. CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION