

# When Diplomats Speak of War Rooms

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By Gary Smith



February 22 was Diplomacy Day at Seattle 4, and members were ringside for diplomacy practiced in real time.

In the main event, club member **Jill Dougherty** orchestrated a discussion of how Seattle and the Pacific Northwest relate to Canada and Mexico, as well as how those two nations are going about working with the new administration, especially regarding trade.

Dougherty, the distinguished CNN Foreign Affairs Correspondent and anchor who is now semi-retired and living in Seattle, is an expert in Russian diplomacy. She recently completed a study “Re-defining Russia: Vladimir Putin's Ideology” for the Woodrow Wilson Center. Her panelists were:

- James Hill, Canada’s Consul General in Seattle. Hill has served as Canada’s first or second ranking diplomat in Libya, Kuwait, Kabul, Rio de Janeiro, Kosovo, and Tehran, and has also held trade and economic development positions in Ottawa.
- Roberto Dondisch, Mexico’s Consul in Seattle. Dondisch most recently served as Mexico’s lead negotiator in the Paris climate change agreement and the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty. Dondisch earned a Master’s in Foreign Service at Georgetown and a Doctorate in International Relations at Johns Hopkins.

Dougherty asked how Mexico and Canada view Seattle and the surrounding region. Dondisch observed that initially he thought Seattle didn’t really see how important it is in the world. Now he thinks that is changing, due to cases such as the UN climate negotiations where people from Seattle had a big voice. “(Seattle) has a clear voice in the world,” he said.

Dondisch went on to say that Seattle companies have a big presence in Mexico. Starbucks has more than 500 stores there; Costco has 37 stores; Expedia has its Latin American headquarters there; Amazon has a fulfillment center that is growing exponentially. Paccar is the biggest seller of trucks in Mexico and Mexico is the biggest buyer of Boeing airplanes in Latin America.



Mexico is also a very large market for Washington apples and hops.

Hill, of Canada, noted that Seattle is every bit as international as his recent overseas posts. Since 1953, he pointed out, Canada has been aware of Seattle's importance and maintained an office here, because it views Seattle as a leader and focal point for economic growth and cultural cooperation.

Pointing to the news from the White House on renegotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Dougherty asked how Canada and Mexico view the Trump administration's plan to revisit the agreement and to push for greater changes with Mexico than with Canada.

Hill and Dondisch were clear and united – trade agreements become dated and modernization is useful but NAFTA is a “trilateral agreement,” Hill pointed out. “Yes, we understand the perspective coming out of Washington. But, point of fact, if there's going to be a renewed or modernized NAFTA, it has to be done on a tri-partite basis and involve Mexico, Canada, and the United States equally.”

Ralph Munro asked the panel how the initial meetings between their national leaders and the new administration were going.

Hill said that from the Canadian perspective, the first meeting went as well as it could have, given how fluid things are and with the leaders having divergent views on key matters. Underscoring the uncertainties and the importance of the relationship, Hill said “we continue to be very focused on daily developments, to the point where Canada's management of the relationship with the United States has changed. We've developed strategically different mechanisms, a type of cabinet committee on relations with the U.S., which we hadn't had for a long time, a pseudo-war room to deal with the emerging shift and change in policies, to be much more focused on dealing with the reality of this administration. In the end that's the government that is leading your country for the next four years so we have to find the best road map, the best way forward to make sure the benefits for Canada and the relationship remains productive and strong. Different, but equally valid.”





Dondisch observed that Mexico sees it as valuable to “sit together and talk out everything – every aspect of the bilateral relationship – because it’s so big and one of the things we have to make sure is the new Secretary of State understands a lot of what we do together, how it works together.”

He also explained their view regarding immigration. “Our view is that for the last five years,” he said, “more Mexicans have come back to Mexico than have come to the U.S, which is not necessarily the case for people from Central America. Our view is that if that is an issue for the U.S., the best thing that Mexico and the U.S. can do is to invest together in developing the economies of the Central American countries. The better those economies do, the less people are going to want to get out.”

Both diplomats emphasized the ties between the Seattle region and their two nations. Hill pointed to the Cascadia Initiative between British Columbia and Washington that seeks to foster a stronger and more integrated region. Dondisch spoke of the strong ties that already exist – 12% of Washington State’s population is of Mexican heritage and over 105,000 jobs here depend directly on trade with Mexico. “Mexico City is closer to Seattle than New York City,” he pointed out, “and getting closer in many ways.”



**David Woodward**, chair of Rotary 4’s Diplomacy Task Force, opened the Diplomacy Day program. The Task Force now has 47 club members, speaking both to our club’s global expertise and Seattle’s increasingly influential place in the world. Nearly 60 nations are now represented in Seattle diplomatically, he said.

Four of the task force’s Blue Ribbon members, who represent nations or regional diplomatic interests, spoke briefly.

Masahiro Omura of Japan highlighted the local value of the development of the Mitsubishi Regional Jet, or MRJ. Mitsubishi has opened an engineering center in Seattle and a flight testing program in Moses Lake, employing 500 people, about half of whom are local.

Duk Ho Moon of Korea spoke of his efforts to engage Korean corporations in the Seattle economy. He also said that Korea is moving ahead on plans to build a consulate building in Seattle.

Sophia Chi, Vice Consul of the Taiwan mission, promoted five innovative industries that are investing in the region.

Hyeok Kim, deputy mayor of Seattle spoke of the importance of embracing diplomacy as a tool not only for people to people relationships, but also country to country, economy to economy, culture to culture. She also conveyed the Mayor's intention to uphold Seattle's values as a welcoming city and to partner with the diplomats in Seattle from around the world.