

NAFTA talks with US 'very far' along: Mexico's Guajardo

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US and Mexican negotiators are "very far" along in efforts to revamp the North American Free Trade Agreement but some issues will have to wait until Canada rejoins the talks, Mexico's Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo said Friday.

A contentious proposal by the United States—which would require the nearly 25-year-old trade pact be reapproved every five years—is one that must include all three partners, Guajardo told reporters on his way in to yet another meeting.

Guajardo and Mexico's Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray have been shuttling back and forth to Washington for more than a month for meetings with US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer to try to iron out bilateral issues, such as rules for the auto market, before the end of August.

He said "our purpose for the last five weeks has been to close up most of Mexico-US issues," however, "there are trilateral issues that have to be solved in a trilateral context."

The so-called sunset clause is one of those issues "because it implies extension of NAFTA and NAFTA is a trilateral agreement," he said.

Officials are "very far" along with the US-Mexico issues but he added, "unfortunately, even if you are extremely engaged there's always a last moment thing that can come between you and your goals."

Although he had indicated there could be a breakthrough this week, he said Thursday the talks would have to continue into next week.

Jesus Seade, an economic advisor to Mexico's incoming president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, has been participating in portions of the NAFTA talks and said the sunset clause "is going out," according to press reports from Mexico City.

Guajardo declined to comment on Seade's remarks.

However, a senior Canadian official told AFP on Thursday there had been "no indication of flexibility from the US on this issue."

Canada's top diplomat and chief NAFTA negotiator, Chrystia Freeland, said earlier in the week that she was encouraged by the progress and would rejoin the talks once Washington and Mexico City finished their bilateral discussions.

The three countries have been negotiating for a year to salvage the trade pact that President Donald Trump says has been a "disaster" for the United States.

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