



## **Trump eyes an easy win in getting rid of the name 'NAFTA'**

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President Trump doesn't like a lot of things about the North American Free Trade Agreement, including its name. Getting rid of the name, as he has long sought to do, is one of the goals Trump has the best odds of getting in the ongoing trade talks, trade policy experts say, because the change would be mostly cosmetic.

When asked Wednesday about the status of the NAFTA talks, Trump immediately redirected the conversation to the name of the potential deal. "I'll give you a little surprise as to the name when it's completed, because it may have two or it may three," said at the White House. "We're going to find out pretty soon."

Trump has made similar comments in the past. In a late August press conference he said: "We'll get rid of the name NAFTA. It has a bad connotation because the United States was hurt badly by NAFTA for many years. And now, it's a very good deal for both countries."

Trade policy experts said that policy-wise, this would make little difference — and that's why it might happen. It'll be an easy concession for the NAFTA trade partners to make to the U.S.

"It would just be a political rebranding. He wants to be able to tell his base he changed NAFTA and made it better," said Simon Lester, trade policy expert for the free market Cato Institute. "Canada and Mexico would have to agree, but I don't know that they care. They're not attached to the name; they just want the substance to be there."

The White House has said that its recent deal with Mexico would "supplant" NAFTA and referred to it as "United States-Mexico Trade Agreement." The administration has said it wouldn't need Canada's support. It has nevertheless engaged in talks with Canada to get its assent to the deal, as many in Congress are wary of approving a deal that could disrupt NAFTA. A

seeming agreement with Canada fell through last week, and Trump submitted the deal to Congress anyway. Talks with Canada have continued.

"Canada is still at the negotiating table and if those talks succeed and it remains a trilateral agreement, the change in the name would be cosmetic," said Hugo Perezcano, deputy director of the international law research program at the Canada-based Centre for International Governance Innovation. "There are important substantive changes in the deal that Mexico and the U.S. have reached, many that neither upgrade nor modernize the NAFTA but rather the opposite, but the title has nothing to do with that, and I doubt that it would reflect in any way a washed-down NAFTA."