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# *What's in a Name Change? For Those Saying U.S.M.C.A., a Mouthful*

By **Alan Rappeport**

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WASHINGTON — President Trump has long wielded the word “Nafta” like an epithet, deriding the North American Free Trade Agreement as the worst trade deal in history.

So when he renamed it the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement — or U.S.M.C.A. — this week, he may have short-circuited attempts to criticize the new deal. Why? Because the name itself is really hard to say.

Even Mr. Trump, who bills himself as a master brander, appeared to grasp that U.S.M.C.A. was not as smooth as Nafta, saying on Monday that people would make use of the new term “99 percent” of the time. At an event in Philadelphia on Tuesday he poked fun at the name, arguing that it had to be changed because Nafta was so bad for the country.

“U.S.M.C.A. Like Y.M.C.A., or United States Marine Corps with an A at the end,” Mr. Trump said. “I like the way it sounded.”

He is largely alone. While reviews of the trade deal itself are still coming in, the name itself has gotten a resounding thumbs down.

Top Trump administration officials have stumbled over the agreement’s shorthand, which linguists say is tricky to verbalize because it is an initialism rather than an acronym, like Nafta, which slides off the lips like a word.

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Speaking to reporters outside the White House on Tuesday, Larry Kudlow, the director of the National Economic Council, made clear that he was still coming to terms with the new name while espousing its many virtues.

“The North American deal — the U.S.A. — uh, uh — got to get this right — U.S.A.M.C.?” Mr. Kudlow said.

Almost.

In a CNN interview on Tuesday morning, Kevin Hassett, the chairman of the White House's Council of Economic Advisers, was blitzing through Mr. Trump's accomplishments on trade when he called the pact with Canada and Mexico "this new Nafta version," before wincing and correcting himself: "the U.S.M.C.A."

Getting there could take practice, and in some cases, avoidance has been the preferred strategy. Peter Navarro, one of Mr. Trump's top trade advisers and one of Nafta's fiercest critics, seemed to dance around the issue while taking questions on NPR on Tuesday morning, safely referring to the new agreement as "the deal."

Even Robert Lighthizer, the lead trade negotiator who spent more than a year brokering the new trade deal, referred to it as Nafta during a briefing with reporters on Monday afternoon.

For Mr. Trump, renaming Nafta was nearly as important as rewriting it. He spent years lashing out at the agreement and promising to scrap it, so giving it a new title was a critical part of ensuring his promise was kept.

It remains unclear whether the new name will take. On social media, critics of Mr. Trump have sneered at the name and some have suggested sticking to Nafta or amending it with a "2.0" to spite the president.

Dean Crutchfield, a branding and marketing strategist in New York, said that since the name was officially being changed in the text, it would probably take hold, as long as the news media used it.

"I think the more people see it, the more they will get accustomed to it," Mr. Crutchfield said.

But that does not mean it will be embraced. According to Grover Hudson, an emeritus linguistics professor at Michigan State University, initialisms — which do not read as words — are easier to digest for shorter abbreviations. But long strings of words, such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, set off a desire for a convenient shorthand. Imagine if "scuba" — short for "self-contained underwater breathing apparatus" — were scrambled, he mused.

"It's typical of Trump's decisions in that you get something that's not terribly better than what it replaced and worse in many ways," Mr. Hudson said. "He wanted to have something new that he could claim was his, but all he could come up with was U.S.M.C.A."

To trade experts, the new name was a minor annoyance dwarfed by huge relief that a trade deal had been reached.

"It is somewhat comforting to see that one of the worst things you can say about U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement is that the new trade agreement replaces a term that everyone knows and can say with an unpronounceable acronym," said William Alan Reinsch, a trade specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "How do you say U.S.M.C.A.? Even Nafta 2.0 would sound better."

The alphabet soup of an abbreviation could come with some benefits. It captures the essence of Mr. Trump's governing philosophy of America on top, while being difficult to attack.

**"This accomplishes Trump's goal of putting America first, at least in name even if not in terms of the country's long-term interests," said Eswar Prasad, a trade policy professor at Cornell University. "This is hardly an abbreviation that rolls off the tongue, so at least no future president will be able to refer to it mockingly and derisively as Trump did with Nafta."**

Like Nafta, the future of the U.S.M.C.A. will ultimately depend on the agreement's effect on the economies of North America.

"Nafta became a bad name because it led to a bad result," Representative Sander M. Levin, Democrat of Michigan, said in an interview.

While Mr. Levin is optimistic that Mr. Trump's new pact could be a step in the right direction, he acknowledged that shaking the old name could be a challenge.

"It's going to be hard not to use the word Nafta," he said.

If the leaders who drafted the deal are committed to using it, however, it has a better chance of taking hold.

Chrystia Freeland, Canada's foreign minister, signaled that she was fully on board with both the agreement and its name.

"Yes, we do have to call it U.S.M.C.A.," Ms. Freeland told a skeptical interviewer on CBC Radio on Tuesday. "That's what it is."

Quoting Shakespeare to underscore that substance is more important than style, Ms. Freeland said, "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

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