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Backing off a bit, Mr. Chafee said that it did not need to happen overnight, but that switching to the metric system would have economic benefits and the symbolic bonus of showing the world that the United States is not so unilateral.

And it worked for Canada, he said, recalling his years living in Alberta during the 1970s when he worked fitting horseshoes at racetracks.

Mr. Chafee said in an interview after his announcement that he had worried that making the metric system central to his platform might seem "too flaky," but that it was an issue too close to his heart to ignore.

"Canada wouldn't have done it if the cost was that high," Mr. Chafee said. "It's not that hard."

-- Alan Rappeport

What We're Reading

