

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

the lack of confidence in our country, and the fear that she and others have been spreading during the course of the past election campaign.

This runs counter to the history of many countries that have been involved and are now involved in free trade agreements. I wish to remind the House that today 71 countries are part of a free trade arrangement of one sort or another. It also runs counter to our experience over the past 40 years, during which time we have seen a progressive breaking down of the trade barriers between the U.S. and Canada.

● (2020)

Had Canadians, in 1946, 1947 and 1948, the time we started moving toward multilateral reductions in tariffs, been told what in fact was going to happen in terms of the reduction of trade barriers, they would have been frightened. But we can look back now and appreciate what that policy of working toward the reduction of trade barriers has meant to the Canadian economy. We can see today what it has meant in terms of the prosperity of Canadians, a prosperity that we can, in many ways, link directly to the trade liberalization policies that have been in place since World War II.

Gerald Regan, the Minister for International Trade in the Trudeau Government, a former Liberal Premier of the Province of Nova Scotia, made the following statement in respect of free trade: "In the trading history of the world, it is hard to find any case where free trade has led to disaster or where either of the parties repudiated an arrangement because of adverse economic results flowing from such an agreement."

Mr. Crosbie: Right on.

Mr. Wilson (Etobicoke Centre): It is that type of experience that we should reflect upon as we stand before our constituents, as we stand here in the House of Commons today addressing the Free Trade Agreement.

We need to be able to look ahead to appreciate the benefits that will flow to Canada from the Free Trade Agreement. If we do that, Canadians from coast to coast will accept the Free Trade Agreement with enthusiasm.

That is precisely what we saw during the latter part of the election campaign. As people got over the fears, over the myths, over the distortions and the half truths about the Free Trade Agreement and came to understand the benefits that would flow to their communities, to their businesses, they voted in favour of it.

I listened very carefully to what the small business community has to say. Listening to what Bell Canada or the Steel Company of Canada have to say is all well and good, but I can tell you that I listen with particular care to the small business community, to those individuals who employ anywhere from 10 to 100 people. These are the people who risk their own money, their own livelihood on how the economy performs, and as such they are going to reflect very carefully on what the Free Trade Agreement will do for them or to them. If they make a mistake and support an agreement that is going to hurt their businesses, it is not only their jobs that are at stake but their bank accounts and their homes.

It is for that reason that I listen carefully to John Bulloch, the representative of the small business sector in Canada. Mr. Bulloch tells me that the small business sector supports the Free Trade Agreement by a margin of six to one. Given that Mr. Bulloch's group represents people at the grass roots level right across Canada, I consider that to be a significant statistic indeed.

A number of points have been raised during the course of this debate in relation to the Free Trade Agreement. I should like to reflect for a moment on some of the broad economic results that we expect. And when I say "we", I refer not just to the Government of Canada but to the major think tanks in this country, all of which have come to the conclusion that the Free Trade Agreement will improve our competitive position, it will increase our standard of living. We are told that the Free Trade Agreement will result in an increase in the income of the average family of four in this country in the amount of \$1,800. We are also going to see an increase in manufacturing output in this country of 11 per cent.

These are not temporary blips. We are talking now about a permanent increase in the over-all standard of living of Canadians.

As we increase our standard of living, as we increase our economic strength, as we increase our competitive position, we are going to be able to support more effectively such social programs as unemployment insurance, medicare, old age pensions, and so forth. Not only will those programs not be destroyed by this Free Trade Agreement, our capability to support them will be enhanced.

I cite by way of example the increased support we already see for Canadian culture. Over the past 20, 30, 40 years we have seen a real surge in the strength of culture in Canada, a surge that has been brought about