

There is an unusual statistic that leaps out of the program for this year's convention of the Canadian Exporters' Association [CEA]. And it has nothing to do with tariffs or trade surpluses or balances of payments.

It is the fact that this is the Association's 52nd Annual Convention, which places the first one in the middle of World War II!

Even as the men and women of that generation were fighting to keep the world secure from tyranny, Canadians were establishing yet another mechanism for enhancing our export performance, confident in the prospect that trade would again be Canada's national lifeline when liberalized market access would be at the top of the postwar agenda.

Much has happened in Canada and the world since 1943, but the importance of international trade and investment to our economic prosperity continues to increase.

In the past two years, we have seen major strides taken toward trade liberalization - from the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the creation of the World Trade Organization [WTO] to the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]. Initiatives for freer trade in Asia, in Europe, throughout the Western Hemisphere and across the Atlantic are emerging.

Our economy has become one of the most open in the world. We are today experiencing an extraordinary export boom: our exports of goods and services now amount to more than one third of our Gross Domestic Product, compared with about one quarter just four years ago. Today, Canada-U.S. trade amounts to one billion dollars a day, every day of the year.

Considering that every billion-dollar increase in exports creates 11 000 jobs in Canada, it is clear that the lion's share of the additional jobs has and will continue to come from our exports. That is a powerful incentive not only to create an international framework that stimulates freer trade and investment among nations, but also to establish the domestic strategies and programs necessary to capitalize on this more liberal climate.

Today's trade figures are impressive, but we can do better. We can capitalize on the market openings resulting from the creation of the WTO and from the elimination of trade and investment barriers within NAFTA. We can increase our market shares, diversify both the composition and the destination of our exports. We can also broaden the base of Canadian companies involved in international trade and investment. This is our challenge. This is Team Canada's challenge.

And make no mistake about it - international trade is all about winning.