

the growing spending power of its 85-million consumers presents many opportunities for Canadian exporters of goods and services.

Prior to the Free Trade Agreement, companies were not exploring the opportunities available to them within the Mexican market. Our trade commission in Mexico was not seeing much activity at all. Our Embassy is accommodating increasing numbers of business visitors. There were only 200 in 1988, but there were 2,200 in 1991 and in the first six months of this year, 4,450. This translates into increased business. Our exports are up -- so far this year by 100 per cent over last year. And we are doing our part to encourage companies to participate in business missions to Mexico. Over the next 12 months, we will have 20 business missions.

There is tremendous support from the government for companies that are interested in exploring markets down there. Already, a number of some bellwether sales and new partnerships between Canadian and Mexican businesses have taken place.

This July, a joint venture of the Ottawa-based SHL Systemhouse and a leading Mexican computer systems management company won a breakthrough US\$500-million contract to build and manage a number of systems for Mexico's Finance Ministry, over the coming 10 years. In August, SNC-Lavalin International was awarded a \$20-million contract to modernize Mexico's geomatic information systems. An example of the new partnerships, this system will involve a unique digital mapping system developed by Energy, Mines and Resources Canada. Last month, the Bank of Nova Scotia announced that it was reinforcing its presence in the Mexican market by being one of the first international banks to enter an equity partnership with a local institution.

The government is confident that NAFTA is a good deal for Canada: good for our prosperity and good in helping to secure the type of caring society that all Canadians value and expect.

The government, however, can only negotiate treaties and assist with business development and trade promotion. It is up to individual businesses to take the initiative to export and to enter into strategic alliances that result in innovative trade development. Yet, of the 40,000 Canadian firms involved in manufacturing, only one third export -- even after the FTA has secured the biggest two-way trading relationship in world history. And the top 100 companies account for fully 50 per cent of all exports. Clearly, more companies need to get involved.

At the same time, I note with some interest that there are over 600,000 active corporations in Canada and over 1.6 million Goods and Services Tax (GST) business registrants. To me, these numbers suggest a lot of potential entrepreneurship for innovation and exports. Effectively applied, this