

In the fall of 1991, the government launched an unprecedented nation-wide series of consultations to seek the advice of Canadians on how Canada could strengthen its economy and improve its competitiveness. This exercise culminated a year later in the Action Plan of the Steering Group on Prosperity. Today, we are responding in a direct way to the Action Plan's verdict that, as Canadians, we must work to capture a larger share of global markets.

This morning, I am happy to announce the launching of a major new trade program called Access North America. This initiative will increase our exports to Mexico, and these exports will create more jobs.

With the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) legislation now introduced in Parliament, we have set the stage for new trade and investment opportunities in North America. Access North America will help companies turn those opportunities into sales.

I am here with representatives of the private sector to emphasize that we intend to work in partnership with Canadian business to reach out to firms from coast to coast to deliver key components of this initiative.

Mexico is a fast-growing economy that will need telecommunications products, infrastructure expertise, environmental services, new technology and other goods and services that Canada produces. In 1991, Mexican imports grew by nearly 22 per cent, making Mexico a market of immediate opportunity for Canadian exporters.

Canadian businesses have already begun to increase their presence in the Mexican market. One need only point to the 4,500 business people who last year visited the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City.

These companies and others will face tough competition in the Mexican market. However, with the assistance of Access North America, they can meet the competition head-on and come out ahead.

We have already seen the benefits that the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has brought to Canada in the four years since its implementation. Our exports to the United States are setting record levels month after month.

Last year, exports to the United States rose a remarkable 13.6 per cent, to \$122.3 billion, up \$14.7 billion from 1991. In 1992, we also saw the creation of 118,000 jobs in Canada.

Our experience with the FTA shows that participation in the NAFTA will provide even more benefits for Canada. Indeed, the NAFTA expands our access to the vast U.S. market, specifically in areas such as services and government procurement.