

It gives me great pleasure to be here today in this historic center of education, science and technology. As a person of Irish descent, I have a special affinity for the city of Boston. And even if my name wasn't Pat Carney, as a former Canadian Minister of Energy, I can only support the home of "Oil Can" Boyd.

As you know, my current portfolio is International Trade. It is a fascinating and complex portfolio, particularly during this time of growing international trade skirmishes and rising protectionism.

Our two governments are presently fighting this ominous trend by seeking a long-term binding trade agreement between our two countries. Such efforts have provoked much debate in my country. But they are not new.

In 1854, for example, the United States entered into a treaty with the colonies of British North America and its termination by the United States after the Civil War was a key element in the decision to create the country of Canada in 1867.

In 1935, Canada and the United States agreed to reduce some of the tariff barriers that had helped to start the great depression.

And in the years since 1947, Canada and the United States have negotiated reductions in trade barriers with many other trading partners and between themselves in automotive and defence products.

This has brought great prosperity to both our countries. Yet throughout this process, coalitions of interest groups have repeatedly fought against change. In both our countries, they have wrapped their self-interest in the flag. And at times, they have succeeded in promoting the interests of the few at the expense of the many.

One such occasion in Canada was in 1911. At that time, the debate pitted the great Liberal Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, against a protectionist Conservative Party and a group of industrial interests centred in the provinces of Ontario and Québec. Although the reciprocity agreement of 1911 won support in the United States, in Canada opposition to the agreement grew. In the end, a general election saw both the Government of Laurier and the reciprocity agreement defeated by a coalition of nationalists and protectionists. "No truck or trade with the Yankees," was the political slogan of the day. The Liberals were swept from power, and the political issue of free trade passed into obscurity -- never to be raised by Canadian politicians for 75 years.

Now 75 years later, much has changed. Today Canada and the United States enjoy the largest trading relationship in the world. We have reduced our tariffs to the level where next year 70 per cent of Canadian exports and 75 per cent of American exports will cross the border duty free. And, now, it is the Conservative Party that is the champion of free trade, with a protectionist Liberal opposition.