

giving us a fair shake." Those who made such statements said that the media focused more on speculation than on fact (perhaps because the facts were unavailable to them) and were perhaps too superficial in their coverage. One Vancouver participant said that as far as he was concerned, "all you see on TV is Reisman going from his car into the hotel."

While not that frequent, several comments were consistent with a Halifax participant's view that the government and negotiators "can't be doing a super job or they'd be building it up more in the media." This sentiment as well as the overall concern with lack of available information, highlights the appropriateness and necessity of communications initiatives aimed at informing and briefing segments of the media.

B. Key Issues of Concern

Perhaps a reflection of the lack of available information, few participants identified very specific issues when asked whether there was anything in particular of concern to them about the negotiations. Their key concerns were of a more general nature, relating to the need for a "balanced" agreement and for increased awareness and information about the issues and the benefits possible for Canada, as well as those likely to accrue to the United States under a free trade deal. Many also thought that Canadians should have an opportunity to be consulted on the merits of a draft free trade agreement before it was implemented. This reflects concerns noted above about the failure of the key stakeholders to explain the issues to Canadians. A statement reflecting this view was that, "People don't understand because not much effort has been made to explain it all....Before signing anything they should come back to the people."

The issue of the need for balance was raised in several contexts. Most of those people who raised the issue stressed that Canada should not enter into a free trade deal unless it was a fair, balanced and equal one. In the words of a participant in the higher SES Brantford group: "If we're not all willing to do it on a fair and equal basis, it doesn't make sense to go ahead." Others were somewhat more pessimistic or fatalistic in stating a belief that it was "difficult to get something that both sides were going to like."