

little foresight, they may anticipate the day 30 years from now when they will feel the same way about the FTA.

To Jean Chrétien, whose views on free trade seem fuzzier than ever these days, I say come on board and let's look at the facts.

Despite the problems generated by a tough global recession, a spate of difficult disputes with the United States and a deep slide in public support for the FTA in Canada, there is now clear evidence that the FTA is working. It is meeting its objectives. It is helping to lay the foundation for a stronger, more prosperous, more resilient and more confident Canada, a Canada that is a vibrant part of the global economy.

That is a message we need to get out. Now is the time for Canadians to speak out about the benefits of free trade. Now is the time for those on the front line to say yes we can compete, yes we are adjusting, and yes we will succeed.

In the few minutes I have today, I want to share with you my assessment of the FTA. I want to report to you how well the FTA is performing as economic policy in promoting competitiveness; how effective it has been as trade relations policy in managing Canada-U.S. trade issues; and how catalytic it has been in influencing the evolution of the global trading system.

While the fact is not broadly appreciated, the most important objective in negotiating the FTA lay in its potential impact on our future competitiveness. The world's thirty-first-largest population did not become, and cannot sustain, the world's eighth-largest economy without expanding its base well beyond its domestic market, now 27 million people. By opening our economy to greater competition from U.S.-based firms, by encouraging Canadian-based firms to serve both the U.S. and Canadian markets and exposing them to the discipline of meeting greater competition both here in Canada and in these new U.S. markets, the FTA provided Canadian companies, particularly manufacturing firms, with the impetus to adopt global business strategies. Has this objective been achieved? Evidence to date is encouraging.

Five years ago I told the House of Commons:

I often have the opportunity to meet Canadians, people from our business community, not just the captains of industry but the entrepreneurs, the risk-takers, the small business people, the people who are creating jobs, the people who have their money, their life savings on the line. At these meetings we invariably