

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

answering a question so that as many Hon. Members as possible can express their ideas.

Never twice without three times, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg South.

Ms. Dobbie: Madam Chairman, I am very proud today to rise for the first time in this House to take part in these proceedings and this ultimate discussion about the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. I am also proud to be here on behalf of my constituents in Winnipeg South, many of whom are vitally interested in the opportunities presented by this agreement. Some of these people are business people whose livelihood depends on trade and on the security of access to markets in the United States. But there are others who are individuals who depend on salaries and wages and who support the free trade initiative because of the employment options that it will open up for them in the future.

• (1250)

All of them have shown a keen interest in the agreement. The fact that I am here today is evidence of their support for free trade. I am very proud of the people of Winnipeg South for their intelligent assessment of the deal. This is in spite of the vociferous attempts by the Opposition to distort repeatedly the real facts about the Free Trade Agreement.

I must say that I am also very proud of all those other Canadians who so enthusiastically endorsed the agreement in the recent election. I have to commend our Prime Minister and his Government for having the vision, the courage and the leadership to pursue the Free Trade Agreement to its conclusion over the past year or two.

The Free Trade Agreement marks an achievement that will go down in history as a turning point for our nation. It will be seen by our children and by our children's children as the day that Canada came of age, the day that Canada reached its maturity. This coming of age, this new maturity is being marked even now by the nations around the world upon whom we depend for additional trade and upon whom we depend to act as our allies from time to time in various causes. I believe that this signal is vitally important to our future in the global community. Its message will help to determine how we Canadians are positioned in future negotiations affecting Canada's prosperity and well-being.

The Free Trade Agreement is a symbol of Canadian strength. It is a symbol of a new confidence in ourselves

as a society with an intrinsic identity. We need not fear competition in a nation of strong, capable and secure men and women who boldly seek out new opportunities. Opportunities are what this agreement is all about—opportunities to sell our hydroelectric power from Manitoba; opportunities to expand our beef, hog and oil-seeds production; and opportunities to increase our exports in aircraft parts, textile and clothing.

For those of us who do business from Manitoba, from Winnipeg, the Free Trade Agreement provides us with a freedom to pursue a prosperous future. We view this freedom, this opportunity, with a great deal of optimism and a great deal of excitement.

In Winnipeg we have a diverse industrial base. We manufacture a tremendous variety of products, all looking for market options that simply cannot be realized in Manitoba's population of just over one million people. We have the potential to produce much, much more.

Currently, about 12 per cent of our labour force is employed in manufacturing. Our local industry is already gearing up to double that number. That is why it is so hard for me to understand the negative and contrary remarks made by members of the Opposition, and that they continue to make about the Free Trade Agreement. Surely, these Hon. Members cannot be serious in opposing an agreement that is filled with so much hope and so much promise for the vast majority of Canadians. I cannot believe they do not care.

In my province there is already a tremendous amount of activity as companies prepare to take advantage of the new opportunities opened up by this Free Trade Agreement. This activity is not confined to Winnipeg. In southern Manitoba, in communities such as Winkler, Steinbach and Altona there are literally dozens of small businesses that see the Free Trade Agreement as their ticket to being big businesses. These people are novices in the world of international trade. Many of them depend right now on exports to the United States to sell their products. They know that the Free Trade Agreement will enhance their opportunities while removing the insecurities presented by a growing protectionist attitude in the United States. These things are true right across western Canada. While Manitoba probably has the largest variety of industries expecting to benefit directly from free trade, the other western provinces have just as much to gain and more.

In the West, we need free trade.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!