

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

[English]

Before we entered into the trade talks, we consulted widely with Canadians, building on the consultations undertaken at the time by the Macdonald Royal Commission, chaired by the Hon. Donald Macdonald, a former Minister of Finance and one of Canada's most distinguished sons who today serves us proudly as our High Commissioner in London. During the negotiations, we consulted closely with business and other affected interests through the International Trade Advisory Committee and the sectoral advisory groups. We sought the advice of labour and Canadians, and we benefited from the participation of the Canadian Federation of Labour in the consultative process. We worked closely with the provinces.

Apart from all the meetings with the Ministers of Trade and their officials—and there were countless dozens of those—I personally had the occasion to meet no less than 11 different times with the First Ministers for meetings lasting up to 14 and 15 hours, seeking their advice and their support.

I am proud to say today that in large measure, because of the hard work that went into the consultative process in making a federation work the way a federation should, that no less than eight premiers out of ten supported then and support today the Free Trade Agreement between Canada and the U.S.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: Parliamentary committees studied the issues and consulted Canadians before, during, and after the negotiations. I believe the trade debate of the last several years has raised the awareness of all Canadians as to the importance of trade in the life of our country. I believe it is important for that discussion to continue, and I know that it shall.

Members from all parts of the House have indicated the intensity with which they propose to continue the debate and the vigilance they propose to exercise with respect to the application of the treaty. That is a very commendable and appropriate attitude for all Members of Parliament. I wish them well in this. I offer them my full co-operation.

I just say, *en passant*, that it will be interesting to look back and read *Hansard* some years from now, because 25 years ago, when the Government negotiated the Auto Pact, a lot of people were opposed to it then who today say that they actually fathered the same agreement. If I happened to be looking at the Hon. Member for Essex—

Windsor (Mr. Langdon) of the NDP when I said that, it was entirely by accident.

I believe it is important for that debate to continue. Government, business, labour, the universities, and public policy institutes need to co-operate in developing a wider and deeper understanding of the challenges of trade. As a step in the right direction, the federal Government will soon announce details of a special fund to help the development of greater understanding, not only of the agreement itself, but also of Canadian trade policy.

I have asked the Minister for International Trade to be in touch with officials at the University of Ottawa and at Carleton University, as well as business and labour leaders, regarding the establishment in Ottawa of a world-class Canadian centre for the study of international trade policy.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: We would propose that the Ottawa centre become a world-class centre for the teaching and the research and the analysis of trade issues, not only around the country, but around the world. I think all Members of the House of Commons will not only applaud and encourage this kind of initiative, but I hope they will participate actively in its building, its encouragement, its design, and in its support.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: After the next election, there might be a job as a visiting professor for the Hon. Member for Essex—Windsor. There will always be a place for the Hon. Member in Canadian trade policy debates.

Mr. Gauthier: After Simon Reisman, I suppose?

Mr. Mulroney: No, Simon Reisman will be there too. I can assure you of that. Canada has all kinds of extraordinary and impressive people who have served Canada through the public service. None has been finer and none has made a more durable contribution than Simon Reisman.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mulroney: I can say that about Simon, because I know he would never say it himself.

In a phrase, the Free Trade Agreement is a major insurance policy for two million Canadian jobs. It represents more secure access to the United States market and new opportunities for economic expansion.