

I'll be speaking later today on market access questions related to the launching of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations within the GATT and the Canada-U.S. trade initiative. These are critical issues and we count on your support in tackling them. Indeed I understand that a survey of the CEA membership indicated a 92 percent favourable response to a free trade agreement with the U.S.

As a government we can and must work to ensure market access. As a government we are and will continue to work with you to take advantage of the market opportunities.

We are here today to honour companies that have taken advantage of the opportunities and made a major contribution to Canada's export performance. That is why I'm so pleased to be here.

I'm happy to be able to report that the Export Awards Selection Committee composed of representatives from the private and public sectors as well as the media found its task extremely difficult. The calibre of the nominees was higher than ever before.

Indeed, the chairman of this year's Selection Committee - Frank Petrie - has recommended the establishment of a new award. For the first time and to reflect the high caliber of the more than 200 applications, a limited number of Honourable Mentions will be awarded. On your tables you have a list of the 25 companies that deserve your recognition. I congratulate each and every one of them.

I'm also pleased to note that the winners represent many industrial sectors, small and large enterprises, from across Canada. That speaks well for Canadian business.

The criteria for the Awards are demanding. A firm must demonstrate significant achievement in exporting, in terms of sales, financing, or promotion of export trade. These achievements are measured by increases in sales over the three most recent fiscal years, by success in penetrating new markets, and by success in introducing new products into the world market. Additional factors assessed include the level of Canadian content, the range of markets where sales are made, the retention of market share in the face of strong competition and the ratio of a firm's export sales to total sales.

Meeting these criteria mean, by definition, besting the international competition. This year's nominees -- not just the winners, but all the companies that were considered -- have proved that Canadians can compete and win in world markets. They have done precisely what it is we must do as a nation to maintain our prosperity. They set themselves tough goals and achieved them.

In the process, they have set a standard of skill and excellence which Canada must aspire to. The companies that receive the Canada Export Award are world class competitors. They are tough, aggressive and determined. They show that the excellence of Canadian goods and services ranks them among the best in the world.