

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me say how pleased I am to participate in your consultations with Government. I am well aware that although this is billed as an annual event, it is really a consolidation of what is an ongoing and lively relationship, and that gives all the more meaning to today's meeting.

Indeed, the working relationship of CALA and the Brazil-Canada Chamber with Government Departments shows that one of the fundamental commitments of our Government can be a reality. That commitment is to consultation, to bridge the communications gap between Government and the private sector to help get our economy moving again -- and keep it moving.

My principal concern today has a lot to do with communications. It lies in giving you, as business people and exporters, a clear picture of the Government's trade strategy -- not as it is sometimes depicted by our critics, but as it actually is.

Just over a year ago, I issued a discussion paper on how to secure and enhance Canadian access to markets abroad. There were two principal working sections to the paper. The first dealt with the necessity to encourage -- and prepare for -- a new round of multilateral negotiations under the GATT. The second discussed what Canada might do to maintain and improve our access to the markets of our largest trading partner, the United States.

The section on the U.S. listed four possible courses -- from leaving things as they are to negotiating a new bilateral trade arrangement. At that point, we took no sides. We simply pointed out that none of the options was perfect, that each of them had pluses and minuses.

But somewhere the point got blurred, perhaps because the discussion paper contained so much to discuss. Somewhere along the line, people forgot about our preoccupation with the next GATT round -- in other words with our global trade. What caught everybody's attention was one of the four options for dealing with the United States -- the option of bilateral trade negotiations.

"Attention" may be an understatement. The idea that we might negotiate a better trade deal with the country that buys nearly a quarter of everything we produce -- not a quarter of our exports, but a quarter of everything we turn out -- that idea set off a barrage of charges and countercharges across the land. And when, after long and intense consultations with the private sector and the provinces, we determined to undertake bilateral negotiations, the barrage of course intensified.

One of the charges that has been heard most -- and, I suspect, the one that most concerns you here -- is that we are "putting all our eggs in one basket." Or, to put it another way, that we have abandoned our global trade interests and become narrow "continentalists".

I assure you that nothing could be farther from our minds. We are not putting all our eggs in one basket. We have not become continentalists. We are absolutely committed to expanding Canada's trade everywhere in the world.

Let me be explicit.

At the same time that we proposed bilateral trade talks with the Americans, we also launched a major new trade initiative in the Pacific