

Today in Parliament, the Government introduced the legislation to implement the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

This Agreement is the culmination of 14 months of negotiations and six more months of careful drafting of the text and the legislation.

The NAFTA will create a North American free trade area with important economic benefits for Canadians for many years to come.

Of course, this is not the view expressed by the Opposition. Their policy is either planned paralysis or reckless abandonment of our largest trade relationship.

Today they are even asking why we are introducing the legislation now. They argue that we should wait until the United States and Mexico dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" of their legislation.

Let me be very clear. Canada signed this Agreement because it will be good for the country and will provide opportunities for Canadians in the future.

We are the first of the three partners to formally introduce legislation, but the approval processes in both the U.S. and Mexico are well under way. Mexico has sent the Agreement to its Senate. In the U.S., the approval process started many months ago, with the Administration's 90-day notification of the Agreement to Congress on September 18, 1992. The new Administration is now continuing the necessary discussions on implementation with the U.S. Congress.

But that's neither here nor there. This is Canada. We have our own Parliamentary process; they have theirs.

What would happen if we waited -- if we sat on this Bill until our partners were quite far advanced in their process?

Our critics would accuse us of not giving them enough time to examine and debate the Bill, or our critics would accuse us of not acting until the Americans had.

In Canada, the level of interest in the Agreement is high. That is why this Government strongly supported the all-party hearings that took place on the NAFTA in nine cities across Canada over the past four months. It is now time to start the debate on the legislation itself.

We introduced the Bill now because we want everyone to have ample time to examine and debate the Bill.

We introduced the Bill now because the sooner Canadian businesses know about and understand this legislation, the sooner they can prepare for the opportunities that await them.