

consult with my fellow first ministers on an ongoing basis, as the process unfolds. To that end, I have placed this major issue on the agenda at the meeting of first ministers in November. The government will also arrange, if possible, a debate — a full debate — in this House on the subject of trade at a time agreeable to honourable members.

We must all be aware that international negotiations are complex and extremely challenging. Success is not a sure thing but the results of success are well worth the enormous effort and good faith required for these negotiations.

Moreover, we have already agreed to establish a special mechanism with the provinces, to assure their continuing involvement throughout the process. To support Canada's negotiating effort, the Minister of International Trade is as well creating a new consultative arrangement with business, labour and other groups.

I emphasize that we are beginning a process of purely commercial negotiations with the USA, the results of which would provide sufficient time for all Canadians to plan ahead to take advantage of new opportunities which come with enhanced access.

We seek to negotiate the broadest possible package of mutually beneficial reductions in tariff and non-tariff barriers between our two countries.

I accept the words of prudence coming to us from some quarters; indeed some quarters of this House on this subject. I accept those words and I respect them. We understand the natural concerns of various sectors and regions that their interests as well be recognized both in the negotiations and in any agreement. And this of course shall be the case.

There is I think general consensus, however, that we must seek to secure and improve our trade with the USA. To shrink from this challenge and opportunity would be an act of timidity unworthy of Canada. It would be contrary to our national interest.

Our political sovereignty, our system of social programs, our commitment to fight regional disparities, our unique cultural identity, our special linguistic character — these are the essence of Canada. They are not at issue in these negotiations. They will be at all times in a Canada made more confident and prosperous from a secure and dynamic trade relationship with our biggest customer our close friend and with all the world.

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