

At the same time, we have to consider our bilateral trade with the United States, where our access is being seriously threatened. The paper sets out four possible courses.

We could try to go along under the status quo.

Or we could try to negotiate arrangements limited in scope to particular sectors, or to particular types of non-tariff barriers (such as government procurement).

Or we could negotiate a framework agreement, which would commit the two governments politically to objectives and mechanisms for the removal of trade barriers and the settlement of bilateral disputes.

Or finally, we could try to negotiate a comprehensive agreement, one that would encompass most of our trade with the U.S.

In issuing the discussion paper, the government has made no prejudgment on which of the four strategies would be the wisest and most appropriate. There are advantages and pitfalls to each of them. None of them is free of risk, not even the status quo.

The question we are trying to answer in this consultation process is which course would be best for Canada.

We are now drawing to the end of our consultation tour -- which by Friday will have taken us to 15 Canadian cities from coast to coast. I can tell you that, from my point of view, it has been an outstanding trip. I have gained insights into the problems, aspirations and abilities of business people all over Canada, and of labour representatives as well. I think there are two main themes to what I've been hearing. That Canada has been falling behind in trade, and must catch up. And that there is intense interest, all over the country, in doing anything within reason to secure and enhance our access to world markets in general, and to the U.S. in particular. Perhaps the one thing that has struck me most, however, is the depth of knowledge of the people whom we have heard. If I had a hat on, I would take it off to you. You're great!

The object of the exercise, of course, is to hear from everyone who wants to talk to us. Next week, we'll be