

VI. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS AND DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

The final segment of the focus group discussion agenda dealt with several aspects of perceptions of the Canada-U.S. trade negotiations themselves. Perceptions of the "dimension of change" people associated with free trade between Canada and the United States were also briefly explored.

A. Satisfaction with the Handling of the Negotiations

Participants were initially asked how content they were overall with the way in which the federal government and its trade negotiators were handling the negotiations with the Americans. The responses obtained reflected the concern which emerged in the initial stages of the discussions about the lack of information available. People were reiterating their earlier comments that it was difficult to express a view given that little information was available and that they "haven't heard that much." Among the comments made stressing the difficulties in expressing a view due to the lack of information available were the following:

There are more questions than answers;

I don't have a firm grasp on the social and cultural issues;

I'm not really sure what's on the table and wonder if we'll ever know until it's too late;

The picture of what we're discussing and negotiating isn't very clear. We should be exposed a little more to the hypothetical issues...should have access to the topics which are being covered; and,

We don't get any of the nitty gritty.

Related to the focus on a lack of information were comments expressed about the role of the media in contributing to this situation. Despite the fact that participants in several groups thought the media would be a source of information for the average Canadian in assessing the merits of a free trade deal, they were also taken to task by some for "not