

I think many Canadians understand these realities. But concerns persist. Some worry that we will reopen the FTA and dilute its provisions or remove its safeguards. Some are concerned by the environmental and labour conditions in Mexico. And still others worry about the adjustment period and measures which will accompany a North American free trade agreement. I will address these one by one.

This Government believes that the FTA is a good deal. It is balanced and fair. It is an agreement worth safeguarding.

There are some in the United States Congress and elsewhere who have suggested trying to secure from Canada in trilateral negotiations what they were unable to secure from us in bilateral negotiations. Let me be clear about where we stand on this issue. Canada is not going to let the United States get through the back door what it could not get through the front door. The FTA is signed, sealed and delivered. We will not negotiate it twice.

That applies in particular to pressure from U.S. lobby groups to challenge Canada's special measures of support for its cultural industry. That pressure will not work. This Government insisted on maintaining special measures of support for its cultural industries when it negotiated the FTA. It is not prepared to negotiate now what was settled then, particularly when the capacity of Canadians to reflect their nationhood to each other has never been more important. That is a point of principle.

But the FTA as a whole may not be a perfect agreement from a Canadian point of view. Improvement is not impossible. Indeed, the FTA itself instructs the parties to seek improvement, which is ongoing right now. If we can identify areas where the FTA could be made even better, we will not hesitate to pursue them. But we will be guided by one criterion only: what is best for Canadian industry and Canadian jobs. Reducing the benefits which come from the FTA is not a price we are willing to pay for a North American accord.

A second set of concerns relates to environmental and labour standards. Some people worry that we will let our own standards slip in both areas. They need not worry. Canadians are justifiably proud of their labour standards, their environmental standards, their safety standards. This Government is not going to preside over their erosion. That will not be the result of North American free trade.

I also believe it is misplaced to see labour or environmental standards in Mexico as a reason to reject trade negotiations with that country. I do not dismiss the concerns of those who lament the current state of the Mexican environment or those who would