

I want to spend most of my time today talking about trade and about breaking down the barriers that impede our business community. However, let me start with some more general comments about three very positive recent developments in the relationship between our two countries.

The first is the appointment of James Blanchard as Ambassador to Canada. He is an impressive choice. By naming such a high profile and well-qualified Ambassador, President Clinton has highlighted the importance he places on the Canada-U.S. relationship.

The second development grew out of Prime Minister Campbell's meeting with the President at the recent G-7 [group of seven leading industrialized countries] Summit in Tokyo, which I was privileged to attend. The Prime Minister asked that the President designate senior White House officials to oversee our bilateral relationship, particularly on trade and economic matters. We are very pleased by how quickly and fully he has responded.

Finally, I was impressed as well when President Clinton demonstrated that he understood what Prime Minister Campbell meant when she explained why we are determined to protect and support Canada's culture.

We are each other's best friend and best customer. We often face shared challenges, whether in protecting the common environment or promoting peace and freedom around the world. We will continue to be resolute allies and partners.

But we are also separate countries with our own histories and our own priorities for the future. Whether it's in diplomacy or in the arts or in business, Canada's voice is strongest when it is a truly Canadian voice that expresses our history, our traditions, our values, and our dreams. It must be so much more than simply an echo of someone else. Simply put, Canadian cultural products are for sale, but Canada's culture is not.

People who are secure in their identities don't feel threatened about working closely with others. They know that strong and healthy partnerships benefit both partners.

There is nothing flashy or extraordinary about our good relations with our neighbours to the south. It is not the stuff of legend or history. But it is good news for people like you, because it means you can go about your business in a stable, predictable and open environment.

At a time when the international economy is struggling to get all cylinders going, that's good news for people on both sides of the border.