

Mr. Speaker, a year ago this government announced an agenda for the economic renewal of Canada. In it, we recognized that Canada's economic well-being will be determined, in large part, by how successfully Canadians respond to the challenges of technological change and rising competition that are facts of life in today's world.

In the Agenda for Economic Renewal, we set ourselves four basic goals. To put our fiscal house in order. To make government less intrusive, reducing the compulsive regulation that has hamstrung business and sapped it of creative energy. To adopt policies that foster higher investment, greater innovation and increased international competitiveness. And to do all this in a climate of fairness and openness that is characteristic of Canadian society.

One of the basic tenets of the Agenda was that we must improve our export performance. Trade is our life-blood. Nearly one-third of our national income -- and more than three million jobs -- are directly dependent on our exports. And during the past year, promoting and improving our capacity to export has been one of this Government's main preoccupations. Securing our access to our biggest market, the United States, has of course been a major theme, but we have also launched an important trade initiative in the Pacific Rim, we have worked with the Provincial Governments to draw up a dynamic national trade strategy, and we have taken a leading role in promoting and preparing for a new round of multilateral trade negotiations that would lower more of the barriers to commerce throughout the world.

Trade is a two-way street. To export, we must also import. And the balance in our trade can only be de-

termined by our capacity to compete. Artificial barriers, such as quotas and high tariff walls, may provide temporary protection to specific industries, but experience has taught us that they are counterproductive in the long run. They can have the effect of isolating the industries they were intended to protect, of making them less able -- rather than more able -- to stand on their own.

Mr. Speaker, during the past year, this government has been engaged in a comprehensive policy review related to one of Canada's protected industries, footwear. Our producers of footwear have enjoyed the protection of import quotas for the past eight years.

In June of last year, the previous Government assigned the Canadian Import Tribunal to review the industry's position, with particular stress on determining two factors: the extent of injury the footwear sector would sustain if quotas were lifted, and the extent to which the industry had used the period of protection to become more competitive.

To carry out its mandate, the Canadian Import Tribunal spent one year conducting the most comprehensive review ever undertaken of our footwear industry. In addition to its own studies, the Tribunal heard 72 witnesses and received 39 written submissions representing virtually all interests -- manufacturers, importers, exporters, retailers, labour unions and consumers. It made its report this past June, and we see no reason to disagree with its findings.

Indeed, the tribunal found great cause for optimism. It found that, by and large, the Canadian footwear industry has, in recent years, matched, and at times out-performed, the economy as a whole and the manufacturing sector in particular.