

As all of you know, the Government has been involved in a number of initiatives to improve market access with our trading partners. I am talking about the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the completion of the Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN).

With the very slow progress of the MTN, some people in the room may have grown very sceptical about the prospects of a positive outcome. To these sceptics I say, "Don't lose hope." Keep in mind that some very real progress has been made. U.S. President Clinton's recent announcement that he will seek an extension of fast-track authority is a signal that the United States is committed to seeking a successful conclusion to the negotiations.

The path ahead does remain strewn with obstacles, but, with hard work and a strong dose of political will, trade ministers from around the world can get the comprehensive result that all are seeking.

The removal of trade barriers, however, is not limited to the international domain. For Canada, it is also a priority domestically. For too many years, interprovincial trade barriers have dampened the competitiveness of many Canadian companies.

Over the past few months, I have been working with my provincial colleagues to open up the internal Canadian market. Most recently, two weeks ago the Committee of Ministers for Internal Trade discussed a plan of action to achieve a broad agreement by June 30, 1994.

The very real benefits of trade liberalization, both domestically and internationally, also led us to seek freer trade with our closest neighbours, first the United States, through the FTA, and now a continental agreement, through the NAFTA.

The evidence of the benefits of the FTA are now becoming clear. While 1992 was an outstanding year for Canadian exports -- with an overall 11-per-cent increase over the previous year -- our sales to the United States alone were even more impressive. Our exports to that country -- our largest market -- reached \$122.3 billion, representing a 13.6-per-cent increase over 1991. In January 1993, our exports to the United States were up more than \$2 billion, or 22 per cent higher than in the previous year. For the same period, they also soared to \$14.6 billion on a global scale, representing a 16 per cent increase over January 1991.

As is so clearly evident, it is the export sector that is leading the way in the current expansion.