

agreements open doors abroad, through which Canadian SMEs can enter.

From the federal government's point of view, SMEs are a vital national resource, the fastest-growing component of the economy, the most knowledge-intensive, the most responsive to rapid change, and the largest creator of new jobs... During the 1980s, firms with fewer than 100 employees created over 2.3 million net new jobs, or 87 per cent of the total growth in employment. During this decade, they have the potential to perform even more impressively.

However, the job- and wealth-creating capabilities of this impressive national resource will not be fully utilized until SMEs become much more active exporters.

Canada is a trading nation, with about one third of our GDP [gross domestic product] derived from exports. But as it stands now, our exports rest on a foundation that is too narrow, with a relatively small number of firms accounting for the majority of our exports. We all have a stake in seeing SMEs export more.

In recent months, the federal government has been conducting a comprehensive review of programs aimed at small businesses. The goal is to create greater awareness of export opportunities and to enhance our marketing skills and abilities.

The larger challenge is to transform Canada from a nation dependent on trade into a true trading nation — with a much larger role being played by SMEs.

The job of meeting that challenge begins at home, for the foundations of competitiveness abroad are rooted in the domestic business environment — especially today, as the world economy becomes more open, and the distinctions between domestic and international markets are blurred.

Accordingly, Canada's international trade policy and market development programs are fully integrated into the federal government's comprehensive initiatives aimed at re-engineering the domestic business climate. The process is ongoing and accelerating.

To foster a more highly skilled and competitive work force, we must reform our human resource development policies. So in early October, my colleague the Minister of Human Resources Development will present the working documents to support that renewal.

Canada needs a skilled, educated, flexible work force to attract investment. No government can simply legislate that work force into existence. It will be created by people who believe in themselves and in their future. But first they need training and