

the Conservatives when it comes to responding constructively to the Liberal point of view on these matters.

The infrastructure program, for example, is something we began pushing for back in 1988, building on the very good work of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities.

However, I regret to say that when I and others examine this resolution more closely we see problems with it. These problems have led our party to propose an amendment. If this amendment were to be adopted by this House then I would say that the resolution, as amended, would be acceptable not only to Liberals but I think to most Canadians.

Our amendment focuses on two particular problems. One is that the resolution calls for simply abrogating the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and the North American free trade agreement.

This resolution overlooks the fact that surveys have shown, including one survey carried out by supporters of the NDP, that most Canadians want the government to renegotiate these agreements. Only if it is not possible to renegotiate to bring about a better deal for Canadians, one which answers the concerns about the problems we outlined all too often which are connected with these deals, only then we say should the tool of abrogation be undertaken on behalf of Canadians by their government.

This resolution does not respond to the views of Canadians in this regard. In fact the resolution shows no recognition of the common sense of a policy which, as the Liberal amendment points out, should be one based on renegotiating these trade agreements rather than simply rushing to abrogate or cancel them.

• (1725)

This is a common sense approach because it makes use of the unparalleled opportunity for getting better deals for Canadians in their trading relationships with the United States, and also with Mexico, created by the election of the Clinton government in the United States.

That government sees flaws in these arrangements similar to the ones that we have outlined. Liberals have

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expressed concern about the lack of labour standards in the proposed North American free trade agreement.

They have expressed concerns about the lack of environmental standards. They have also had particular concerns about the lack of a subsidy code and the lack of measures to deal with the exposure of Canadians to anti-dumping and countervail law from the United States.

The Liberals have also expressed concerns that the Mexicans are left under the proposed NAFTA deal with more sovereignty over their energy resources than Canadians have under the free trade agreement and would have under the NAFTA.

With the Clinton administration ready to negotiate what it calls parallel or side agreements, a door has opened to make major improvements to correct flaws which have been all too evident in the existing Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and which have been carried forward in the North American free trade agreement. Yet the Conservative government has said that one of the reasons to adopt the NAFTA is because it corrects the flaws in the free trade agreement.

It is interesting that is a justification given by the Conservative government for the NAFTA because originally the Conservatives said that the free trade agreement was perfection in itself and was the best agreement between two countries that we have ever seen.

Now they come along and say they want us to agree with this NAFTA proposal because they finally woke up to the fact that the free trade agreement is full of flaws and errors which this NAFTA will correct.

We should recognize that the same gang that brought us the flawed free trade agreement with the United States is now trying to sell us the North American free trade agreement to replace it. If they were able to make a botch of the original agreement there is no reason that one should assume that they are doing anything better with the NAFTA.

Our trading relationship with the United States is crucial for this country. It is our best customer and we are its best customer. Yes, we need to expand our trade with the rest of the world but we have to recognize the importance to this country, now and in the future, of our trading relationship with the United States.