

I thank you for your invitation and for this opportunity to express my appreciation to the members of the Canada-United States Business Association. Your association has played an important role in nurturing a strong and dynamic relationship between Canada and Michigan. In any case, it is a relationship that Ambassador Blanchard, who had hoped to be here with us today, would not let me forget.

Although the Ambassador could not be with us, I am here today with a group of small and medium-sized companies from Ontario who are seeking for the first time to expand their business across the border to Michigan. They are here under a Canadian government program, sponsored jointly with the Government of Ontario, called "New Exporters to Border States" or "NEBS." The program encourages Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises to look beyond their local markets into markets across the border. I invite you to welcome them and to share with them your knowledge and experience of the Michigan market.

At the same time, I wish to convey my appreciation for the trade initiative shown by the Canadian participants on this mission. I hope that you meet with the success you deserve. Through your success, you contribute in no small way to job and wealth creation.

Job creation is a key objective of the Canadian government. It is widely recognized that in the current business cycle, small and medium-sized enterprises in general and exporting enterprises in particular are the most likely to create jobs. Our NEBS program is one of a growing number of measures we are taking to help smaller firms step beyond our border, starting with the United States of America.

While we are keen to expand and diversify our export markets globally, we know that succeeding in the U.S. market — the most demanding in the world — is the best possible training for exporting offshore.

The importance of our close relationship with the United States became particularly clear over the past year, as exports to the United States provided a major driving force behind our economic recovery.

At the same time, our increasing imports from the United States demonstrated that the recovery was well under way, providing a further boost to Canadian confidence about the future.

The health of our trading relationship is nowhere more evident than in autos and auto parts where our cross-border trade is, to put it mildly, robust. And nowhere is the impact of auto trade more evident than in Canada's trade with you. Michigan is the largest destination for Canadian exports. Michigan is the largest source of our imports among all States of the Union. In