

We have found a concern among the business community about Canadian competitiveness in the world, an awareness that we have lost some ground and must regain it.

At the same time, we have found a conviction -- not unanimous, but fairly general -- among Canadian business people that they can compete, and will be happy to compete, with American business on any reasonable terms and in any part of the world, including the U.S. This confidence has been expressed even by sectors of the economy that have been perceived as weak, as needing protection to survive.

But we have also found that many Canadian businesses have been experiencing problems getting financing for overseas projects, particularly in the Third World. We're working on several fronts to correct these problems.

We have been impressed by the high degree of awareness of the seriousness of protectionist sentiments in the U.S. Indeed, the feeling has been close to unanimous that we have to do something of substance to secure and enhance our access to the U.S. and then that we should act fairly quickly to do it. There is also, however, a conviction that whatever we do with the U.S. should not dim our trade prospects with other parts of the world -- particularly the fast-growing Pacific Rim, but elsewhere as well.

We have also been impressed by the concern of many of the union leaders that we have talked about Canada's ability to compete - in its own market and in the world.

And we have had impressed upon us the need to open up our interprovincial commerce here in Canada. Many business people have told us that the most formidable trade barriers they face are the ones between the provinces.

We have found some regional variances in both problems and aspirations, but not nearly as many as we had expected. Indeed, we found, coast to coast, far more consensus than dissensus. And in Western Canada, particularly, I was greatly encouraged by the repeated statements of business people that they understood and sympathized with the concerns of Ontario and Quebec. If this means that Canada is coming together as a nation, I am overjoyed.