

Ladies and gentlemen, this being the eve of the Chinese New Year, I want to wish all of you **Kung Hei Fat Choy** . I hope the year of the dragon will be even better than the year of the rabbit.

Today I want to discuss the relationship of the Free Trade Agreement which we have negotiated with the U.S. and our relationship with the Asia-Pacific Region, the fastest growing region in the world.

I am in a unique position to do so, because I am both the Minister responsible for the Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. and the Federal Minister responsible for our Asia Pacific initiative, a challenge I share with my provincial colleague, the Honourable Grace McCarthy, B.C. Minister of Economic Development.

The Free Trade Agreement with the U.S. expands and secures our access to the richest market in the world. The Asia Pacific initiative involving the work of 110 top-ranking volunteers is aimed at transforming B.C., Canada's pacific province, into the pacific gateway to Canada, and transforming Vancouver into a Pacific centre for trade, commerce and tourism rivalling Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The Free Trade Agreement is the link for two reasons. Not only does it provide us with access to the North American market, it makes us an attractive centre for investment for foreign companies which wish to build on that secure access. Every day we read in the newspapers how other countries envy us our trade agreement with the U.S. That envy will be translated into investment dollars; we here in B.C. must actively seek out our share of those investment dollars.

Secondly, secure access to the U.S. market is a key to Canada's international competitiveness, not only in North America, but in markets throughout the world.

By eliminating all tariffs in 1998, the Free Trade Agreement will provide B.C. entrepreneurs lower costs which will result in increased competitiveness.

Tariff elimination also gives you the opportunity to compete for much bigger markets. If you are a manufacturer, you will be able to have much larger production runs. This will allow you to rationalize and modernize your operations and to be even more competitive, not only in North America, but around the world.

We need free and secure access to the U.S. market if we want to take full advantage of trade and investment opportunities