

The original justification for the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement — and the subsequent trilateral agreement with Mexico — was really just that: to push forward in areas where our degree of economic integration seemed to call for a deeper, more comprehensive, more expeditious regime of rules and procedures than the GATT could provide.

It is Canada's goal to extend this deeper free trade relationship throughout the hemisphere and beyond, regionally if possible, bilaterally if necessary. We are already engaged in the negotiation of bilateral investment agreements with some international partners. We shall have to consider the negotiation of bilateral trade agreements if other avenues forward should become blocked.

Although the negotiation and implementation of the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] has focused Canada's attention in recent years southward to the rest of this hemisphere, we must also begin to explore new means of expanding our trade relations eastward, across the Atlantic, to Europe, and westward, across the Pacific, to Asia.

The momentum for trade liberalization both in the hemisphere and around the world, is strong. Canada seeks to maintain that momentum and, accordingly, I shall convene a meeting of the Trade Ministers of Japan, the United States and the European Union this spring. We hope to develop a consensus for new trade initiatives that will be considered at the Halifax G-7 Summit next June.

Mr. Speaker, in submitting this Bill for approval, the Government counts on the consensus of all parties in this House that the cornerstone of Canadian trade policy is the multilateral system of mutually agreed market access conditions and non-discriminatory trade rules applicable to all; that free, fair and open trade is essential for the future of the Canadian economy and for securing the competitiveness and long-term sustainable development of Canada; and that trade expansion contributes to job creation, achieves higher standards of living, offers greater choice to consumers, and strengthens the Canadian economic union. Such are the objectives that this Bill seeks to promote. I invite members to join in considering its purposes and provisions and in assuring its timely adoption.

Thank you.