

2. Stakeholders as spokesmen/spokesgroups

There is also a very diverse range of advocates of free trade to be recruited to "sell" the virtues and merits of a Canada-U.S. free trade agreement. Given the public's admitted lack of understanding and knowledge about the issues involved in the free trade negotiations, opinion leaders will likely play an important role in influencing public impressions of the relative merits of a draft trade agreement once its components are made public.

Views expressed by focus group participants suggest that a communications strategy which relies primarily upon federal government and perhaps indirectly upon selected key media players may not prove to be the optimal choice. As a group, politicians (both federal and provincial) were least likely to be among those whose opinion participants would consider most in determining whether they felt a free trade deal was good or bad for the country. Somewhat greater credibility was accorded to the media, but many also felt that it was not an "unbiased" source of information on free trade. A considerable number thought that it would be best to listen to the views of business people, especially those who had been successful in their own right.

Given these perceptions, we conclude in the report that the proponents of free trade would be advised to recruit and present to the public a diversified and varied range of different groups and spokespersons to speak out on the benefits of a free trade deal. Priority should be placed during the period prior to the initialing of a draft agreement in October, on recruiting as diverse a range of spokesgroups and spokespersons as possible for participation in the public debate on the merits of a draft agreement once one is reached.

3. Ontario's skepticism and views on U.S. protectionism

As for Ontarians' more skeptical views on the merits of free trade relative to other Canadians, some of this is obviously linked to a concern about possible major job losses especially in the cars and car parts sectors. What the groups reveal as another underlying concern as well, relates to whether or not the Americans are