

The myriad of cultural instruments at our disposal is one reason our country is as strong as it is today. Conservative Governments have long recognized this and that is why they helped to create so many of these instruments. We recognize that they go to the very root of Canadian identity. The Government knows well this fundamental truth. We too have created instruments, have searched for innovative solutions to meet our country's cultural needs. It is in part because of such instruments that Canada has reached the stage at which we can contemplate a new trade agreement with confidence. We can consider it in the sure knowledge that our culture is both rich and mature, that our identity is no longer subject to question but is stronger and more self-confident than ever and that our cultural institutions will be firm in their defence of each.

What we are talking about is a commercial arrangement, not political union or cultural assimilation. We are looking for an agreement which will inspire business confidence and help this country prosper. By increasing our wealth and by putting our economic relationship with the U.S. on a more secure footing, we will improve our ability to make choices, and the ability to choose is the very essence of nationhood and independence.

Commercial negotiations and a trade agreement with the United States will not weaken our sovereignty or our identity. Certainly no one on this side of the House believes that. On the contrary, what we are doing is an assertion of our sovereignty in an increasingly interdependent world. We demonstrate our confidence that we can be as productive, innovative, ingenious and efficient as our American neighbours.

I listened to the Leaders of the opposition Parties this morning. Sadly, what I heard was not leadership. Leadership demands that we seize this opportune moment, leadership such as that being provided by the Prime Minister of the country and the Conservative Party. I am proud, Sir, that it is the Progressive Conservative Party, the Party which founded this country, which dares to move this country into the 21st century, the Party which dares to act boldly for the future of Canadians.