

I can assure you that I will be raising this matter with my Cabinet colleagues in the coming months but I do need your help to garner support for this issue.

It is essential for you, as CEA members, to drive home to your elected representatives the realities of competing in today's international market. For example, if our exporters are unable to match the competition's financing, what impact will this have on our companies and our communities in terms of jobs and revenues?

On the issue of the "freedom to move" legislation, let me say first that this will increase the level of competition among carriers to the benefit of our exporters. This legislation, which incorporates modifications to the original proposal, balances the interests of conferences and shippers.

However, let me assure you that complaints of unreasonable reductions in service or increases in cost will be scrutinized by the new National Transportation Agency. In addition, the operation of the Shipping Conferences Exemption Act of 1987 will be reviewed in four years to ensure that shippers will be able to report on their experiences with the legislation.

Finally, I want to comment on Reg's point about some confusion in the minds of exporters about trade responsibilities among federal departments.

I appreciate your frankness on this issue and I would like to be equally frank in my response. Everyone in this room is acutely aware of the increasingly complex nature of international trade. Today, the art of exporting requires more than a good product and a good price. Today's exporters face some very difficult and very complicated issues which require them to rely on government for assistance.

To deal swiftly and effectively with these challenges, we need to consult broadly with both the public and private sectors. Naturally, this involves more players -- including representatives of my department, other federal departments and agencies, the provinces and associations like this one.

As Trade Minister, one of my concerns is that some of our efforts are at times not clearly perceived. To improve this situation, we are developing a new trade communications strategy in my department, which, I think, will significantly improve your access to information on markets, department programs and services.