

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

provided us much of the capital that we needed in those early days. It was they who provided us with the equipment. It was they who provided us with the technical knowledge and the understanding that we needed to develop this product that has since become so fundamental to our economy. That taught us that we did not have to be afraid of the Americans. We did not have to run and hide every time we heard the word "American". We did not have to be cowards.

• (1530)

We learned that we could work with them, compete with them and in fact could teach them some things they needed to learn. For example, within the oil and gas sector in western Canada today there are several western Canadians involved in training Americans in the latest technology and techniques. That is why western Canadians have a lot of confidence in our ability to compete with the Americans and other countries throughout the world.

Let me explain some of the benefits I believe the Free Trade Agreement will bring to the West. My riding is essentially a perfect snapshot of western Canada. That area has a strong agricultural base, a strong and developing forestry industry, and a strong energy industry both in oil and gas. We also have the shale tar sands project which involves us in the synthetic oil industry. My riding, which includes all those fundamental resource economies that exist in western Canada, is probably one of the best examples to illustrate what will happen to the region as a result of free trade.

The Canada West Foundation conducted a study of every riding in western Canada to examine the impact of the Free Trade Agreement on each constituency. The study on Peace River resulted in the astonishing statistic that 99.5 per cent of all the jobs within the riding of Peace River would have either a positive or a neutral impact as a result of free trade. I cannot think of a single investment opportunity or program that could give better prospects for the people of the Peace country than that. It is absolutely astounding that such an initiative could result in a positive impact on 99.5 per cent of the jobs in the area.

It is understandable why this initiative is so important to the people in the Peace country and, I believe, to the rest of western Canada. When one considers such an impact on my riding, which I suggest is a snapshot of western Canada, it is obvious why the debate we are engaged in today is so important.

One of the difficulties we face in Canada is that this is a big country with a small and scattered population. Anyone who wants to develop successfully a large industry obviously needs a large market. In Canada, that large market exists primarily in the so-called Golden Triangle of Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. In order to gain access to a big market one must be able to reach that market. We in the West are isolated because that market is some 4,000 miles away. The cost of servicing that market is incredible.

The Free Trade Agreement provides another opportunity for western Canadians, including Albertans in my area, that did not previously exist to the same degree. That opportunity is the market in California. It comprises roughly the same population as that of all of Canada, some 26 million. That market is only 1,500 miles from my constituency, which is half the distance to the major market in Canada.

One gas pipeline from the Elsworth gas field in my riding to the State of California and Los Angeles would have the same effect as my riding gaining access to the entire Canadian market from coast to coast. It is no wonder that we believe this initiative is so important. It is a market that gives us an opportunity to move away from our traditional role of being hewers of wood and drawers of water. Suddenly we can see the potential to become the processors of our goods and materials. We can begin to develop the secondary industries that we have longed dreamed of.

The Free Trade Agreement will also be of great benefit to consumers in my riding. During the last election I decided to buy a new pair of cowboy boots—a requirement of every Albertan—to replace my worn out pair. Since we were in the middle of an election that involved the free trade debate, I thought perhaps I should wait and buy the boots after free trade is adopted because of the difference in price. In fact, when I learned of the tariffs that applied to goods like those boots, I was tempted to wait until January 2 to buy them.

The gentleman who sold me the boots said that there was a tariff of approximately 40 per cent on boots, saddles and all his leather goods. The agreement will have a major impact on his operation. We can multiply my experience as a consumer thousands of times each day of the week to realize the goods we will have available to us without the restriction of a quota.

A retailer in my constituency once told me that he wanted to increase his quota of cowboy boots because he