

In the event that a draft agreement is reached, group participants expressed an interest in being informed of its contents and in the need for public debate and discussion on the merits or debits of such an agreement to take place. Such a process was seen as critical for average Canadians to first know precisely "what's on the table" and to formulate an opinion as to whether or not they think such a deal is in Canada's best interests.

The findings from the focus group research confirm the quantitative research findings from June that free trade is not well-understood by Canadians. They also point to the fact that the main reason for this appears to be a lack of information and precise definition of "what it's all about," rather than anything inherently confusing or perplexing for the population about Canada-U.S. free trade. Free trade appears to be viewed as more of a "government issue" rather than as an issue "of the population." People are in effect "from Missouri" on the issue and in large part do not know what it is all about or how it will or could affect them.

More particularly, the research suggests that the major challenges for the federal government and for the proponents of free trade are convincing Canadians:

- o Why they are pursuing free trade with the United States and why it is necessary and advantageous for Canada to take this course;
- o Of what the positive effects of free trade are likely to be for themselves personally and for their part of the country; and
- o That the government and its negotiators are managing the issue and the negotiations well and are seeking an agreement which is balanced and fair for both Canada and the U.S., as well as for provinces and regions in Canada.

Of critical importance in convincing Quebecers in particular of the advantages of free trade, will be for them to perceive that their provincial hydro-electric power corporation, Hydro Quebec (HQ), will come out as a "winner."