

Many business men and women know that they need the international competitive edge, which a barrier-free Canadian market would provide. I know that many of you are already focussing on the emerging business opportunities that the rapid expansion of the Asia-Pacific Rim region has to offer. To maximize your position at the North American crossroads with the Asia-Pacific Rim, you need to have access to a domestic market for your products that provides economies of scale.

By removing barriers, the Canadian market can provide you with an attractive base from which to form strategic alliances with Asia-Pacific-based companies seeking an entrée into the North American market. Building such alliances will be critical as well to your ability to take full advantage of the opportunities that the double-digit growth in the region provides. The removal of barriers is not simply a domestic, political or economic issue. It also has implications for Canada's international trade performance in the rapidly expanding economies of the Asia-Pacific.

Removing these barriers is a challenge both for you and for governments. The first great challenge for business is to identify the barriers to interprovincial trade that impede your opportunities and competitiveness.

How does your business operate? Are there markets you don't serve? If so, why? What opportunities are being denied to you because of barriers that affect your profitability and opportunities for growth?

These barriers are not inevitable. They were created by governments, and they can be removed by governments, so long as there is enough political will. You have to demand that governments find the political will.

Demand your right to be treated the same as every other Canadian across the country. Hold governments and interest groups who are comfortable with the status quo accountable for the lost income and opportunities these barriers are costing you. That is a role that each of you can play within the parameters of your own businesses.

But today you have an opportunity to act together to speak with one voice about how you expect to see free trade created in Canada. I want to hear the advice of the Business Council of British Columbia. I want to know what you can do to help me keep up the momentum. I ask that your conference answer some critical questions. First, will the Business Council of British Columbia adopt an official policy on barriers to internal trade? Other industry associations have done this. Such policies are very helpful in keeping the issue before governments and their members.