

III. GOOD IDEA OR BAD IDEA?

A. Overall

As in the quantitative data, the group discussions revealed mixed views as to whether or not free trade between Canada and the United States would be a good thing. The reasons offered for each position were consistent with those reported in the June nation-wide survey results. Those in favour pointed to economic benefits for themselves personally and for Canada, as well as anticipated positive effects on competitiveness for Canada. Those against were, for the most part, concerned about either or both of the impact of free trade on jobs and prices, as well as questions of Canada maintaining its independence and control over its economy in the face of increased American influence.

Several issues came up in the groups, which added to the itemization of reasons obtained via the June survey. One involved wages, raised in the context of both support for and opposition to free trade. Some of those in favour expected that free trade would enhance Canadian competitiveness through depressing what they felt were excessively high wages in some cases. On the other hand, Vancouver group participants expressed concern about a loss of the recognizably high wages many enjoy in Canada and in British Columbia in particular.

Another, very frequently raised reason for thinking free trade might be a good idea pertained to expectations of an opening up of the Canada-U.S. border in terms of people flows, as well as trade flows. That is, some felt that free trade would be a good thing if it meant that they could move freely back and forth across the border to seek employment. Others said they thought that people in the personal service industries would be able to more easily sell and market their services in the U.S. under free trade, as compared to the "red tape" many people felt they had to contend with today. Given this apparent expectation of freer movement of people between the two countries under free trade, it will be imperative that the precise terms of a free trade agreement in regard to this issue be clearly explained to Canadians.