

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I am here today with the team of experts from the Trade Negotiations Office because it is a golden opportunity for me to talk to you, the entrepreneurs and business people of the province.

You are the people who are going to make the Free Trade Agreement with the United States work.

I am also here because I want to tell you directly that the Government of Canada is behind you 100 per cent in meeting the challenges and taking advantage of the opportunities created by free trade.

Some people make the mistake of seeing the Agreement purely as a North American exercise. They criticize the Government for having economic tunnel vision.

What they fail to realize is that secure access to the U.S. market is a key to Canada's international competitiveness, not only in North America, but in markets throughout the world.

No one appreciates that more than B.C. entrepreneurs and business people who want to expand their activities in Asian markets.

The Prime Minister and I, and all our colleagues in the Cabinet, believe in Canadians, in their spirit of enterprise, in their competitiveness and their capacity to innovate.

When our bilateral trade negotiations with the United States were just getting underway, some people were saying that free trade was a leap of faith. My view is that it was an act of faith, based on confidence in Canadians and knowledge of their abilities.

That positive attitude has inspired all of our economic policies and initiatives.