

Over two million Canadians work in businesses owned and led by women.

Clearly, the world of business is no longer just a man's world - and hasn't been for some time now.

And it should surprise no one that our Chief Trade Commissioner and the head of the new SME division in my department are both accomplished women.

Indeed, the same is true in this country, where both the trade representative and the head of the Small Business Administration are also outstanding women.

But despite these incredible statistics, women entrepreneurs are under-represented in our trade culture. And I want to change that.

The purpose of this mission is to do just that. This mission will encourage the contacts that lead to contracts.

It also made perfect sense to me that we should launch this initiative in Washington.

The mid-Atlantic states surrounding Washington represent one of the richest markets in the world. Seventy-five percent of the world's multinational enterprises are represented in Washington. It also has the second-highest concentration of high-tech firms outside Silicon Valley. This \$11.5-billion market holds incredible potential for all sectors of the Canadian economy, including businesses owned and led by women.

That being said, I want to assure you that the Canadian businesswomen with us here today - and hundreds of thousands back home - are ready to do business with you in any part of this country.

After all, Canada and the United States are each other's largest trading partner.

The potential that exists for us in this market is why we must take the steps to support our exporters and to encourage more of our businesses to look across the border for opportunities.

We have to focus our assistance where our customers are and where we are most relevant.

And to do so means a sharper targeting of our activities toward those sectors that have the most potential for growth, and that will benefit the most from our help.