

*Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement*

Affairs Committee. Those committee hearings added up to 300 hours. As a result of that, the issue has been very much the focus of Canadians. We are repeating that process again today. We repeat it simply because we have gone through an election period. We, as a Government, have received a mandate to proceed on this particular piece of legislation, because it was the central issue of this last campaign.

I have been surprised in the debate over the last couple of days to listen to Members from the Opposition who say time and time again that a majority of Canadians said "no" to free trade, that this Government has no mandate. Yet if we as Members in this House are to apply their rules of mandate that they seem to be using in their particular arguments, we would find that very few people in this House of Commons have a mandate to be here to represent their people. There are very few people in this room today who have over 50 per cent of their electorate backing them. Does that mean that they do not have a mandate to speak for their people? Does that mean that they do not have a right to come in here to represent their constituents by way of voting in this institution or speaking in this House of Commons? Of course not. It would be the height of absurdity if we were to accept that kind of an argument.

Then why should the opposition Members expect the Canadian people to swallow that argument hook, line and sinker all of a sudden because we did not receive over 50 per cent of the vote in this last election? This Government does have a mandate. It has a mandate by every fair standard that has been applied in the country and throughout the history of Parliaments that have existed throughout the world.

I want to touch on three or four items that I think are essential to the debate. The perspective that I want to bring to the discussion is that of the Member of Parliament for the riding of Peace River, an Albertan and a western Canadian. I believe that this particular debate is an issue that has been absolutely fundamental to western Canadians for a long time. If I were to stop and ask western Canadians what has been the one issue that has been a frustration, a point of anger, not in recent weeks and months but for years and decades, they would say that one problem that they have lived with all this time has been the question of tariffs. Those tariffs were never seen as being put in place to protect the people of Peace River or the people of Alberta. They were never put in place to protect westerners. They were put in place to protect industries that were not located in that part of our country.

I really do believe that this issue is fundamental to western Canadians. It is fundamental because of those tariffs. We have wanted, since the beginning of Confederation, since the western provinces became a part of this country, to work on a level playing field. We have asked for equal opportunity. Give us equal opportunity. Give us an equal chance. We believe that we can compete successfully with any competition that exists. Instead, as long as those tariffs have remained in place, we have been confined to the role of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Why? Because those tariffs have never been fair to our products. It is very simple reasoning. It is not just the Americans.

It is the Japanese and the Europeans. In fact, it is the Canadians as well. We are quite prepared to let other peoples' raw materials come into our country with a very small tariff if we can process those goods, but if they want to ship us processed goods, then we want a high protection. That is exactly what has been happening in western Canada for decades. It was quite easy for us to sell the raw oil, the raw natural gas, the raw lumber, but when we wanted to start processing those products, then immediately they faced a much higher tariff barrier than the raw material. As a result, there is a frustration that is very deep-rooted within western Canada.

We have wanted to diversify our economy. That is why this Government has developed programs like the Western Diversification Program. Why? Because we want to broaden our base. We want new opportunities for western Canadians. We do not simply want to be producers of raw materials. We want also to be the producers and the manufacturers of those raw materials. We want to create those jobs and that investment, and we want to keep it in the Provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. We do not want to export those jobs to the United States, to Japan, to the European Common Market. We want to keep them at home. Why? Because we want a future for our young people. I really believe that that is one of the fundamental issues in this debate.

There is another little bit of history that I think western Canadians particularly want to talk a little bit about, and that is the history of being afraid of the Americans. Speaking from the perspective of an Albertan, I think that oil and gas is an important part of our economy. Not only is it an important part of our economy, but it has taught us a good deal about how we can relate to our American neighbours. When we develop that oil and gas, we do it with the co-operation and the help of the American people. It was they who