

Good morning.

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

You are the people who are going to make the free trade agreement with the United States work.

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 global competitiveness. We need that kind of market base to export successfully to all of the world's major markets.

Other people make ominous predictions that the free trade agreement spells the end of Canadian culture and sovereignty. They never explain how or why this would happen. Furthermore, they usually fail to mention that Canada's cultural industries are specifically exempted from the terms of the agreement. They also fail to mention the very real commitment of the government to Canadian culture.

We have increased financial support to cultural industries and have introduced innovative support programs in areas such as film production and sound recording.

We have taken these initiatives because we are committed to Canadian sovereignty and Canadian cultural industries.

Above all, we believe in Canadians, in their spirit of enterprise, in their competitiveness and their capacity to innovate.

When our bilateral negotiations with the United States were just getting underway, some people said 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 such as our market-oriented energy policy, the deregulation of transportation and communications, and our investment policy, which is designed to promote investment in Canada by Canadians and non-Canadians.