

Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

We are not in an area that is highly industrialized, booming with branch plants, factories, and so on. Therefore, we do not experience a massive influx of people nor do we attract foreign investment which might greatly boost the service industry of the North. Like all developing areas we export raw materials such as minerals and fur. We also import finished goods.

On the question of what the Free Trade Agreement will do for northern Canada, as I walk through the stores at home I notice that most products come from Canada or the Far East so I do not anticipate a great reduction in the cost of living as a result of lower tariffs.

Free trade may reduce the cost of imported mining machinery and oil field equipment which will reduce exploration and production costs. However, when the U.S. is getting our oil and gas at Canadian domestic prices where, may I ask, is the advantage for Canada? After all, we all know this has been the primary goal of the U.S. for a long time. The Americans have clearly achieved both goals in terms of price and guaranteed access.

My second point on this matter is that our principal export is production from mining. Having a so-called secure market for our minerals does not guarantee any benefits. Commodity prices not accessed to markets is what determines how well our mining industry does. Over all it appears that there will be little direct benefit to northerners from this deal. From my perspective this deal jumps the gun. It is a presumptuous, insensitive and uncaring deal.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Blondin: I say this because this deal was signed before negotiations were finalized. Canada and the U.S. will still have to determine what constitutes a trade distorting subsidy. Even as a political neophyte I can see that this represents a leap into the dark. Is it not foolhardy in the extreme to leap into the dark? This cavalier attitude has many Canadians, including northerners, concerned.

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In the North we are truly at a critical political and economic crossroads. Understanding, co-operation, and a firm commitment will assist us in going the whole distance, not the domination of our economy by third party interests especially by the highly market-driven forces of the United States.

Evidence in the North clearly shows that the private sector alone cannot develop our economy. An active government role by way of federal investment in the North is needed.

In the Northwest Territories the private sector creation of 3,000 jobs over the last five years has been impressive. Most of the growth has been in the larger centres.

We are fearful in the North that much needed regional development programs are at risk. We do not have the numerical strength to influence government or to affect an election in regard to the direction in which this country is headed. We know that we are vulnerable and susceptible to the will of government.

During the campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) stated that regional development programs were not at risk. His attitude was one of "trust me". Many people in the North believe that they were forced to trust the Prime Minister, our federal political representative, when he met in secret in the middle of the night with ten Premiers to finalize the Meech Lake Accord. Many of my constituents believe that the Accord makes northerners second-class citizens in this country. They also state that the provincial Premiers protected their constituents, but that the Prime Minister, our sole representative, did not do the same for us.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Blondin: The people whom I represent ask: "How can we consciously subscribe to this 'trust me' attitude when our fundamental rights as Canadians have been ignored on more than one occasion?" People in my riding do not understand why the Prime Minister voted against perfectly reasonable amendments to Meech Lake put forward by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), amendments which would protect the rights of northern Canadians.

I hope that the Prime Minister will not let us down a second time by voting against any Liberal amendments to the free trade deal which would protect Canada's regional development program.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Ms. Blondin: During the election the Prime Minister promised that regional development would not be affected by free trade. All I am asking him to do is to put that in writing as part of the free trade legislation.

In the North we are not equipped to compete with the American business sector and are clearly no match for