

Every reputable study has confirmed that free trade will have a positive impact on investment, employment, incomes and living standards everywhere in Canada, particularly in Atlantic Canada.

The Agreement opens up the American eastern seaboard to us once again, and with it a renewal of the mercantile tradition that was the life blood of our economies before Confederation.

Recently, in my capacity as Minister for International Trade, I had the honor of leading a group of representatives from 27 Atlantic Canadian companies on a trade mission to Boston.

The companies were participating in the New Exporters to Border States program. It is, in effect, a crash course for small and medium-sized businesses in the essentials of exporting to the United States.

The program provides practical information along with first hand exposure to a nearby market place in a northern U.S. State.

The program encourages Canadian firms that are not now exporting to develop markets just across the border as a natural extension of their home markets.

I cannot overstate the enthusiasm and determination of the members of the group. I am confident those companies will soon be doing business in the Boston states.

It is vital that we in government give these entrepreneurs the financial and development support they need to take greatest advantage of new open markets.

And in Atlantic Canada, no instrument of federal policy is more important to this process than the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

Newfoundland Premier Clyde Wells recently dismissed ACOA as an "abject failure" - the latest in a long line of failed regional development programs.

I want to take the strongest possible exception to that unwarranted and demonstrably wrong assertion.