

In Canada, the critics predicted nothing short of economic calamity, replete with downward pressure on Canadian wage and benefits packages, the demise of Canadian culture, loss of sovereignty over water resources, unavoidable lowering of our environmental standards, destruction of our social services, including Canadian medicare, and the elimination of entire sectors of Canadian industry.

And what does the record show?

Four years later, Canada's merchandise exports to the United States are up 19 percent, and U.S. merchandise exports to Canada are up 18 percent. Our social services remain intact. Your government is studying our medicare system. Canadian culture is alive and well. Environmental standards have improved. And I have not seen one American claim FTA rights to import a Canadian lake or river - although Canadian entrepreneurs have captured significant markets for high-quality Canadian bottled water in the United States.

The lesson is obvious. The NAFTA opponents, like the FTA critics before them, argue from a false premise. They think removing walls that protect and segregate markets will force unacceptable harm upon workers, whereas by leaving walls up, harm will be minimized. They are wrong.

The reality is that unavoidable competition is already hard upon us in North America. The NAFTA merely creates a framework of fair rules for competition. In other words, the NAFTA promises a more gradual adjustment and greater stability than would otherwise confront employers and workers in the long run.

The real question, then, for all three countries, is: Would we be better off without such a mutually agreed rule book for the years ahead? The answer is no - without the NAFTA, we will all be worse off.

The Government of Canada is, more than ever, convinced that the decision we made to enter into the FTA in 1989 was the right one. The NAFTA will build on the solid achievements seen by Canadians and Americans alike under the FTA.

I urge you to maintain the momentum for free trade and support quick passage of the NAFTA legislation in the U.S. Congress.

I want to turn now to change and continuity on the Canadian political scene.

In a good hockey town like Chicago, (no offence to the Bulls and the Bears) I don't have to explain line changes and what they do for the momentum of the game.