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But the output and employment gains from the Agreement go further. Without free trade, the increasing threat of U.S. and international protectionism would place at considerable risk the robust pace of output and employment growth that Canada has enjoyed in recent years. Over the last three years, for example, real output growth in Canada has averaged 3.7 per cent and employment growth has averaged 2.9 per cent, or 300,000 jobs per year. The Agreement will not only create new employment opportunities for Canadians, it will also help to secure existing jobs. In the absence of the Agreement, any increase in U.S. protectionism would clearly cost Canadians jobs. Illustrative scenarios of possible U.S. protectionist measures suggest the risk of job losses could be substantial.

The Department of Finance analysis suggests that the Canadian economy should have few difficulties in responding to the new opportunities provided by the Agreement and in making the adjustments that will be required. This conclusion is based on the following considerations:

- first, the Canadian economy has shown a great deal of flexibility and adaptability in the past in handling the size and types of changes that will be required by the Agreement. Between 1960 and 1987, average Canadian tariff rates vis-à-vis the United States have dropped from 14 per cent to 4.5 per cent; yet during that period incomes and output grew more than 200 per cent;
- second, the reduction in trade barriers will be implemented gradually over 10 years, giving enough time for businesses and workers to adapt to the free trade environment;
- third, the Canadian economy is well positioned to adjust quickly and smoothly and to take advantage of the new opportunities provided by the improved and more secure access to the U.S. market. Canada's international competitive position has improved substantially over the past several years. Since 1983, Canada's record of output and employment growth has been the best of all major industrialized countries; and
- fourth, not only will the adjustment requirements be minimal compared with the changes normally occurring — every year for instance, there are five million job changes in Canada involving more than four million workers — but the federal government has in place a wide array of programs to assist individuals and businesses to adapt to changes in business and labour market conditions that will arise from free trade.