

Mr. Chairman, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman.

It gives me a great deal of pleasure to be here today to address the annual meeting of the Canada China Trade Council. As a native Vancouverite and graduate of the University of British Columbia, I am also delighted to be back in what is one of the greatest cities in the world.

Vancouver is a city where the benefits of the connection to Asia are omnipresent. Too often, Canadians, like the little frog in the old Chinese saying, have "looked up at the sky from the bottom of a well." We tend only to see opportunity on our front doorstep. Until recently, only a few companies ventured beyond those traditional markets with which we are familiar. Many of you, who have broad experience in Pacific Rim affairs, will not be surprised in the least that Asia-Pacific, and China in particular, are finally moving from our peripheral field of vision into the focus of our future.

If there is one message I want to leave you with today, it is that the new Liberal government is well aware that the Pacific century is now. My party has always recognized the importance of Asia-Pacific. Indeed, it was a Liberal government under Pierre Trudeau that, in the late Sixties, took the bold decision to begin negotiations to establish diplomatic relations with China. This marked a key step in breaking the international isolation of China and welcoming it back into the community of nations. In recognizing the People's Republic of China, Canada was a leader, not a follower. Our government will continue in this forward-looking tradition when it comes to Asia-Pacific.

We shall vigorously pursue Canadian interests in the Asia-Pacific region. This is one of the reasons that the new Liberal government appointed a Secretary of State, Asia-Pacific, within the portfolio of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Raymond Chan, Member of Parliament for Richmond, is, I am sure, well known to many of you. I know that he will be a great asset to Canada's endeavours in the Pacific Rim.

I will be attaching a high priority to trade policy in Asia-Pacific. I look forward to the APEC [Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation] meeting next week in Seattle to pursue questions of tariff and non-tariff barriers with my counterparts from the Asia-Pacific region. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade will continue to serve as the cornerstone of the world's trade policy framework, but APEC can play an important role in meeting regional needs.

If Canada is to be a major beneficiary of the Pacific century -- economically, politically and socially -- we must be an active participant in this dynamic rapidly-growing region. For Canada to be successful in the Asia-Pacific region, we need to concentrate our efforts on two things. First, we must improve the competence and competitiveness of Canadian companies in these