

'I reject a *little* Canada,' Ed Fast says in pitch for EU trade deal

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In what was probably his most convincing oratorical moment since taking over as trade minister a year ago, early Friday Ed Fast made his case for the Canada-EU trade deal while excoriating the official Opposition and anti-trade activists.

"I reject the pessimism and fear of the proponents of a little Canada who wish to hide behind protectionist walls. I am a proud Canadian and confident in my belief that Canadians can compete with the best," Fast said, quoting Simon Reisman, the chief architect of the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement.

In his morning speech to the Economic Club of Canada, Fast compared the present heated debate on CETA with the one that took place on NAFTA.

"You may recall their 'doom and gloom' predictions for NAFTA. Claims that free trade would hollow out our economy, drain our resources, threaten our sovereignty over fresh water, and wipe out our culture," he said. "None of those dire predictions came true... We continue to control our sovereignty over fresh water, and the last time I looked, Canadian culture was alive and well, thank you."

Addressing other CETA-specific concerns, Fast said municipalities would retain their powers to regulate water services, while health care, public education, financial and other social services would be excluded from the deal.

"When it comes to procurement projects, local governments will remain free to use measures like grants, loans and fiscal incentives to support local businesses and address local needs," he continued.

Fast was at his most animated, however, when it came time to berate the official Opposition.

After repeating familiar criticisms – they never supported one free trade agreement and are steadfastly allied with unions, for example – Fast took it step further by attacking their vision for the country.

“Their vision for Canada is a country that turns inward out of insecurity. A Canada that cowers. A Canada that lacks confidence. And a Canada that cannot compete,” he said.

As 17 other Conservative ministers, parliamentary secretaries, MPs, and one senator fanned out across the country to spread the same message, one of the ‘myth machines’ Fast certainly had in mind when spoke of activists “trotting out the same falsehoods,” replied with a press release.

“Speaking at Canadians isn’t the same as speaking with them,” said Ted Woynillowicz, Calgary organizer with the Council of Canadians.

“If the Harper government really wanted to meet with workers, he would have picked a more convenient time than 9 or 10 a.m. on a Friday. We dare these ministers to come back to the province to actually meet with the public and take tough questions about CETA.”

With Fast again promising more CETA promoting “in the coming days, weeks and months,” they might just get their chance.