We’re global leaders and we should be proud of that, Iain Weir-Jones writes.

There has been much talk in 2016 about our trade agreements and trading arrangements. Canadians depend on trade. As events unfolded around the globe — especially those involving our biggest trading partner, the United States — it has caused some to approach the new year with questions about our ability to compete, to create jobs and to grow our economy.

In the face of protectionism abroad, are we really powerless? Without doubt, there are those who hope we’ll believe this, as it’s that kind of thinking that spawns hopelessness and attracts its close friend pessimism, the ultimate economy-killer.

Canada and British Columbia have no reason to question our place in the world in 2017. There are, and always will be, trade challenges. We overcome them with hard work, innovation and what we have to offer. Our confidence helps, too, but maybe Canadians’ brand of quiet confidence needs a rethink.

Canadians compete globally in every sector, but we don’t know as much about our strengths or our trade successes as we should or as times require. We should make more of our international accomplishments and the role they play in keeping people safe, secure and healthy and improving their lives.

I regularly see CEOs of globally successful B.C. companies in airports and hotels around the world. I rarely see them here, however, because, like me, the majority of the goods they sell and the services they provide are far from the comfort of home. That’s the way of it when we’re a trading nation. Still, we do ourselves a disservice — and make ourselves vulnerable to the damage caused by vibrations.

We began with specialized monitoring and testing services in the resource and transportation sectors, then moved into manufacturing sensors and electronic readout equipment for use in environmental, geotechnical and structural industries. Our technology and systems are in operation all over the world.

At home, our earthquake early-warning technology is in the George Massey Tunnel, where our sensors detect the first seismic waves of any earthquake, analyze them and, if necessary, shut down traffic into the tunnel. All these actions are performed in less than half a second. Close to 80 percent of all Canadian and U.S. nuclear power stations use our systems and technology for post-earthquake structural assessments. In South America, and in Europe, our power plants and at dam sites, our seismic monitoring systems are installed.

With earthquakes, every second matters. Whether it’s just a couple of seconds before the incoming destructive waves of a local, shallow crustal quake or 90 seconds before a mega-thrust quake, action can be taken — from triggering alarms in schools, protecting hospitals and shutting off gas lines, to the automatic opening of first-responder garage doors so fire trucks and ambulances can help those in need. We’re implementing real-time warning systems — with accompanying smartphone apps — that cover everything from large geographic regions to people’s homes. We’re doing it at home and abroad.

In Quebec, B.C. and in the U.S., our seismic rockfall detection system uses acoustic signature analysis and recognition to determine when rocks or other debris fall onto railway lines. In pipelines across the U.S. — and in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario — you’ll find the oil-and-gas safety systems developed and built by our engineers in Vancouver.

In Saudi Arabia, you’ll find the world’s largest permanent seismic monitoring array assessing the response of oil reservoirs, and it, too, was developed, built and deployed by our engineers and technicians. The U.S. navy, Washington State Ferries and the Alaska Marine Highway System use our submersible draft-measurement and hull-monitoring technologies. Australian navy submarines use our strain-analysis technology. Off the coast of Newfoundland and Russia, offshore drilling platforms use our structural-monitoring systems.

India, South Africa, the U.S., South Korea and Taiwan are just a few of the countries whose mining, resource and transportation sectors have used our monitoring and analytical technologies.

All of this has come from engineers and scientists in our B.C. company. And we’re all proud of the success we’ve achieved.

But in writing this article, in light of the recent focus on trade relations and futures, and the uncertainty some are suggesting we face, it’s time to hope that we might all embrace these as British Columbian and Canadian achievements, that Vancouver Sun readers remember just one or two of these advances, and declare, “We did this. B.C. did this. Canada did this.”

I know there are hundreds of B.C. companies we’ve likely never heard about that compete and lead around the globe, despite protectionism, parochialism and any number of hurdles. They’re just good, and so are their products, services and people.

As we take on 2017, it would do us all good to hear about these B.C. companies, and how they succeed in a competitive, always-changing world.

These stories will instil warranted confidence in our abilities, our expertise, and our future, and will make quick work of pessimism and those who seek to use it to put us off our game.

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