

business access to research facilities they could never afford to build or fund on their own.

A new initiative that the federal government will be launching in the coming months will provide a similar access to the 200 existing federal labs. Our goal in forming an alliance among these labs is to give our businesses access to some of the most advanced laboratories in the country. For the first time, through Industry, Science and Technology Canada, business will have access to every one of these labs, which, I hope, will lead to the development of much more extensive alliances between the private and public sectors in the fields of R&D. Those of you familiar with the research programs in Japanese and French public-sector labs will certainly not find this new initiative unexpected.

Despite the obvious need for change, some dismiss the Prosperity Initiative. It's a political exercise, they claim. Well, if that were true, it wouldn't be aimed at the economy's long-term problems. It would be the same as previous governments' solutions: a band-aid.

Others claim the Prosperity Initiative is consultation in place of action.

But -- what action?

The federal government has a very good idea of how to respond to the challenges. I'm sure many of you have some very good ideas on how we could improve.

But, even if most Canadians agreed on solutions, there is no way the federal government can act alone. The issues the Prosperity Initiative tackles demand solutions that are beyond the capacity of the federal government -- or any provincial or municipal government -- to achieve on its own. Building our competitiveness is a truly national project -- one to which Canadians must commit themselves for the long term.

The Prosperity Initiative is a way all Canadians can share in meeting their economic challenges. It provides an opportunity to examine -- critically -- the competitive ability of every sector of the economy, and look at what every Canadian, including business, labour, educators and governments can do -- or should stop doing -- to enhance competitiveness. The Prosperity Initiative challenges Canadians to find out what skills they need for the global economy, to find out how they get those skills, to take a new look at how they do their work, to figure out how to adapt new technologies, and to find ways to meet customers' needs.

I want to enlist your support for the Prosperity Initiative.