

The young couple about to have their first child aren't quite sure why they are having trouble making ends meet on two incomes, when their parents lived comfortably on one. The reason is quite simply that their companies cannot afford to pay them more, because the companies' productivity will not allow them to do so.

Productivity is the heart of this issue, Mr. Speaker, and is essential to our prosperity. It supports our way of life; it puts food on our tables, schools and hospitals in our communities, roads across our great country, and pay cheques in our pockets. But in order to be more productive, we first have to upgrade virtually every component of our economy. And in order to do that, we have to learn to innovate, to work smarter and faster, instead of harder and longer.

And that is why we are here today, Mr. Speaker. We must find a way, as a nation, to improve our productivity. The old ways, which served us well, are no longer working. We must change the way we think, the way we work and the way we work together, as a country and a people.

To be sure, Mr. Speaker, some companies are doing what needs to be done. They are ploughing back their profits into productive new investment, they're spending on R&D, and introducing sophisticated new equipment.

And so too are many individuals, who are not only seeking, but actually making new opportunities for themselves, upgrading their skills, exploring new challenges and, in a word, adapting to the changing world around them.

But too many of us are simply not changing far enough, or fast enough, to keep up with the global pacesetters for much longer. The underlying causes of this state of affairs are far beyond the capacity of government -- any government -- to turn around on its own.

The Speech from the Throne, in May, put on record the government's intention to invite all Canadians "to participate in fashioning a new agenda for prosperity," to tell us what we must change, in order to compete and win in the world. Over the summer, the initial response of Canadians has been clear: take action, but consult us first!

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House of Commons that the government is today instituting a comprehensive consultation process to be managed by a National Steering Committee, and designed to elicit from all sectors of Canadian society the solutions to the challenges now confronting us.