

Wax and wane though the influence of the provinces may have done both collectively and individually throughout our history, it has always been the role of the federal government to represent the interests of the Canadian collectivity both abroad and at home. The issue for any Canadian federal government is not whether it should represent those interests, but rather how it should go about fulfilling its mandate.

As politicians elected to the Parliament of Canada, my colleagues and I have a responsibility to see to it that the interests and overall well-being of Canadians are raised to the highest possible level, regardless of where they live. But unlike our counterparts elected to the Assembly in France, we must recognize that we share governmental power with the people elected to the legislatures of the provinces, who have a similar responsibility to foster the well-being of the people living in their regions.

Undoubtedly the major preoccupation in Canada today, as in many countries, is the question of energy. We happen to be in the fortunate position of being an energy-rich country -- one whose resources ensure that our overall needs can be met for the far foreseeable future. We are even able to export substantial quantities of energy in the form of uranium and natural gas. Our problem at the moment is oil. Our production is less than our current requirements, though we predict that in a decade non-conventional sources of oil from such resources as our tar sands will bring us complete self-sufficiency in that area as well.

Under our constitution natural resources are a provincial responsibility. This means that we as a federal government have had to undertake a long and often very difficult process of negotiation with the oil-producing provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan to develop a national oil policy that will recognize the interests of the people who live in the oil-rich regions of the country, and at the same time ensure that the whole country will have an adequate supply both now and over the long term. This job is no easier for us than for the previous government -- I think the distinction that can be made is the intense and sincere effort that we have made to find a resolution through a process of negotiation rather than through the unilateral use of federal powers without prior and careful consultation.