

Indeed, federal government operating costs, after inflation, are today more than 20 per cent lower than when the Mulroney government came to office. In fact, the federal government is actually running a surplus on its operations, net of debt servicing costs.

And by law, every penny of our Goods and Services Tax -- our equivalent of the European value added tax -- is used only to pay interest on the debt and, ultimately, reduce the debt.

When I left the Finance portfolio just two years ago, provincial governments showed no inclination to work toward a co-ordinated national solution of this problem. Today, Canadians are challenging each level of government to live within its means. And there are clear indications that, no matter what their political persuasion, all governments in Canada are listening to Canadians in this regard. This will not change.

All political parties, all Progressive Conservative leadership contenders and all provinces are showing strong commitment to dealing with this matter.

We have put the recession behind us. We have had a positive growth trend since the second quarter of 1991. There are strong indications that the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will prove correct in predicting that our growth in gross domestic product (GDP) will lead the Group of Seven (G-7) leading industrial countries in 1993. Canada's prime rate is at its lowest in 21 years, mortgage rates are down, Canada's inflation rate now compares favourably with historic standards as well as the G-7.

Few countries in the world are as dependent on trade as Canada. Nearly 30 per cent of our GDP stems from international trade, double or more the comparable figures for Japan and the United States. Without trade, Canadians could never have built the world's eighth largest economy with just the 31st largest population. But that is what we have done.

As a founding member of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), we have, since Punta del Este, made a successful conclusion to the Uruguay Round our number one trade policy priority. And there is widespread national consensus on that issue, which unites all regions of the country, cuts across party lines and will survive both leadership changes and general elections.

You, here in this room, understand what is at stake in the Uruguay Round. You know that the global economy is still recovering from a significant downturn, which still affects many countries. And you know that the economy needs a boost -- a new direction -- which will lift it out of its current doldrums.