

This is not a story with a pre-conceived ending -- there is not a pre-written script.

But there are principles -- principles that guided us as we wrestled with hundreds of constitutional suggestions this summer -- principles that have guided Canada throughout its history.

In historic speeches in Toronto and Quebec City last February, the Prime Minister set the groundwork for any constitutional changes.

First, any changes must lead to a more prosperous Canada.

Second, constitutional changes must lead to a more efficient federation and a more competitive nation.

Third, we must be guided by fairness -- a Canada that respects not only diversity, but also the equality of its citizens.

Fourth, changes must be practical and not restricted by "stale dogma or tired ideology."

Fifth, we must maintain certain national standards, such as our health care system and our system of portable pensions.

Sixth, we must move decision-making closer to the people and involve the people more in the decision-making process.

And finally, the rights of all Canadians must be safeguarded.

There is no hidden agenda -- and there should be no surprises to you. Because these principles also characterize the face of Canada to the world -- a Canada that you and your colleagues have chosen to study in all of its unique aspects.

We welcome your interest in our country, your research, and your ideas.

And we welcome your scholarship and your friendship.

In the months ahead, we have much work to do as a nation. But Canadians have always been equal to the challenge.

We are a stubborn but hardy lot, and we still have many lessons to learn ourselves. But we have much to teach the nations of the world as well.

And we will. Strong, proud, and united.