

BEFORE I PUT ON MY HAT AS SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, LET ME SPEAK FOR A MOMENT AS AN ALBERTAN WHO HAS BEEN ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN OUR PROVINCE AND OUR COUNTRY IN THE BITTER DECADE THAT BEGAN WITH THE CHANGES IN WORLD OIL PRICES. I WANT TO REFLECT BRIEFLY ON THAT EXPERIENCE, AND THE NEED TO PUT IT BEHIND US.

THE COUNTRY WENT THROUGH AN UNNATURAL PERIOD WHEN NATIONAL POLICY SEEMED TO BE DIRECTED AGAINST THE INTERESTS OF WESTERN CANADA. THAT WAS TRUE MOST STARKLY IN THE NATIONAL ENERGY PROGRAM AND THE FIRST LIBERAL PROPOSALS ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT, BUT THE IMPRESSION OF PREJUDICE ALSO ATTACHED TO POLICIES REGARDING VIA RAIL, THE CROW RATE, THE APPLICATION OF BILINGUALISM AND OTHER QUESTIONS. THAT PERIOD CHANGED RELATIONS BETWEEN WESTERN CANADA AND THE COUNTRY -- IT CREATED AN ADVERSARIAL ATMOSPHERE, IN WHICH IT WAS STEADILY MORE DIFFICULT TO GET AGREEMENT ON PROGRAMS, OR EVEN ON NATIONAL PURPOSES.

AS ANY WESTERN CANADIAN KNOWS, THERE WAS FERTILE GROUND FOR CONFLICT, BECAUSE THIS REGION HAS BEEN NURTURED ON A SUSPICION OF THE EAST. THAT IS PART OF THE LEGACY WITH WHICH OUR NEW GOVERNMENT HAS TO DEAL -- AND WE DO SO IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT, AMONG THE SIGNALS