

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for taking time from your summer to participate in this important forum. You are contributing to a plan of action that will be as critical to the economic future of our country as the recent positive constitutional developments can be for our political future.

There was a time in the past when many Canadians -- including those in government -- may have felt that the proper role of government was to set social and economic policy. The notion was that government was best positioned to know and protect the national interest and that the proper role of the private sector was to accommodate itself to the decisions of the public sector.

This led to the development of great divides among stakeholders and between them and the governments they elected. Public policy discussions often led academics, business people, labour and government to develop their own prescriptions, by the score, aimed at transforming our economy -- a tough design process that was often less than successful.

The chief reason for their notable lack of success was a lack of involvement of the people most directly concerned with the impact of the changes.

The 1980s marked a watershed in the process of public policy making. Canadians demanded, as never before, a real role in deciding on matters that are critical to their future. Just as the recent process of constitutional development was enriched by the participation of individual Canadians, so too was the Prosperity Initiative. I don't think that decision makers, whether in the private or public sectors, have fully adjusted to this new way of doing business. We have a long way to go, but we are all learning.

What is different about the plan of action you are building now?

Canadians from across the country have contributed to it. Having invested their evenings, weekends, and -- yes -- tax dollars in this exercise, they will not be satisfied unless their recommendations lead to real change.

As David McCamus no doubt indicated at the beginning of the conference, the Prosperity Steering Group has involved Canadians in the process of developing the ideas that are now before you. This conference is one of the final stages in developing a plan of action that will help Canada meet the competitive and learning challenges of the 1990s and beyond.

- Last year, when we were planning this Initiative, we felt that the only way to obtain Canadians' commitment to its outcome was to have them involved in developing the plan.