

Mr. President,

It is now exactly four months since the new government took office and I was sworn in as Secretary of State for External Affairs. And I'll tell you -- it's been quite some four months.

Anyone who hasn't been involved in a change of government, will find it hard to understand just what an intensive period we have been going through. There has been an enormous amount to do. First, we had to familiarize ourselves with the sheer mechanics of government. And since we have chosen to change the structure of decision-making at the centre, the whole process has been doubly difficult. For example, it has meant helping our senior civil servants adapt to new structures, and to work with the Ministers in a different way.

Second, we had to learn about the true state of affairs facing us. It wasn't until we were actually in office that we got access to the information we had asked for so often while in Opposition. The true state of affairs we found, particularly the government's financial affairs, was really quite different from what we had been led to expect. And believe me, it wasn't better.

In addition, of course, we have all of us been having a crash cram course on our individual portfolios. Speaking personally, this has been probably the most fascinating period of my life. I was truly lucky, in that I have had a long interest in international affairs, and, over the years, I have travelled to many different countries all around the world. But even so, the amount to learn has been tremendous.

As a Cabinet we have had to devote a great deal of time to the legislative programme we shall be introducing when the House opens next week. In parallel with this, we have been preparing our estimates, as part of that annual festival governments go through in the budgeting process. These exercises, of course, call for a drawing together of the information we have gathered, and the experience we have gained in our other activities -- and always keeping in mind the commitments we made while in Opposition.

So life in the past four months has been a relentless series of meetings, consultations, briefings and reading. And for me it has also meant attendance at five major international conferences on four continents -- the latest being the United Nations General Assembly in New York over the past ten days.

Now, I mention these things not to gain any sympathy for the hectic pace that all this has involved, nor am I trying to show what great value for money you as taxpayers are getting from the salary you pay me. I mention it rather to explain that until I started to think about what I should say to you, I really hadn't had many opportunities to reflect on the state of the world as it is today, of the kind of forces at play, and the impact all these things have on Canada.