

Another example is Glenow Building Products Ltd., a Calgary company that is a trailblazer in applying computer technology to producing windows and doors. Glenow has formed a strategic distribution agreement with Nippon Sheet Glass Co. Ltd., one of Japan's largest glass producers.

These companies have found that establishing strategic alliances, adapting new technologies and using partners to expand into foreign markets are all critical to keeping up with the competition. But how are we doing in general in keeping up with the competition? The World Economic Forum Report ranks Canada fifth in competitiveness among the 24 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries -- up from 11th place in 1986. We have a well educated work force. We have plentiful natural resources. We have an excellent telecommunications and transportation network. We have a competitive tax regime.

Those pluses are not guarantees of future prosperity. While Canada's overall ranking appears very good at first glance, our rankings in other areas, which are critical contributors to our future competitiveness, are troubling.

In the 1980s, while other nations made significant gains, Canada's productivity growth stalled, despite strong investments over the past six years. According to the World Economic Forum, Canada ranks 12th in productivity performance, with the U.S., Japan and much of Europe ahead of us.

Canada is a trading nation, yet we are slow in meeting the challenges of a global marketplace -- we rank 16th in terms of international orientation. Few other countries in the industrialized world are as dependent as Canada is on trade, so our products should be among the best in the world. Yet in product quality, design, packaging -- all critical to expanding markets -- we rank 13th.

The Prosperity Initiative is the opportunity we must seize now to build that future. To build that competitive economy, I believe we need a new spirit, new partnerships, new approaches to competitiveness. That's what people are saying in the Prosperity Initiatives' Community Talks. People are looking for more co-operation among the stakeholders in our economy. They especially want more co-operation among all levels of government, and more partnerships between management and labour, for the competitive advantage of everyone. They are saying that we must change our attitudes toward work, organization, workers, learning, skills and competition if we are to capitalize on our strengths. Clearly, we've got to take a good, hard look at ourselves.