

Canada recently received the visit of The Prince of Wales, who undertook engagements in Vancouver and Victoria two weeks ago. In May, The Duke of Edinburgh will attend the Fifth Commonwealth Study Conference which opens in Kingston on May 18th. In July, Princess Margaret will take part in celebrations marking the 75th Anniversary of the entry into Confederation of the Provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Canada has very close and enduring ties with the Netherlands and I am greatly looking forward to representing our country at the accession to the Throne of Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands in Amsterdam on April 30th.

I have had the pleasure of visiting all the provincial capitals and the Northwest Territories during my first year in office. My wife and I are now looking forward to certain engagements in the Yukon and in smaller communities across our vast and beautiful land. Discovering Canada and meeting Canadians increases daily our awareness of the great natural and human resources of the country in which we are privileged to live.

We observe today not only the beginning of a new Parliament but the start of a new era. As Canada enters the 1980s, we confront serious challenges, but we look forward to even greater opportunities. Like our forbears, this generation of Canadians will be equal to the test. We will meet and overcome the challenges ahead, for the history of this land has proven, again and again, that everything is possible if our will to go on building together is strong.

Canadians expect much of this Parliament. The country asks for action and action now. The first task is to clear the accumulation of essential legislation left from previous Parliaments. This backlog must be dispatched expeditiously so that the affairs of the state may be put in good order. To that end, my Government is relying on the good will of members and senators of all parties.

This Parliament must also act quickly to put in place a program for the future. In the recent general election, my Ministers received a mandate for a program which will provide security, equity, and opportunity for the Canada of the 1980s. In the course of that campaign, my Ministers made a number of pledges which will form the core of this Parliament's work. You will be asked to consider a program of action designed:

- to respond to individual needs by promoting greater security for the elderly, expanded opportunities for the young, and equality for women;

- to achieve security of energy supply at a fair price for all Canadians;

- to promote a national development policy that will provide jobs, stimulate growth, build upon regional strengths, and increase Canadian ownership and control of our economy;

- to strengthen national institutions, while at the same time making them more responsive to provincial and regional goals;

- to ensure that Canada plays a vigorous part in the world beyond our borders.

All these commitments will be kept; these pledges redeemed; the mandate fulfilled.

The character of our people should inspire confidence in the ability of Canada to meet the challenges of the 1980s. We have the capacity and the imagination to make this a decade of opportunity rather than a decade of doubt. But there is one question which clouds the horizon and obstructs the view. It is the question of the unity of our country.

Will Canada still exist as a country at the end of this decade, or will it have been broken up by the tensions of our past and recent history? Will we continue to build our future together as Canadians, or will we give in to the siren song of regional isolationism?

In every part of Canada there are forces which are driving us apart rather than bringing us together. Canada's tradition is one of sharing, but in every region this principle is under assault. In the Atlantic, disadvantaged for so long, the promise of new resource riches has already led to squabbles about their future distribution. In Central Canada there are some who fear that the economic strength of this region is somehow slipping away, and this in turn has led to envy and bitterness. In the West, many believe that their problems are ignored, their voices are unheard, and their contribution is unrecognized.

To all these forces of discontent my Government has one clear response. Canada will endure, grow and prosper. The men and women of this country have always realized that their participation in a society that spans the northern half of North America is infinitely more exciting and enriching than confining themselves in any one province or one region. The renewed federalism, to which my Government makes a fundamental and all-embracing commitment, will not only strengthen individual and collective rights and freedoms, it will also ensure that Canada remains:

- a strong country, with first claim on the loyalty of all its citizens;

- a country that regards diversity as an asset, not a liability;

- a country whose people share their wealth first with those who need it most;

- a country that encourages initiative, welcomes daring, and promotes enterprise;

- a country that opens its eyes, its mind, and its heart to the larger community of nations, refusing to regard its own national borders as the outward limits of the universe.

Doubt must be cast aside, uncertainty must end, the forces of disintegration—whether they be economic or political in origin—must be opposed in every part of the land. That is why my Government hopes that the referendum, to be held in Quebec sometime during the coming weeks, will be a time when Quebecers affirm their will and their right to be fully Canadian, a time when all Canadians will reaffirm their desire to live together in the country to which we all belong, and which belongs to all of us.