

I am honoured by your invitation to appear before this important Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) symposium. Your organization has always taken a keen interest in the development of policies that support our prosperity, perhaps because its members are the source of so much of our prosperity.

I'm also grateful for the opportunity to pay tribute to Laurent Thibault who rendered absolutely outstanding service not only to the CMA but also to the country. Larry Thibault has had not only the interest of manufacturers at heart, he's also had our country's interest at heart. In his new role as Co-Chair of the new Canadian Labour Force Development Board, I know Larry will add to an already distinguished record of achievement. I am sure that all of you will want to join with me in thanking him, and would want to add your good wishes for his future success.

Well before it became fashionable, Larry was pointing out the need for us to improve our competitive position if we are to retain our existing markets and develop new ones in the face of globalization and integration.

The manufacturing sector is vital to Canada's competitive standing, and its prosperity, in the 1990s. The challenge for all of us is to make sure the Canadian trademark maintains its reputation worldwide, that Made-in-Canada means second-to-none in products, productivity and quality, and that Canada remains prosperous. Canadians are aware of this challenge. They know that what got them this far won't get them where they need to go.

Last month, we launched the Prosperity Initiative. Our objective is to develop a plan of action for business, labour, government and others to meet the pressing competitive challenges. We must build a new partnership for prosperity. We have to put parochial bickering aside and consider the good of our country. If we don't, the world will pass us by.

Frankly one of our difficulties is that not all Canadians agree on the challenges we face. If you need an illustration, simply look at the reaction to Professor Michael Porter's report on Canadian Competitiveness. Some said it was exactly right in its prescription; others said there was nothing new in it -- implying that Canadians could ignore it for that reason. Still others said that we did not need to move away from resources extraction and processing -- we only needed to do it more efficiently. Even the business community can't agree that we face a number of common competitive challenges.

In the weeks since we launched the Prosperity Initiative, I have had the opportunity to talk to some people who ask why we must consult. "Haven't we had enough talk?" they ask. "Hasn't the time passed when we need to find the facts? Isn't it time we faced the facts?" My reply is that, yes, we do already have a very good idea about what the challenges are. In fact, I am sure all of us in this room, have some good ideas on how we could