

A second, more populist group -- the Citizen's Forum on Canada's Future led by Chairman Keith Spicer -- criss-crossed the country and gathered Canadians' views on important matters such as bilingualism, the place of Canada's aboriginal peoples, decision-making, the role of parties and their leaders, and numerous other topics.

As with most exercises in direct democracy, the process was messy, the views expressed were visceral, in many cases strongly worded and uncompromising.

In April of this year, the Prime Minister established a Special Committee of Cabinet -- of which I was a member -- to prepare a set of constitutional proposals that would respond to the concerns of Canadians and provide for the needs of future generations.

Again, the process was messy, the views expressed were visceral, in many cases strongly worded and uncompromising.

For five months we met in Charlottetown; in Quebec City; in Iqaluit; in Winnipeg; in Kelowna, British Columbia.

As we travelled across Canada, around the Cabinet table, and at the dinner table, we re-lived Canada's history, we pondered Canada's current condition, and we planned for Canada's future.

On September 24, we released our conclusions -- a set of 28 constitutional proposals called "Shaping Canada's Future Together."

As most of you I am sure know, they go to the very heart of Canada by addressing three basic questions:

- o Who are we and what values do we share?
- o What types of institutions do we need to respond to our collective needs? and
- o What is the best way to provide for a more prosperous future for all Canadians?

On the question of shared values, there is a section on "Shared Citizenship and Diversity" which deals with our fundamental freedoms; the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, including the addition of property rights; a revision to the "notwithstanding clause," essentially a provincial veto, which makes it more difficult to invoke; and finally, a special "Canada clause" which outlines our shared vision and values, including a clear definition of what we mean by a "distinct society" in Quebec -- distinct in language, culture, and the civil law code.