

I recently saw a cartoon about an imaginary conversation between an old Russian woman and a Russian cosmonaut who had just returned after a year in space.

"Comrade," the cosmonaut begins, "I've been in space for a year. It's good to be back in Leningrad."

"Sorry," the woman replies, "Leningrad is now St. Petersburg."

"Leningrad out? But Lenin was the father of communism."

"Sorry, communism is out. We are now capitalists."

"Capitalists? But how could Gorbachev allow this to happen?"

"Sorry, Gorbachev is out. He was overthrown by the hardliners."

"You mean the hardliners are in charge?"

"No, the hardliners are out. And Yeltsin took over."

"You mean Yeltsin is the head of the Soviet Union?"

"No, the Soviet Union is out, too."

"No Soviet Union?" cries the cosmonaut in disbelief.

"Quick, alert the Warsaw Pact."

"My son," says the old woman, "we need to talk."

A few years ago, we Canadians were like that Russian cosmonaut. There had been rapid changes. Our familiar world was shifting. We needed to talk.

The federal government helped to get Canadians talking. We invited Canadians to take part in the Prosperity Initiative. We asked them to work together to develop a plan of action to address our economic challenges.

Canadians responded. They talked together in 186 Community Talks and in regional consultations in five major centres. They talked at round tables, conferences and in forums. They talked about science and technology, education, government, quality, investment and trade.

A remarkable consensus developed about creating our economic future.

Canadians want to meet the global economic challenge. To meet it, they said, we all must change. We must change how we work,