

essential for Canada as a nation to take the steps necessary to keep us competitive on the world stage.

As you know, that was the impetus behind the Prosperity Initiative that I launched a year and a half ago. Working together, the government and the private sector engaged in one of the most comprehensive national series of consultations ever undertaken. The Prosperity steering group's recommendations will, hopefully, be the basis for concrete action by both the government and the private sector.

The whole approach to this initiative has been one of partnership. It envisages a major role for the private sector, as well as more focused government support. As a government, we were told to eliminate duplication; to provide export incentives and financing to match the global competition; and to generate market intelligence on a timely basis through the Trade Commissioner Service.

We also heard the strong desire for a co-ordinated global trade, investment and technology strategy, led by the private sector. Such a strategy could double the number of firms exporting within the next three years.

At the heart of our competitiveness challenge, of course, is the need to improve the quality of Canadian education and training. A specific response to this need has been the provision by the government of a further \$4.3 million for the newly created Forum for International Trade Training (FITT).

This program involves the participation of educational and business institutions across Canada, and should materially help to make this country more export-ready.

In the same vein, I am committed to upgrading the skills of the officers who work for you, the exporting community, within External Affairs and International Trade Canada. The Foreign Service Institute, which began operations this year, will ensure that our officials are in tune with the international business scene and the needs of Canadian exporters. Indeed, our latest class of trade commissioner recruits is among us tonight, to begin networking with the exporting community.

Looking at the future, we must find ways to remain competitive, both domestically and internationally, in a world of constant change. The private sector must increasingly rely on its own strength to penetrate new markets. The government will do its part to open the doors of these new markets, but it is you in the private sector who must take the initiative of entering them.

Naturally, the federal government will try to provide whatever assistance we can to help Canadian business take advantage of the market opportunities created as a result of our trade policy initiatives. In that vein, I plan soon to announce further program enhancements for the North American market. This, I