

Instead of seeing the talent of our statesmen fettered, harassed and restrained within the narrow limits of local politics, we shall find its scope extended to a whole continent, while a more vast and more natural field will be thrown open to the active and enterprising spirit of the North American Provinces. ¹²³

Participants in the Confederation Debates felt that the seriousness of the topic under consideration was bringing out the best in them. Colonel Arthur Rankin allowed that "it is to me a matter of congratulation to observe, that at last, something has arisen which has given a higher tone to the debates in this House, and to the utterances of our public men." He attributed this improvement "to the fact that we are discussing a question of greater importance than has ever before been brought under our consideration." Finally, he added, the Legislative Assembly has turned its attention "to something worthy of the consideration of gentlemen who aspire to establish for themselves the reputation of statesmen."¹²⁴

In a remarkably eloquent address, Thomas D'Arcy McGee celebrated the capacity of the confederation question to elevate the tone of public life throughout British North America. "The provincial mind, it would seem, under the inspiration of a great question, leaped at a single bound out of the slough of mere mercenary struggle for office, and took post on the high and honorable ground from which alone this great subject can be taken in all its dimensions." He congratulated the "various authors and writers" on confederation because they seem "to be speaking or writing as if in the visible presence of all the colonies." No longer are such public men merely "hole-and-corner celebrities." They now write and speak as though "their words will be scanned and weighed afar off as well as at home." He was pleased to observe that "many men now speak with a dignity and carefulness which formerly did not characterize them, when they were watched only by their own narrow and struggling section, and weighed only according to a stunted local standard." He hoped that the proposed confederation would "supply to all our public men just ground for uniting in nobler and more profitable contests than those which have signalized the past."¹²⁵