

Speech from the Throne

After a decade of debate, an historic agreement with the provinces has been reached that will improve benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, beginning on January 1, 1987. It will also put the plan on a sound financial footing for the future.

The federal Pension Benefits Standards Act, which sets standards that employer-sponsored pension plans must meet, has also been completely revised. The changes introduced will be of fundamental significance for wage earners, especially women in the labour force, and for the spouses of pension plan members.

The introduction of the new Canadian Jobs Strategy, which for the first time sets targets for women's participation, has helped women, particularly immigrant women, and the unemployed in their search for lasting and productive employment.

My government is encouraged by the decline in youth unemployment. However, much remains to be done. My Ministers are committed to federal-provincial and private sector cooperative action that will enhance job opportunities and encourage greater participation and involvement of young Canadians in productive and challenging initiatives.

Canadians recognize the courage and talent of our disabled citizens. Inspired by the example of Rick Hansen, we are made more aware of the potential for new directions and initiatives to aid the disabled.

My government will work with the provinces, the private sector and voluntary organizations to develop measures to ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills that are the prerequisites for participation in an advanced economy.

Ongoing improvements have also been made in assuring greater income security for the elderly. All widows and widowers aged 60 to 64 are now eligible to receive Spouses' Allowance Benefits. A new program of Older Worker Adjustment is also being negotiated with the provinces. The Government will introduce legislation to increase tax assistance for retirement savings through Registered Retirement Savings Plans. The object will be to make access to tax assistance fairer between employees and the self-employed, and to increase the flexibility of options for the use of Registered Retirement Savings Plan savings by senior citizens.

In a spirit of deep respect and appreciation, my government will continue to address the needs of Canada's veterans. The Veterans Independence Program will be broadened to allow a greater number of First World War veterans to qualify immediately for the benefits designed to enable them to remain independent in their own homes rather than be compelled to accept institutional care. New legislation will also be introduced to streamline the pension process to provide faster, more efficient service to veterans.

In acknowledging the tens of thousands of Canadians who serve their communities and country as volunteers, my Ministers will propose further support to encourage the growth of voluntarism in our society.

Canada's amateur athletes instill pride in our country and achieve excellence in international competition. My government renews its commitment to the increased participation of young Canadian men and women in a wide variety of athletic endeavours, including the 1988 Winter Olympics that Canada will host in Calgary.

It is imperative that Canada's multicultural and multiracial reality be integral to all facets of our national life to reflect the vital and distinctive nature of Canadian society.

To that end, my government will: encourage the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes our many minority communities and that contributes so essentially to Canada's economic development; extend recognition to minority community organizations in our society and increase equitable participation in appointments to federal boards and agencies; and affirm that any existing remnants of institutional barriers that limit opportunities for visible minorities or other groups or individuals are dismantled.

My government will continue to assert a positive leadership role in opposing racism and discrimination, in whatever form. It will continue to resist injustices imposed upon any ethnic, religious, or racial group in the knowledge that to do otherwise would diminish this nation's profound commitment to universal tolerance and human dignity.

Honourable Members: you will be asked to consider amendments to the Canadian Human Rights Act, which will represent further progress in the long march of this nation towards full equality.

My government will propose comprehensive legislation designed to simplify and improve Canada's refugee determination process. These reforms will produce a system which is both fair and effective. It will assist genuine refugees in need of protection and discourage abuse of Canada's humanitarian tradition.

My government recognizes fully the essential relationship between a healthy environment and the quality of Canadian life. A new Environmental Protection Act will be introduced to improve my government's capacity, in concert with the provinces, to deal effectively with pollution, focusing on toxic chemicals. You will also be asked to consider measures to improve water quality in Canada and to safeguard citizens from the hazards of chemicals in our society.

My government remains determined to pursue with the United States the rapid implementation of the recommendations of our Special Envoys with respect to acid rain.

Following the recommendations of an industry-labour-government task force, my government will propose legislation to establish a Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System.

My government has begun to renew our economy and society for the benefit of all Canadians. It has acted to strengthen our national sovereignty and to affirm our independence. But there remains much more to be done.

Each generation of Canadians has risen to the challenges of nation-building. Today's generation confronts its own challenges: we must act now to ensure that the ties which bind us together as Canadians remain strong, in our national cultural institutions, in our sense of community and in our pride as a nation.

Whether through railways in the last century, or broadcasting in this century, Canadians have responded to the task of building one nation across a massive continent. Throughout our history, Canadians have acquired credentials as peacekeepers, as entrepreneurs, as innovators.

Today the new challenge is to assert our interests in a world that is intimate, competitive, and driven by rapid technological change.

Your challenge, in this Parliament, is to apply those Canadian qualities with the same vision and the same commitment that created a nation from a wilderness. The new challenge is to open up new horizons for Canadians—those to be reached through knowledge and information.

In this new environment, we must ensure that all Canadians can pursue their own dreams and expand their own opportunities through greater use of information and knowledge about one another and the world beyond.

To begin debate on this fundamental challenge, my government will define its objectives and ways to achieve them.

It will be essential to ensure that the ideas and information which flow through a modern national communications system reflect the distinct cultural values of the Canadian people. For this reason, the government will act to strengthen the Canadian broadcasting system and renew our commitment to Canadian cultural values.

To a considerable degree, our sense of national purpose, our national identity, and our economic prosperity will depend on our capacity to respond to the opportunities which flow from this new information age.

Our dual linguistic heritage and unique history situate Canada within two great communities of nations, the Commonwealth and la Francophonie. Canada is thus positioned to reaffirm its role in the world by developing joint projects with member countries of these two vast families of nations, to share with them Canadian communications and information technologies while bringing to Canadians a greater diversity of ideas and cultural expressions.

By so doing, Canada will renew in innovative ways its commitment to an established institution, the Commonwealth, and contribute actively to the emergence of a new one, la Francophonie.

The great tasks to which you are committed in this Parliament are national in character. The important reforms you will have considered and adopted give to each the opportunity to make a valued, individual contribution to the legislative process.

Your deliberations must address the aspirations of all Canadians and reflect their pride and confidence in the enduring strengths of the political institutions