

I am delighted to have this chance to meet with your Committee so soon after assuming my new responsibilities. I am especially looking forward to your questions in a few minutes, but would like first just to say a word or two about a couple of things that are very much on my mind these days, and which, I know, relate directly to some of your ongoing interests and concerns.

Two weeks ago, in the Throne Speech, the Government laid out the dual keystones of its agenda for the new session -- unity and prosperity. As I said in the House of Commons the next day, the two are inextricably linked. The shared desire to build on our prosperity helps us see beyond any differences we may have in language, race, or partisan affiliation.

Today, I want to address myself to the prosperity side of that proposition, and more specifically, to the enduring fact of Canadian life that the prosperity of our people is founded upon trade.

Trade built this country, whether the export was fish or furs, timber or wheat, autos or engineering services and telecommunications. Trade has kept food on our tables and clothes on our backs for over 300 years. Trade has helped build the high standard of living and the enviable social safety net we enjoy today.

Trade with the world must be the foundation of our prosperity for generations to come, and the removal of inter-provincial trade barriers within Canada must be a feature of our initiatives towards a new unity.

Today, the whole world is trading. Competition is tough. We did not make it that way and we cannot wish it away. A failure to trade is a failure to compete; and the inability to compete would mean failure in trade. That is a circle that cannot be broken. It is a reality we cannot ignore.

But the environment in which we trade has changed as dramatically as the world has changed since the age of Cartier and Cabot, or Borden and King.

We can no longer rely on the abundance of our natural resources to provide our standard of living, nor on the buoyancy of our automotive industry. These have been great strengths for us as a country. They have been the source of our prosperity and the bulk of our trade.

Now there are new challenges. We must reach further to provide the high-quality and high value-added products and services that will support a continued improvement in our standard of living and quality of life.