

Minister of Industry,
Science and Technology and
Minister for International Trade



Ministre de l'Industrie, des
Sciences et de la Technologie et
ministre du Commerce extérieur

Statement

Déclaration

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**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS BY
THE HONOURABLE MICHAEL WILSON,
MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND
MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE,
TO A CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY THE
STEERING GROUP ON PROSPERITY
"STRATEGY FOR PROSPERITY"**

**EDMONTON, Alberta
July 14, 1992**

Thank you ladies and gentlemen for taking time from your summer to participate in this important forum. You are contributing to a plan of action that will be as critical to the economic future of our country as the recent positive constitutional developments can be for our political future.

There was a time in the past when many Canadians -- including those in government -- may have felt that the proper role of government was to set social and economic policy. The notion was that government was best positioned to know and protect the national interest and that the proper role of the private sector was to accommodate itself to the decisions of the public sector.

This led to the development of great divides among stakeholders and between them and the governments they elected. Public policy discussions often led academics, business people, labour and government to develop their own prescriptions, by the score, aimed at transforming our economy -- a tough design process that was often less than successful.

The chief reason for their notable lack of success was a lack of involvement of the people most directly concerned with the impact of the changes.

The 1980s marked a watershed in the process of public policy making. Canadians demanded, as never before, a real role in deciding on matters that are critical to their future. Just as the recent process of constitutional development was enriched by the participation of individual Canadians, so too was the Prosperity Initiative. I don't think that decision makers, whether in the private or public sectors, have fully adjusted to this new way of doing business. We have a long way to go, but we are all learning.

What is different about the plan of action you are building now?

Canadians from across the country have contributed to it. Having invested their evenings, weekends, and -- yes -- tax dollars in this exercise, they will not be satisfied unless their recommendations lead to real change.

As David McCamus no doubt indicated at the beginning of the conference, the Prosperity Steering Group has involved Canadians in the process of developing the ideas that are now before you. This conference is one of the final stages in developing a plan of action that will help Canada meet the competitive and learning challenges of the 1990s and beyond.

- Last year, when we were planning this Initiative, we felt that the only way to obtain Canadians' commitment to its outcome was to have them involved in developing the plan.

- I know that when we began this Initiative there were some in the country -- even some in this room -- who questioned the process. They were concerned that the process of developing a plan of action through public consultations would be fruitless.

I am glad to report that their concerns were not justified.

Many expected that there would be little possibility of their accomplishing anything beyond highlighting huge and irreconcilable differences. And yet, the remarkable fact was that there was a very substantial degree of convergence of views throughout all the consultations across the country.

This was reflected not only in the community and regional talks, but also in the sectoral or portfolio discussions as well as in the national consultations.

It is seen in the participants' response to issues like:

- building collaboration across sectoral and confrontational divides in business, labour and government to meet common goals;
- focusing on quality and value-added in our exports;
- flattening organizations and thus empowering more people with functional decision-making;
- focusing on renewal of human resources;
- making government institutions more responsive to Canadians' desire to build self-reliance, and making economic decision-making more collaborative;
- revitalizing social safety nets to create opportunities;
- building strategic alliances to take full advantage of the trading opportunities gained for Canadians through trade liberalization; and
- finding the capital to finance innovation upon which expansion of our knowledge-based economy depends.

Throughout the consultations, Canadians have suggested ways that Canada should adjust to the realities of a global knowledge-based economy. They focused not so much on what governments should do to effect this change, but rather on what individuals, communities and companies could and should be doing. A recurring theme was the search for 'best practices.' Canadians want to

know the techniques on which our organizations and entrepreneurs have founded their success. They not only want to celebrate that success, they want those techniques widely disseminated so every Canadian can share in that success.

They acknowledge the role for government, but they also want to be more self-reliant. Participants have acknowledged that there are many things that government can and must do better, but most also agreed that our learning and competitive challenges will not be met by delivering a wish list to governments. On the contrary, they are looking to their own communities, companies and associations to develop the means we need to develop skills and become more capable competitors.

The challenge for government is determining how much governing is needed in the future -- I am sure that not everyone will agree on the amount or kind of instruments we use. Meeting the challenge implies a change in leadership. Instead of governments and other stakeholders acting on their own, with little regard for each other, we must strike a better balance -- one that respects the need to decide, but also respects the need to ensure the largest possible support for the decision.

The resounding outcome of the consultations is that Canadians want to be masters of their own destiny, not victims of a destiny decided for them by a global marketplace. Canadians have been demanding urgent action to do so. Furthermore, they want to do this, not merely to secure good jobs for themselves, but to preserve for future generations the quality of life they have enjoyed. This is a reflection of the nobler aspirations of all Canadians. I think it is a goal that every Canadian can endorse.

They have contributed, as you are, to building an action plan for securing prosperity in a rapidly changing economic environment. Doing so is no different than developing a business plan. Canadians regard it as just as crucial to Canada's probability of success in the future, as a sound business plan is to the success of any of your organizations.

Canadians from across this country have said that we can no longer afford to muddle along without a co-ordinated plan, and developing one is no small undertaking. However, it is not enough to develop such a plan. The plan will contain challenges for every Canadian. From both the private and public sector -- companies, individuals, parents, employers, entrepreneurs and employees, students and teachers -- every Canadian will be called upon to implement it. Canadians must be prepared to act on it! Canadians are saying to you here this evening and to their neighbours across the country:

- You will be affected by the plan.

- You will have to adjust to the realities that the plan is designed to address, whether you do so in the context of meeting the objectives of the plan or not.

I know from my discussions with Canadians that they are looking for a report that no one in Canada can ignore. They are especially interested in ensuring that the plan of action includes an explanation of how government actions can support and reinforce the actions being taken by the private and non-governmental public sectors. Canadians have high expectations of this process. They will not accept anything less than a national commitment to implementing the plan of action. But the fact is that the success or failure of this process is not entirely in their hands, just as it is not entirely in the hands of the federal government.

I want to conclude with a few words about the process following this conference from the government's perspective.

I know the Steering Group is planning to publish the plan of action in September. I don't yet know what the report will contain. No one does -- though you are playing a key role in developing it. I can say that -- so far as the federal government is concerned -- we are prepared to take bold steps to implement the product of this yearlong consultation process.

But, whether governments follow every action to the nth degree is not going to amount to very much, if the major players on the economic scene stand back and hold our coats! The goal of building a prosperous future for Canada in a rapidly changing economic environment cannot be met by government alone.

That is why I am here to solicit not simply your input into the process -- a process to which thousands of Canadians have already contributed their time and energy. Its success will depend on it being practical -- and this can be one of your key contributions.

I am also looking for your commitment to implementing the plan of action when it is published. Canada needs this action plan to secure for its future generations the kind of prosperity that this generation regarded as its birthright. If it is to succeed, everyone needs to get off the bench and get into the game. So Canadians need your leadership to help them make this plan the heart of our long-term strategy to secure a prosperous future.

Canada needs your commitment, and I am convinced that you will come through for her.

Thank you.