


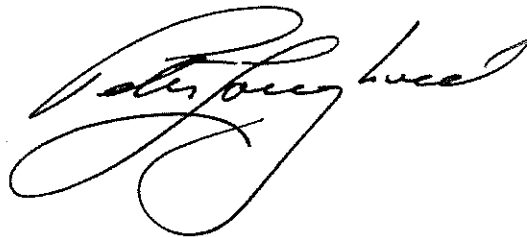
The Confederation 2000 Conferences, aimed at helping to build a new consensus for political change in Canada, have engaged over one hundred citizens from every part of the country.

The first Conference in Ottawa on March 8 and 9 gave rise to the creation of three task forces composed of sixty participants. Many other conference members contributed their ideas to an intensive process of consultation and deliberation over an eight week period.

At the second Conference on May 3 and 4, the task force findings and recommendations were debated and a consensus was reached. The following report is a reflection of this consensus -- a remarkable example of partnership and understanding in the quest to build a stronger Canada.



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Who we are

1. As participants in The Confederation 2000 Conferences, we come from every part of Canada. All of us have different professions, vocations and affiliations. But only one characteristic weds us to this initiative -- we are citizens united by a common passion for our country.

We do not pretend to have all the answers. Indeed, we are not sure there can be one ultimate expression of the soul of a dynamic country. We want to explore practical ways of building on our strengths to create a better quality of life for all Canadians in the 21st century.

2. As but one group of concerned citizens, we recognize our limits. It is up to governments and their leaders to put in place the political changes that are needed. And it is up to citizens across the country, in a myriad of different ways, to bring about the more fundamental shift in attitudes and perceptions needed to support these changes. We offer our collective experience and judgment as one contribution to this common effort to build a stronger Canada.

Why we are taking action

3. On October 30, 1995, the separatist option of a sovereign Quebec failed by only a narrow margin to win the referendum. The future of Canada as a whole was thus put at risk. Many Quebecers who had previously supported the federalist option were doubtful that Quebec's needs would be met within the Canadian framework. Change clearly is needed. Nevertheless,

we believe that most Quebecers, and indeed most other Canadians, continue to share basic values and the desire to build a better future. We believe it can best be achieved if citizens across this great country work together for a vision of Canada with which they can all identify.

4. The answer cannot be found through battles between governments. Our common and most urgent goal must be to find solutions that will improve the lives of children in poverty, single parents trapped on welfare, talented young people frustrated by lack of opportunity, hard-working taxpayers with high debt loads and countless workers displaced or threatened by the profound changes taking place in our economy. We must focus our efforts on the one true purpose of our governments – to help us help each other in our daily struggle to build better lives for ourselves and for our children.
5. We do have much to celebrate. As Canadians, we have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt, and we have accomplished a great deal: the rule of law, an orderly civil society, a strong democratic tradition with guaranteed rights and freedoms, high levels of prosperity, an increasingly rich diversity of talent, what is still the world's best quality of life and, as a result, an enviable reputation in every corner of the earth.
6. Our future prosperity and best potential, however, is intimately linked to the unity of Canada. We believe that meeting the challenge of national renewal will help to provide the consumer confidence and increased investment needed to fuel strong economic growth and to sustain an effective social safety net. Equally, job growth and wealth creation demonstrate the value of our country to its citizens and will help efforts at political renewal. We cannot achieve one without the other.

7. Daunting the challenge may be, but we face it with confidence and with vigour. The people of Canada are an extraordinary resource, and if we work together to unleash our potential, there is nothing we cannot achieve.

How we see the challenge

8. Our **vision** is of Canadians proud of our achievements and of the values that unite us in our diversity, creating wealth and work, sharing our prosperity, caring for the less fortunate and wanting to contribute to a better world.
9. Our **goal** must be to renew hope in our future by enabling Canadians of all origins and cultures to feel at home in this country, to realize their potential and to fulfill their aspirations individually and collectively.
10. We face a threefold challenge in achieving this goal:
 - to keep the country strong and united in a way that celebrates the linguistic duality of Canada and the cultural diversity of its population while recognizing the unique character of Quebec, the legitimate aspirations of Aboriginal peoples and the right of anglophone and francophone minorities to preserve their own identity;
 - to embrace a new concept of our federation as a community of citizens and a partnership of federal and provincial governments that, in exercising their respective sovereignties, can jointly lead and manage the federation for the greater benefit and prosperity of all citizens;

- to renew our institutions to make this concept of partnership work.
11. We should move pragmatically and incrementally within this overall vision of renewal. We should proceed through a series of mutually reinforcing steps toward a package of new arrangements, some of which eventually should be enshrined in our Constitution or recognized as a convention of the Constitution.
 12. Moving incrementally does not mean moving slowly. On the contrary, by breaking the challenge into manageable steps, we wipe out the excuses for not acting. We must proceed as soon as possible with meaningful, concrete change. Each step that we undertake must be feasible. And at each step, we must deliver what we promise.
 13. Success will depend on citizens choosing to become involved as active partners with their governments in the process of building a national consensus and putting it into action. Together, we must foster dialogue where there has been none, dispel the myths that confuse our sense of purpose and build confidence by spreading the facts and sharing our dreams.
 14. Throughout this process, we must seek collective success, not a result measured by winners and losers. We want to build a renewed federation in which Canadians in every part of the country can feel hope for their future, fulfill their aspirations and enjoy the sense of security that flows from being part of a strong and confident community.

What governments can do

The elements of consensus

15. A consensus is growing in Canada that appears to favour more efficient and more accountable governments, governments that work in harmony and that carry out their respective roles responsibly. The federal government speaks for all Canadians in matters for which it is responsible under the Constitution. The governments of the provinces and territories speak for their respective populations in areas which the Constitution has placed under their jurisdiction. Our federal system of government gives legitimacy to these two orders of government and provides that each is sovereign in its sphere of jurisdiction.

But Canadians in increasing numbers are expressing dissatisfaction with the present situation and demands are growing for a “rebalancing” of federal-provincial responsibilities. Such a rebalancing will serve all citizens of Canada by providing them with better, more responsive government. At the same time, it will address a number of issues of particular concern to Quebec.

16. The Government of Canada has begun to respond to some of these demands. In the 1996 Throne Speech, Ottawa has said:
 - It will not use its spending power to create new shared-cost programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction without the consent of the majority of the provinces. Any new program will be designed so that non-participating provinces will be compensated, provided they establish equivalent or comparable initiatives.

- It is ready to curtail its activities in a range of policy areas that fall within provincial jurisdiction.
 - It will work with the provinces to develop agreed-upon values and principles to underlie the social union and to explore new approaches to decision-making in social policy.
 - It will work with the provinces to take concrete steps to further improve the functioning of the Canadian economic union.
 - It will seek to improve public participation in identifying and formulating policies and programs.
17. Meaningful action following upon these statements of intent is urgently needed and would be a breakthrough in rebalancing the Canadian federation. The key issue is how to move from the good intentions of thirty years of reports, speeches and failed efforts at reform to achieve the real changes that are necessary at this critical crossroads of our history.

The rebalancing challenge

18. We need greater clarity in the functions of our two orders of government. Not all functions fit neatly into a single jurisdiction, but there is significant scope for reducing overlap and duplication. We will be better served by governments more focussed on their essential roles and better able to be effective within their assigned responsibilities.
19. The test of which government should do what should be straightforward. We call it a “citizen-centred” approach to the delivery of public services -- what programs and services can be delivered most effectively by which order of government.

20. How to proceed? The federal government has said in the 1996 Throne Speech that it is ready to curtail its activities in several areas that fall within provincial jurisdiction. Labour market training, forestry, mining and recreation are mentioned. To these, we would add labour market adjustment, housing and municipal and urban affairs. These changes would benefit all Canadians while addressing issues, such as labour market adjustment and training, that are of particular concern to Quebec.
21. While seeking a leaner and more focussed national government, we also seek a stronger and more effective national government in those areas of jurisdiction it retains. We seek a federal government more committed to a stronger economic union; expanded international trade, development and security; an enhanced national capacity for research and innovation and an effective social union achieved in partnership with provincial and territorial governments; and stronger national institutions that unite Canadians and promote our identity.
22. But what of the areas where Canadians expect involvement and services on the part of both governments? Here, the federal government and the provinces should agree on a sensible division of their responsibilities -- for example, in freshwater fisheries, agriculture, tourism, regional and industrial development, the environment, culture, communications and international trade development. In these areas, and perhaps in others as well, there is a critical need for the federal government and the provinces to work in partnership to provide Canadians with efficient, coherent and cost-effective services. We also recognize that the power to delegate and the use of concurrent

powers could provide a flexibility that is now lacking in our Constitution.

The federal spending power

23. Ottawa's use of the federal spending power has been a positive force in creating a Canada-wide system of social programs such as health care (Canada Health Act), education (Established Programs Financing and Canada Student Loans), and social assistance (Canada Assistance Plan). But its unilateral use of the spending power has also caused conflict within the federation by effectively extending the federal hand into areas of the exclusive jurisdiction of provincial governments. It has been a significant source of irritation to Quebec and the Western provinces and has contributed to the country's fiscal problems.
24. This conflict has grown more intense over time because the provinces and territories had little say in the development of programs and of the conditions attached to federal transfers, and because no adequate process exists to manage the reform of social programs as those transfers shrink and as conditions in the country change.
25. The unilateral use of the federal spending power is outdated. Moreover, the growing cost of interest on the federal debt means that Ottawa can no longer afford to maintain, much less expand, its unilateral approach.
26. As stated in the Throne Speech, the federal government should not use its spending power to create new programs and policies in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction unless it has the consent of the majority of provinces. Moreover, that proposal provides that non-participating provinces would be offered equitable compensation. However, contrary to what is stated in

the Throne Speech, we believe such compensation should be unconditional. It should not be contingent on the establishment of any comparable initiatives. The reason for this position is clear: new federal programs created under the spending power, by definition, would be in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.

The social and economic union

27. Canada's social union is the way we express our common values and principles of citizenship. Its key features include the equality of access to health care, education and training and our tradition of sharing our collective wealth across regions and with people in need. We need a shared acceptance that Canada as a whole can be strong only if each of its regions is strong and that we all have a responsibility to work together to attain that end. Equalization payments by the federal government must be sufficient to allow provincial and territorial governments to provide quality public services on a comparable basis throughout Canada. Together, social programs and equalization payments form a basic part of our Canadian identity and are vital to our continued success as a country.
28. An effective social union requires an active partnership among governments, while recognizing that responsibility for program development lies primarily with the provinces. The federal, provincial and territorial governments must work together to establish a strengthened framework of safeguards for Canadians respecting the quality, scope and accessibility of their social programs: health care, education, and social services and benefits (including Unemployment Insurance). This means strong minimum standards, agreed upon by the provinces, that will protect all Canadians, while allowing

governments the flexibility to give effect to them in ways that take account of different provincial and local conditions.

29. These principles and values cannot be maintained in an era of increasing global competition unless we strengthen our economic union as well. Here too, the federal, provincial and territorial governments all have important responsibilities and their close cooperation is crucial.
30. An effective economic union is one in which public finances are secure and debt loads are manageable. In recent decades, runaway debt has saddled citizens with painful costs and mortgaged our children's future. Improved cooperation among governments in Canada will make a difference. The federal, provincial and territorial governments must work more closely together to develop fiscal policies and a coordinated process for the delivery of budgets.
31. An effective economic union also is one free of discrimination. Except as entailed by the principle of equalization and the requirements of the social union, federal spending should be governed by the imperative of fiscal neutrality. As a result, the rules for federal spending should allocate resources so that they are evenly distributed across provinces in relation to their populations. This also means that federal programs should not distribute money in a way that discriminates against one or more provinces, or that treats individuals preferentially based on their province of residence.
32. For decades, Canadian businesses have been frustrated by the barriers to trade that exist between provinces. While the federal government and the provinces are making progress in knocking these barriers down, more work needs to be done. Our vision is

of a country where citizens, services, goods and capital can move about freely.

33. The federal government should be more assertive in the exercise of its responsibilities for interprovincial trade, investment and labour mobility. Provincial and territorial governments for their part should show greater willingness to give greater precedence to the collective good.
34. Trade issues are unity issues. Reinforcing the commercial links that cross provincial boundaries is an effective way to demonstrate that Canada offers real benefits to all its parts. By contrast, every time a Canadian cannot sell goods, bid for contracts or move credentials across a provincial boundary, we give more ammunition to those who say that it does not really matter whether the country holds together.
35. The federal and provincial governments should develop pan-Canadian rules and standards for securities regulation, so that Canada can present a unified posture in international markets, substantially reduce current duplication, create a level playing field and protect less-sophisticated investors.
36. A strong economic union at home is a powerful platform for projecting Canada's political and economic interests globally. As a country with vital trade and investment interests in many parts of the world, it is more important than ever that Ottawa and the provinces and territories work closely together in advancing public policy priorities and in supporting private sector initiatives. In matters of international trade, provincial participation is important but the federal government's role is paramount and it must lead with vigour.

37. The social and economic union will not be well-served by the unilateral imposition of federal standards and rules. The approach, on the contrary, must be one that builds on a new spirit of partnership and on a more effective decision-making model.

Cooperative decision-making

38. Canadian federalism has proved remarkably flexible and has accommodated great change and innovation in how we are governed. But we need new methods to manage the links between governments as they tackle today's complex challenges.
39. In particular, as Ottawa's share of the cost of social programs falls, it must work with the provinces and territories to define the values, principles and objectives that should guide the provision of these services to all Canadians.
40. The traditional mechanism for cooperative action has been the First Ministers' Conference, together with a wide array of meetings at the ministerial and public service level. However, there are limits to this device. Meetings of First Ministers are called only when the Prime Minister wants one, and he or she sets the agenda. There is no formal decision-making procedure, and no formal mechanism for enforcing decisions. We need to establish effective rules for making and enforcing decisions at federal-provincial meetings, especially First Ministers meetings. We also need effective rules for settling disputes. We do not need constitutional change to establish these rules.
41. In addition, First Ministers Conferences should be co-chaired by the Prime Minister and one of the Premiers, chosen on a

rotating basis, and would meet in different parts of the country. Either Co-Chair would have the right to call a meeting, and the agenda would be determined jointly.

Our proposal is meant to encompass in an orderly and efficient way the already extensive network of bilateral and multilateral intergovernmental arrangements that exist.

Quebec in an evolving federation

42. Quebec benefits greatly from belonging to Canada, and Canada is greatly enhanced by Quebec. It is time to stop harping on the zero-sum concept of what Quebec may “want” and what other parts of the country may seem reluctant to “concede”.
43. We must unleash the quiet pride that Quebecers and all Canadians feel in our great land. We have achieved in Canada a partnership that includes French and English-speaking peoples, Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians from all corners of the world. That partnership has made Canada unique in the western hemisphere.
44. Quebec is unique in the Canadian family in that it is the only predominantly French-speaking province. On the basis of its language, culture and civil law, Quebec has developed a society which is clearly distinctive by its social, cultural, economic and political institutions and its general mode of life.
45. The National Assembly and the Government of Quebec are the only legislature and executive in Canada elected and controlled by an electorate that is predominantly French-speaking. As such, the Government of Quebec has the right and duty not only to protect, but to promote the distinctive character of Quebec. On the other hand, the existence of an important English-

speaking community in Quebec and of important French-speaking communities in other provinces requires that the rights and needs of official language minorities be recognized and respected in appropriate forms by the federal government and in every province and territory.

46. The Quebec Act of 1774 recognized Quebec as a different society in the Canada of that day with a special guarantee of religious freedom and re-establishment of the French Civil Law. The Canada under the Act of Union of 1841 was made operable only with the rule of the “double majority”, effectively of the English and the French. The British North America Act, 1867, adopted a federal structure in order to accommodate provincial autonomy, including that of Quebec, in a number of areas including local government, education, language (with guarantees for English) and the civil law.

We embrace longstanding tradition in affirming the unique character of Quebec and the legitimacy of the desire of the governments of Quebec over the years to ensure their capacity to preserve, protect and promote that character.

47. The Constitution already accords a large measure of autonomy to the provinces in matters like language, culture, education, labour market training and immigration that are of special importance to Quebec. The rebalancing process that we propose, including curtailment of the federal spending power, would lead to greater respect for the 1867 division of powers. It would also increase the autonomy of all provinces and, in doing so, provide Quebecers with greater scope for developing in accordance with their own aspirations.

Provincial political parties and successive governments of Quebec have constantly expressed the need for additional

constitutional powers, and the special challenges Quebec faces might well justify such powers. We believe that it is important to make more use of concurrent powers -- powers shared by the two orders of government -- with paramountcy being attributed either to Parliament or to provincial legislatures depending on the powers involved.

This concept is not new. Parliament and provincial legislatures have shared immigration and agriculture since 1867. Old-age pensions were made concurrent in 1951 and supplementary benefits in 1964, leading to Quebec creating its own pension plan. Concurrent powers were expanded in the 1982 Constitution, notably with relation to concerns of Canadians in Western Canada over the export of natural resources. Greater use of concurrent powers is worth exploring.

48. Providing for the special circumstances of Quebec under the Constitution is a challenge that must be faced as we continue to work to renew the federation. More respect for the existing constitutional division of powers is an essential step in the right direction.

We believe it important to recognize Quebec's unique character and ensure that Quebec is able to protect and promote that character through formal constitutional recognition -- by words which best describe it and are understood and accepted by Quebecers and other Canadians. Such recognition would have to include a provision that courts would take into account Quebec's distinctive character when determining whether measures taken by the Quebec National Assembly were "demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society". The Supreme Court of Canada would be the ultimate guarantor of all civil rights involved and of the "reasonableness" of any Quebec action.

49. We recognize and we call upon all Canadians to recognize the legitimacy of Quebec's unique linguistic, cultural and institutional rights and needs, and we affirm the right and duty of the Government of Quebec both to protect and to promote the distinctive character of Quebec society. We also hold that the rights and needs of linguistic minorities and Aboriginal peoples must be recognized and respected.

What people can do

50. The decisions facing Canadians rest on moral and ethical as well as technical and political considerations. Public judgment is therefore an essential step in the creation of public policy. Citizens must be challenged to contribute effectively to the process of renewal and provided with realistic opportunities to have their views incorporated. This engagement is a crucial part of our effort to create an environment of partnership, coordination and collaboration among the federal, provincial and territorial governments.
51. A wide variety of initiatives has potential to serve this purpose, including exchange programs, meetings, discussion groups, conferences and awards. We should be open to all experiments in citizen participation that may help us reach our common goal -- and each of us must decide for ourselves how we can participate most effectively on the issues that matter to us.
52. Canadians also need to know their own country, their own history and their own fellow Canadians better. There needs to be a long-term effort to foster mutual understanding and to bring citizens across this vast land into the renewal process. The

media, our educational systems and our vast infrastructure of national associations and student, labour, business and professional networks all have important roles to play.

53. In an effective democracy, the activities of citizens must inevitably take a wide variety of spontaneous, innovative and energetic forms. Among others, we would like to see initiatives to improve communication, especially between anglophones and francophones and between natives and non-natives; to foster mutual comprehension through exchanges of Canadians from different parts of the country; to promote conciliation of differences through mechanisms for exploring common ground, compromise and dispute resolution; and to create opportunities for cooperation among Canadians on joint public and private projects on a national scale.
54. Existing forms of public consultation certainly have not met this ambitious standard of democracy. Governments spend millions of dollars each year on public opinion polls, hearings, inquiries, commissions and other forms of public consultation. Yet the public is increasingly cynical both about the ability of governments to consult effectively and about their real intentions in carrying out such activities. One product of this cynicism is the oft-heard call for a constituent assembly and for more use of referendums.
55. We need more opportunities for citizens to deliberate on public policy in an organized way without being tied to a particular policy agenda chosen by governments. In recent years, new techniques such as citizens' panels, community forums and deliberative polling -- which offers respondents an opportunity to take part in in-depth discussion and debate on the subject of a poll -- have been developed as alternative ways to improve the quality of citizen participation in the policy-making process. We

need further reflection and understanding of these options as ways of gauging the state of public judgment.

56. By offering citizens new opportunities to engage, and by listening to the results of their thoughtful deliberation, governments can nurture the foundation of our democratic traditions and truly reflect the concept of our federation as a community of citizens and a partnership of governments.

Today and tomorrow -- an agenda for action

Six months to major progress

57. As a symbol of Canada's ability to meet the evolving needs of all its citizens, we believe that significant progress can and should be made by October 30, 1996.
58. To demonstrate good faith, the federal government should immediately withdraw from labour market adjustment and training, as requested by Quebec and other provinces, and help the provinces to take over their new responsibility quickly and effectively.
59. The following additional actions should be taken at the First Ministers' Conference scheduled for June 21, 1996:
 - The Premiers should accept the offer made by the federal government in the February Throne Speech respecting forestry, mining and recreation, and establish a firm timetable for the resulting transfer of responsibilities to the provinces.

- Both federal and provincial leaders should commit themselves to a “citizen-centred” approach to the delivery of all public services and launch an assessment of what programs and services can be delivered most effectively by which order of government. They also should agree to work together on a strengthened framework of safeguards for the quality, scope and accessibility of Canada’s social programs.
- The First Ministers should sign a binding agreement that puts into effect the Government of Canada’s pledge to refrain from the use of the federal spending power with regard to new programs in areas of exclusive provincial jurisdiction.
- The First Ministers should agree to enhance the Internal Trade Agreement so that it truly provides for the free movement of people, services, goods and capital within our own borders, strengthens the role of the federal government in making sure those principles are respected, and makes governments accountable to the citizenry for erecting or maintaining barriers to trade that hinder the abilities of Canadians to make a living.
- The First Ministers should also agree to create Canada-wide rules and standards for securities regulation.
- Finally, the First Ministers should demonstrate their commitment to the new spirit of partnership that will be needed to manage the federation effectively as the process of renewal unfolds. They should begin work immediately on more effective rules for making decisions and resolving disputes. And as a first step in this process, they should agree to have First Ministers Conferences co-chaired by the Prime Minister and one of the Premiers, chosen on a rotating

basis; to allow either co-chair to call a meeting; and to have the agenda for each meeting set jointly by the co-chairs.

60. During this phase of constructive, concrete change, the federal, provincial and territorial governments should consider carefully the forthcoming recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, and consider ways to strengthen dialogue, improve the process of self-government negotiation and better address the evolving needs of Aboriginal peoples.
61. If this immediate agenda is to be successful, government actions must be accompanied by public and private initiatives both to promote mutual understanding and cooperation across the country and to improve citizen participation in the policy-making process. Political leadership must go hand in hand with democratic engagement.
62. We call on the Co-chairs of this conference to meet on or before October 30, 1996, to assess and to issue a public report on the progress being made by our governments and political leaders.

The continuing agenda

63. While the progress that can be made in the next few months should do much to restore political stability and provide a more solid base for economic prosperity, it will not be sufficient.

Good will, trust and mutual respect must also grow and guide the actions of governments and citizens alike as we build the new Canadian partnership.

64. As we go forward, constitutional ratification will be required to implement some aspects of the rebalancing process.

65. Constitutional measures will be required within a realistic time to recognize the unique character of Quebec and to ensure that no constitutional change affecting Quebec can be made without Quebec's participation and acceptance. It is in our common interest to act sooner rather than later.
66. Constitutional steps also will be necessary to achieve reform of the Supreme Court and the Senate and to effect other changes to the central institutions of government in response to the concerns, particularly in Western Canada, about representation in and the effectiveness of these institutions.
67. Equally important will be to take whatever constitutional steps are necessary to address the full range of yet unresolved Aboriginal issues.
68. Not all changes to the Senate, to the Supreme Court of Canada and to the Bank of Canada require constitutional amendment. The federal government can begin the process at any time by discussing with the provinces appropriate means of appointing Senators, Supreme Court justices and directors of the central bank.
69. The attitudes for achieving constitutional change may not exist today. But we must make every effort to create the positive circumstances for the implementation of this constitutional phase. That means going to work now and building the foundations for a constitutional reconciliation with Quebecers, regardless of who holds office in Quebec City. It also means going to work to respond constitutionally to the long-standing aspirations of Western Canadians and Aboriginal peoples.

Conclusion

70. The participants in the Confederation 2000 process believe that most Canadians are sick of constitutional gridlock and political posturing. We want to see concrete action that effectively helps real people to deal with their real problems.
71. We must not ignore the difficult questions that remain. But we must accept that in our never-ending effort to build a better society for all Canadians, we should face each challenge and grasp each opportunity as quickly and as effectively as possible. We have discovered through bitter experience the consequences of putting off until tomorrow what could be done today.
72. Citizens from every corner of our country have vital roles to play in the process of renewal. As well as working toward a consensus on the basic shape of renewal, we all must help our political leaders understand what services we believe are most important to us as citizens and taxpayers, and which government, if any, can deliver those services most effectively. We also must help each other to develop a common understanding of what we love about our country and how we can make it an even better place to live.
73. We do not seek immediate action simply for the sake of action, to get the visit to the dentist over with. But in many areas, the debate has gone on long enough. The urgent need now is for clear decisions and visible progress, the first stepping stones toward a more prosperous and united future. Our message to political leaders is simple: let's get on with it.

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The Confederation 2000 Conferences are part of the "Confederation 2000 Initiative" launched by the Business Council on National Issues in November, 1995, following the Quebec referendum.

The Council's Confederation 2000 Initiative is aimed at helping to build a consensus among all Canadians that will advance the cause of political change and national reconciliation. The Council is undertaking this through research, consultation and the encouragement of dialogue across Canada.

The Business Council is a non-profit, non-partisan organization comprised of the chief executives of Canada's leading companies, and is active in a wide variety of public policy areas including the national and the global economy, social policy, the environment and political governance. Its Chairman is Guy Saint-Pierre and its President and Chief Executive is Thomas d'Aquino.