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## Notes for an Address by the Honourable Mike Harris

Premier of Ontario

The Canadian Club

Toronto, Ontario

October 12, 1995

Check against delivery



Madame President, thank you for that introduction.

It is both an honour and a privilege to be a guest of the Canadian Club, but particularly at this point in our nation's history it is an important responsibility.

It is a particular honour to be here with such a distinguished head table. I am very pleased to be joined today by the former Premier Mr. Rae and the Leader of the Official Opposition in the Ontario Legislature, Mrs. McLeod.

While we may have our political and policy differences, your presence here today re-enforces the fact that each of us, as Leaders of our respective parties, agree on one thing in particular. We love our country and we want it to stay together.

National unity is an issue that has always gone beyond party and beyond partisanship in Ontario. This was true of Premier Rae, Premier Peterson and it is true today.

We have recently completed an election in Ontario. As democratically elected leaders we represent all of the parties in the Ontario legislature.

I've come here today to discuss the Ontario perspective on the current unity debate. And I want to talk about the Canadian advantage which Ontarians and all Canadians enjoy as citizens of this great country.

I do so as the leader of a government, elected only four months ago, with a strong mandate for change.

I do so as Premier of Ontario, as the inheritor of a proud tradition of responding constructively to legitimate aspirations for change within confederation.

My purpose today is not to tell Quebec voters how they should vote. It is obviously up to them to make that determination after having carefully listened to the arguments on both sides. I do believe however, that I have a responsibility to share my views as to the nature of this debate and its implications.

Far from being proponents of the status quo, successive Ontario premiers have been agents of change within Canada.

Ontario has always been prepared to work within confederation for changes that increase the harmony and improve the management of our federation for the benefit of Canadians in their everyday lives.

Ontarians recognize that, as a province and as a country, we need to keep up with a rapidly changing world to make us more competitive internationally, to support job creation and, to protect and improve our quality of life.

We will look at all proposals that enhance the Canadian advantage.

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The Canadian advantage has given us a country that most Canadians, including a vast majority of Quebecers, regard as the best in the world. A country with the highest rated quality of life in the world and one of the highest standards of living.

A country of almost 30 million people, whose output as a single economic unit gives us membership in the G-7, the world's most influential economic association. A country which now exports over one-third of its output, and whose made-in-Canada trademark, which benefits all Canadians, is admired and respected around the world.

Recently, I said publicly that, if Quebec separates, Ontario would trade with it on no different a basis than it trades with other foreign countries. Premier Parizeau has used that factual, straightforward statement to argue that there would be no disruption in the economic relationship between Quebec and Ontario. I think it is important that I set the record straight today.

Let me be very clear. And I said this to Premier Parizeau at the Premiers Conference in Newfoundland. Canadian internal trade patterns exist amongst provinces within a country, not between countries. If Quebec separates, one thing is certain, Quebecers would no longer have access to the Canadian advantage, they would no longer be a part of Canada. We would have no special obligations tied to history or common national interest.

There is a big difference between commercial relations of the kind negotiated between Canada and the United States, and the economic union now enjoyed by all Canadians, inside Canada. For one thing, trade relations between a separate Quebec and the remaining provinces would have to be consistent with Canada's obligations to all our other trading partners under current international trade agreements. We are not required to apply those international trade rules to trade inside the same country, inside Canada.

For example, we have tariff and non-tariff protections for various products benefiting different regions. These protections are part of a balance of all the regional and sectoral interests that are taken into consideration in setting Canada's trade policy. It is this policy that has allowed producers in Canada, including in Quebec, to benefit from the open Canadian market. This increases the competitive capabilities of all Canadian companies. If Quebec were suddenly no longer part of the country, there would be no reason for the rest of Canada to consider Quebec interests. In fact, we would have no choice but to act in the best interest -- short and longer term -- of our own producers and manufacturers. Quebec would lose the Canadian advantage of a shared economic space.

And in any discussions about an independent Quebec joining the World Trade Organization or NAFTA, Canada would have to be there to protect its own interests, interests that would no longer include Quebec. There are other trade reasons why we would not -- could not -- have preference for a separate Quebec at the expense of other countries. Other countries -- the United States at the top of the list -- would not stand for any favouritism. They would demand the same treatment. And Canada has no interest in giving other countries the same economic protections and privileges that it provides itself within the Canadian economic union. Ontario is not prepared to give up this Canadian Advantage.

If Quebec separates, there would be international borders between Ontario and Quebec. And borders do matter.

A trade agreement between different countries involves customs and immigration procedures, checks on people crossing borders, litigation on dumping, unfair trade practices and so on. Citizens moving between Quebec and the rest of Canada may be required to carry proof of citizenship as they do now in moving between Canada and the United States. International trade agreements, like the FTA, can also be canceled by either side. An economic union of the kind we all enjoy in Canada involves none of those limitations, none of those stipulations, and none of that uncertainty. That is a Canadian advantage.

I would now like to say a few words about the political agreement that was signed by the sovereigntist or separatist leaders on June 12 and which is referred to in the referendum question.

J'aimerais prendre quelques minutes pour expliquer, en termes très simples et pratiques, pourquoi, du point de vue de l'Ontario, cette proposition ne marche pas. Pourquoi, dans la perspective de l'Ontario, ça n'a pas de bons sens.

I want to take a few minutes to explain, in very practical down-to-earth terms, why from Ontario's point of view, this proposal is not on. It is a non-starter.

The separatist's agreement sets out a proposal for a partnership between a separate Quebec and the rest of Canada. This partnership proposal would involve setting up a new cluster of political institutions: a new partnership council, a new parliamentary assembly, a new dispute resolution tribunal and, to support these institutions, a new permanent secretariat.

In their proposal, the sovereigntist leaders list the areas over which, as a minimum, this new layer of political institutions would have authority: a customs union; the movement of goods, services, capital and people; monetary policy, labour mobility and citizenship. In short, authority over, at a minimum, the key instruments of economic policy. This proposal assumes that Canadians would be willing to share power over its economic policy instruments with a foreign country. Wrong. Countries don't behave like that. In their own self-interest, countries can not behave like that.

When I look at this partnership proposal I have to ask how would creating another layer of government -- and make no mistake about it, these partnership institutions would be another costly and permanent layer of government, another layer of bureaucracy — How would this make us more efficient? How would this help us live within our means? How would it help us compete internationally? The answer is clear. It doesn't.

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Let me turn to the decision-making process which is envisioned by the sovereignists for this new partnership. They propose that a partnership council, made up of an equal number of ministers from Quebec and the rest of Canada, would hold the decision-making power over the partnership. This means that Quebec with a quarter of the population would hold half the power over such critical matters as customs union, monetary policy and citizenship.

Ontario, with more than a third of the population would have less power than Quebec and Ontario would have no direct representation on this partnership council. This is also a non-starter. In all reasonableness, how could anyone believe that this would be an acceptable arrangement from Ontario's point of view? I repeat, it doesn't make sense.

Not only would it be another layer of government, it would be a layer of government which is one step removed from democratic accountability. This would be a group of ministers appointed by their respective governments. They would not have been elected to these responsibilities. People want less government and they want accountable government. This proposal doesn't pass either of those tests.

Let me also address the issue of negotiations. This is particularly relevant in light of Premier Parizeau's recent announcement designating Mr. Bouchard as his negotiator.

Let there be no doubt about what I am saying. Ontario's answer to this proposal is a friendly but firm no thank you.

The question for the people of Quebec in this referendum is whether they want to be part of Canada or become a separate country.

From an economic perspective, separation does not make sense. But Canada is not merely about trade agreements and economic advantages. It is more than that.

I believe Canada is a success story both economically and as a political and social entity. But it is also always a work-in-progress. Hard work, trial and error, small compromises and large ones. As Premier of Ontario I am confident that Canada is worth this effort.

To our friends and neighbours in Quebec, I say this. Our differences are important. At our best these differences are a precious asset and, yes, sometimes they cause us to rub each other the wrong way. But are those differences more important than what we share, what we have accomplished together? I don't think so. Not for Quebec. Not for Ontario. Together, our two provinces account for nearly two-thirds of Canada's economic output. For more than a century and a quarter, we have been nation builders in a single country called Canada. The good will between our two provinces, is one of the most important intangibles of confederation. Together, with our partners in the Atlantic, Western, Pacific and Northern regions of Canada, we have built a great country.

As our government stated in our recent throne speech: We appeal with an open heart and with generosity of spirit to our fellow Canadians who are also Quebeckers, to remain within Confederation, so that we might continue to work together for prosperity and equality of opportunity for all. The economic challenges we face today are real — and they are serious. We are far better off facing them together than apart. That is also the Canadian advantage.

So I come full circle. The Canadian advantage and the willingness to change.

It's fair to say that Canadians in all provinces want positive change that leads to a more functional federation, that streamlines governments, that eliminates waste and duplication of services. This kind of change will be supported by Ontario. Change that gives better value to the taxpayer.

Ces changements vont mener à un pays plus décentralisé et à une fédération plus flexible. Un seul gouvernement ne peut plus dicter une ligne de conduite uniforme dans tout le pays.

These changes, if done right, will lead to a country more decentralized in some respects and a national government that does less but does what it must well. Fiscal realities mean that no single government can dictate uniform behaviour across the country. This is a new opportunity to redefine how the provinces co-operate with each other and how the federal and provincial governments can work together better.

Just as our founding fathers anticipated change more than a century ago, we have the ability and the obligation to affect it today. The solution lies in innovative changes to the way our governments interact with one another, and with the people they serve.

The role of government ought not to be to fight over turf, or build bureaucratic empires. Its role should be to serve the people in the best way possible at the lowest possible cost.

What is needed, and what should happen, is a major rebalancing of responsibilities in this country. Rebalancing is needed where it results in better, more efficient public services. Smaller, less obtrusive government. Rebalancing where it helps create an environment for prosperity that will improve the quality of life of Canadians and enhance our international competitiveness and sustain a framework for social justice.

These discussions on rebalancing have been ongoing. They were re-enforced recently at the Premiers' Conference in St. John's involving governments of NDP, Liberal and Conservative affiliation. They will continue when a special council of ministers from the provinces meets to explore further the best way to redesign health and social programs so that these programs work for all Canadians.

Those who promote sovereignty are promoting a path that will cut Quebeckers off from this process, and radically diminish their real choices and fiscal capacity.

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Let me conclude by re-emphasizing the following three points:

First: The partnership relationship which the sovereignists in Quebec are proposing is entirely unworkable. From Ontario's point of view, either we are one country or we are not. A separate Quebec would be a foreign country. Period. Anything else is wishful thinking.

Second: Ontario does not accept the status quo. There is an urgent need to move this country forward. Citizens are demanding better government, leaner government and they want out from under the burden of public debt and high taxes.

Ontarians today would be a strong ally for Quebeckers that want to change the status quo of federal-provincial relations.

Third: The Canadian advantage. Whatever our problems, in my view, Canada is still the finest nation on earth. We know from the popularity of the Canadian flag abroad and the friendly reception that Canadians receive when travelling, that this is one of the most respected and admired countries in the world — and for good reason. And the Canadian advantage will continue to be there for Canadians, for those who stay and work to make it an even finer country.

Together we can do it. The Ontario government is committed to prosperity, jobs, fiscal health and economic growth. These are challenges that confront all governments in Canada and elsewhere in the world. The difference is that this is Canada. We have the resources, both human and natural, to succeed and to prosper. All we need is the will and the sense of common purpose.

I come from Northern Ontario. I live forty miles from the Quebec boarder. I grew up with and have done business with fellow Canadians from north western Quebec. My home town of North Bay and Timiskaming Quebec are separated by the Ottawa river. Not a boarder, a river. As neighbours the people of North Bay and Timiskaming fought wars together — worked together and played together. There is much more that unites us than divides us. We share a common love for the land. We want a prosperous future for our children. We know the values of hard work, self initiative and community.

Also In my riding of Nipissing there is a large francophone population. We are enriched as a nation and as a community by the diversity of our people and the pride in our heritage.

This coming Monday evening the municipal council in my home town of North Bay is holding a joint meeting with the Timiskaming council to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Ontario has always worked hard to keep this country together. In North Bay and right across the province we are working hard to keep it together now.

I want my children and theirs to share the joys and the challenges of building, advancing and protecting the greatest country in the world — hand in hand with future generations from our sister province of Quebec. Nothing would serve our respective and collective interests more.

If we resolve to face reality and maximize the Canadian advantage I am confident that we will succeed, in Quebec, in Ontario and in every corner of this great land.

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