



Justice Information

NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS

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TO

THE EMPIRE CLUB AND

THE CANADIAN CLUB

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Thank you for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure, indeed an honour, to be here and to have this opportunity to address a joint meeting of the Canadian Club and the Empire Club.

It is also a pleasure to be here in Toronto, a city that is prospering again and helping drive the country's current economic expansion.

This city, the province of Ontario, along with Québec, have long been the engines of economic growth in Canada. As the Member of Parliament for Edmonton West, it gives me great pleasure to note, that while this may still be true, they are being joined by the West and its urban centres, such as Calgary and Vancouver. This is not just good for the West, but for the entire country.

I make these introductory remarks because I have been asked, today, to provide a view from the West: to provide my perspective on issues as a representative of the Government and the Cabinet from western Canada, representation that is not quite as abundant as that in Ontario. I will take this opportunity to reflect a little on the country's expanding power base, on the fact that the West is assuming an increasingly important economic role in our federation, and what this means for the governance of our country and our choices. In this respect, I will touch on some of my challenges as Minister of Justice.

Thanks, in part, to the policies of our government, the national economy is doing well after the very difficult years of the late 1980's and early 1990's. The unemployment rate, though still too high, has fallen to its lowest level in seven years and keeps falling. Inflation is low. Consumer and business confidence are reaching record highs. Short and long term interest rates are lower in Canada than in the United States. After years of pessimism, Canadians feel optimistic again, both about the national economy and about their own personal prospects.

We have gone from the second highest deficit-to-GDP ratio of the G-7 nations to the lowest. The OECD forecasts that Canada will lead the G-7 nations in economic and job growth this year and next. We are now in the very fortunate position to start prudently and responsibly identifying our priorities as a country and investing in them — priorities such as education, health care and personal tax reductions.

This is where our nation is today. But what's interesting is how we got here.

For the past few years, the West's economy has consistently outpaced that of the rest of the country, seizing the advantages and opportunities, particularly export opportunities, brought about by the country's fiscal turnaround. In 1996, GPP growth in the prairie provinces was twice that of Ontario's and three times that of Quebec's. In 1997, as the recovery consolidated, Ontario's and Quebec's GPP approached that of the prairies, but again Alberta led the country with growth of 5.5 per cent. It is also worth noting that, unlike the late '80's where growth occurred primarily in Ontario, this has been a truly national recovery.

The story is the same on the unemployment front. Alberta's unemployment rate today is 5.2 per cent, the lowest in the country. Manitoba's and Saskatchewan's are right behind. British Columbia has been having a tough time given Asian markets, but we cannot forget that for years B.C. was an export champion in our national economy — and will be again.

The West is not just growing, it's diversifying. Manitoba's economy is the most diversified in Canada. In Alberta, while oil and gas is still the major contributor to provincial GDP, the manufacturing and service sectors have steadily increased their combined contribution over the past 10 years. The province today derives much more revenue from non-energy exports than it did in the 1980s. So, while it is obviously a concern when oil prices drop, as they have recently, the provincial economy maintains its strength and vibrancy.

Here are some other indicators of the West's growing strength. Canada West Foundation reports that 46 % of Albertans own or have access to home computers, versus the Canadian average of 36 per cent. My home of Edmonton, along with Vancouver and Calgary, sell more books per capita than any other Canadian cities. And, if the statisticians have this right, Alberta and B.C. have the highest percentage of their citizens with a post-secondary education.

Calgary's population, at 840,000, is small compared to the millions who live in Toronto or Montréal. Yet Calgary hosts the second largest number of head offices in Canada.

Population also continues to move westward. In the period between 1986 and 1996, B.C.'s population grew around 50,000 a year — the equivalent of moving a city the size of

Kingston to the coast each year. A percentage of this growth comes from outside Canada, but most, is from within. Born in Nova Scotia, I am an example of this internal migration. And, as Newfoundlanders are the first to tell you, their fourth largest city is Fort McMurray, Alberta.

What we are seeing is, quite frankly, a gradual economic realignment. What I've described speaks to the intellectual vigour and corporate reach that is taking place across this country. It is surely a strength we must all welcome, for it is contributing to our pluralism and diversity as a nation and is providing new opportunities and prosperity for all Canadians.

It is in this context of the West's economic and population growth, diversification and confidence, that the country, or more specifically central Canada, experiences the West's demands for greater influence in the country's affairs. The Reform Party is one manifestation of this, although I would argue that it is an unfortunate one, for it tends to be one of negativism and division. Most westerners are not angry or defensive - they are confident, optimistic and tolerant. They deserve a more positive expression of their ideas and our government is working hard to provide the means for that expression. However, we must view these demands as not only natural, but that understanding them and responding to them are essential to Canada's continued growth and prosperity.

The first point I'd make is that the West's influence is already strong. Fiscal responsibility and the belief in a more streamlined, smaller government are ideas that, first championed in western Canada, are now virtually gospel — embraced by all Canadian governments regardless of political stripe.

The continued deregulation of oil and gas markets, the recognition of the national importance of Alberta's and Saskatchewan's oil sands and our government's focus on Asian markets and the Pacific Rim, are all examples of western priorities that have achieved a high place on the national agenda. The economic significance of the Pacific Rim for Canada's economy, and western Canada's in particular, cannot be understated.

But the West wants more and as long as trends continue, these demands will increase. The question is how we can make this happen harmoniously, constructively and to the benefit of all Canadians?

Westerners are often viewed as a relatively homogeneous people who are conservative in their values and political preferences. However, the West possesses a highly diverse, multicultural society, reflected in its plethora of social, cultural and political organizations. The very term, "the West," is misleading, for the social, economic, political and even historical differences of the four western provinces are easily more significant than, for example, those of the Maritimes, yet they are more readily lumped together.

For example, the West has produced several populist political movements. However, one need only compare the socialist C.C.F., born in Saskatchewan, to the conservative Social Credit, born in Alberta, to appreciate the West's diversity. What all western movements have shared is an anti-establishment, or certainly an anti-central Canadian establishment bias, and a desire for a greater decentralization of powers and more representative institutions.

But beyond the regional protest language, the values expressed by these movements and held by westerners are not that distinct from those held by other Canadians. The West has always been and will continue to be committed to the growth and development of Canada. I consider Albertans to be among Canada's most ardent patriots. As former Alberta Treasurer Jim Dinning has said, "Albertans believe in the principle of equity. Clearly, those who have are going to be asked to pay more than those who have not... I don't believe this (Alberta) government is a believer in cheque book federalism."

Alberta is the home of the pioneer spirit in Canada. It is a spirit that combines the determination to beat the odds and the fortitude to open up new frontiers. It conveys a strong ethic of individualism and suspicion of state power. But it is balanced by another, gentler side. The hardy pioneers who built Alberta knew that surviving the harsh conditions on the frontier meant helping each other out. It meant sharing and making sure that everyone was treated fairly. This aspect of the pioneer spirit still informs Albertans' actions: approximately 40% cent of Albertans volunteer, a higher percentage than in any other Canadian province.

So while some Albertans might debate other Canadians on how we, as a nation, should care for our citizens, (the appropriate order for government) the fundamental values Albertans hold are the same as those in Ontario, Nova Scotia and Québec: we believe in a country that cares for its people, particularly those most vulnerable. As Jim Gray, a Calgary oil executive stated in his remarks to the Public Policy Forum in April: "our (Canadian) distinguishing hallmark is the effective balance we have generated between our high standard of social values developed

within the context of a successful and resilient economy. We have achieved this admired balance better than most.”

This is the challenge our country has successfully met for 130 years: building a nation by focusing on those things that bind us. Our future requires that this continue.

As a westerner, I, am sometimes described by some, in the media, as a small-c Liberal justice minister. Some have viewed my priorities — crime prevention, the renewal of our youth justice system and victims’ rights — as evidence of my western bias.

But one of the most important things I have learned over the past year in this portfolio is how justice issues transcend provincial and regional boundaries. While Quebecers show a higher (though by no means very high) degree of support for the *Young Offenders Act* than in other parts of Canada, where it is easily the most unpopular piece of justice legislation, fear of youth crime is just as high in Québec as elsewhere. There is no question that fear of crime and questions about the ability of our criminal justice system to deal with it is a growing concern in every part of this country. And we also know that this is happening at a time when crime rates have been going down in most categories for the past 5 years or more.

These concerns reflect the fact that Canadian society has undergone profound change over the past 30 years. We’ve evolved, for example, from a relatively homogeneous country bent on assimilating immigrants and Aboriginal people, to a pluralistic one, whose commitments to multiculturalism and Aboriginal self-government are enshrined in our Constitution; from a country

whose political discourse was dominated by a few privileged voices, to one in which the number of viewpoints heard in public debate in any given day defies quantification. And we now have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which has changed the perceptions and expectations of citizens about what the justice system and legislators are capable of accomplishing in a given situation.

Our justice system has been slow to respond to these new realities and pressures. Aboriginal peoples still feel disadvantaged and isolated in their dealings with the justice system. Litigation is still the paradigm by which the justice system resolves legal disputes, even though such a model is foreign to many people's instinctive sense of how to resolve disagreements or conflicts, and even though litigation creates an atmosphere that deters many people from seeking recourse to justice at all. A general sense of alienation from our judicial institutions resonates more strongly still when they take on a regional angle: expressed in the demands of westerners and others, for greater control of their judicial institutions.

What these issues point to is the need to change the way our justice system operates. We must work to provide Canadians with a greater sense of ownership of the justice system. Canadians, no matter where they live, will only feel that their justice system is working for *them* if it is accessible, relevant, and inclusive. This may mean changing our institutions, the power they wield, and that of those who run them. It is a goal that is important not just to westerners, but to all Canadians.

The need to open up our institutions of justice finds no greater argument than when we look at the issue of victims. One of the most troubling aspects of justice in Canada in recent years

has been the failure of the system to recognize and respond to the needs of women, children, seniors and other vulnerable groups who have been victimized by crime or family violence.

Victims' rights is not, as some might allege, a western issue, although there is no question that the concerns of victims resonate strongly in western Canada. In the *Rapport Jasmin*, for example, a much-heralded study of Québec's youth justice system, one of its recommendations was to improve the system's treatment and involvement of victims. Improving the treatment of victims is very much a national issue, though doing so effectively requires action that is locally-based.

As our justice system has evolved, we have had to understand that justice must be seen to be done at the local, as well as the global level. The precedence of the "Queen's Peace" over the interests of the individual, is a fundamental principle – and I would never suggest otherwise – but its practical effect for individuals victimized by crime has been painful, since their needs and concerns often have been ignored. Justice can not be an abstract concept, but must be one that has meaning and impact in the hearts and minds of individual Canadians.

Reforming our justice system to respond to Canadians' concerns means finding ways to increase the involvement of victims, of the community and of individual Canadians. The federal government is doing this through several initiatives, including our strategy to renew our youth justice system.

Here in Ontario and elsewhere, community-based youth justice alternatives are being developed. These alternatives, used for non-violent offences, involve new ways of making the young offender atone for his or her crime through restitution, community service or other measures that make it plain to the youth the impact of his or her actions. Through our youth justice renewal strategy, we want to expand the use of community-based sentencing for non-violent offences, not just because they are less costly and, in most circumstances, more effective, but because they also empower the community.

This week, our government announced a new direction for justice in Canada, when we unveiled our National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention. In partnership with the provinces, municipalities, NGOs and local community organizations, the Government of Canada will be providing resources to help communities to fight crime by addressing its root causes. It is a program that recognizes an essential fact: the people who live and work in Canadian communities are the ones who best understand their concerns and needs. The federal government won't run this program, communities across Canada will. It is a concrete example of citizen engagement on an issue of fundamental importance to Canadians — the safety of their communities.

This \$32 million annual investment represents one per cent of the federal cost of the criminal justice system in Canada — and implements a recommendation of both the former National Crime Prevention Council and a House of Commons committee. The program will be spearheaded by a national Chair, Toronto's former mayor and longtime community advocate, Barbara Hall. She will be assisted by a steering committee comprised of representatives from

across the country, including representatives from the provincial and municipal levels of government, the police, the social services network and others.

This program acknowledges the fact that communities and regions have different crime concerns. Organized crime is a more pressing issue for Montréal and Winnipeg than it is for Edmonton, while child prostitution is a major concern for Calgary and Vancouver. It is a program that takes decision-making out of Ottawa and empowers communities to respond to crime concerns directly.

Crime prevention, youth justice and victims' rights are three areas where we, in the justice system, have an opportunity to make the system more inclusive, responsive, indeed more relevant to Canadians. In doing so, I also think we can also take steps to address regional concerns, be they from the West or Ontario. Canada is a large country, with a small population spread over great distances. Allowing for greater public ownership of our institutions is a much greater challenge in a country as large as ours, but it also makes the importance of meeting it that much greater.

Canadians from all regions built Canada by working together, overcoming differences of language and culture. It has not always been easy, but the challenge of achieving understanding and respect for Canada's differences is a noble one and our ability to do so is what sets us apart from so many other countries around the world. We can continue to build this country, confident that the values that led us to this point are shared by all Canadians. Westerners may have some

needs or feel some frustrations that differ from Ontarians, Atlantic Canadians or Quebecers, but we have long worked and will continue to work toward common purposes.

Georges-Étienne Cartier — one of the Fathers of Confederation — said that Canada was founded on the “kindred interest and sympathies” of our different communities. As we enter a new era of prosperity, it is my hope and belief that Canadians and their governments will find it easier to overcome our regional differences and work together in partnership. As Prime Minister Jean Chrétien said to the Economic Club of New York this March, “our nation has emerged to a bright future full of hope and promise, with new confidence in its abilities and a new belief in its destiny.”

He is right. And Canadians, regardless of where they live, feel that hope, that promise and that confidence. The new millennium will dawn brightly for this great nation and its people.

I thank you for inviting me to be with you today.