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THE REALITY OF BEING A CANADIAN

I am grateful for your invitation to be here to-day and to have an opportunity of sharing with you some of my views on a subject dear to my heart.

As the President has said, the title I have chosen is "The Reality of Being a Canadian". Some of you may be sitting back at this moment wondering why such a subject? One thing, I can assure you I do not either wish to be too profound, or, to be too superficial in my remarks. I am not speaking as an historian or as an economist. Rather, perhaps I can share with you, at least for a few moments, my own sometimes personal views honed through years of activity in educational and cultural fields, and more recently as the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Ontario.

I dare say that each of us has a particular concept or idea as to what is truly the Reality of being a Canadian. At the outset, I may tell you that I consider it fortunate that my parents decided for me that I should be born in Ontario. I grew up in a small border town - Sarnia. I went to the University of Toronto. I lived with my parents, relatives and friends through what was known as the Great Depression. I was here in Canada during a Second World War, participating in voluntary organizations which have grown and in some cases prospered in terms of human endeavour (if not in funds). I recognize that I

live to-day in a country which may seem to be the same as it has always been, but which is constantly changing and hopefully maturing - and that is part of the Reality of being a Canadian. I recognize that we Canadians in this part of the country, let alone the other regions of the country, are often misunderstood by English speaking peoples from other countries. When you and I are in the United States or in the United Kingdom or even Australia or New Zealand, while we may speak the same language with somewhat different accents, words and thoughts actually have different meanings and emphasis. This is particularly difficult for Americans to understand because they look upon us as being, as they have often said, "their cousins". They become disturbed and concerned when we don't seem to agree with their policies or actions because they feel we should think as they think; after all, they say, we speak the same language.

We don't. May I give you just one brief example. Several months ago, I was bringing greetings, as the Lieutenant-Governor of this Province, at a dinner in this hotel. 90 to 95% of the guests were from the United States. The Chairman wrote me afterwards to say that she had been taken to task by one of the gentlemen who was present for constantly referring to my handicap - the left-handed governor. He thought she was very rude. When I visit schools, students often refer to me as Lew-tenant, and I know they've been watching American T.V. programs.

Perhaps I should tell you at this point that my research as a student at the University of Toronto was concerned with that period of United States history related to the American Revolution. Certainly, one of the major differences between people north and south of that continent-wide border is that the history of those south of us is rooted in revolution, while ours has been a history of evolution. I suppose we Canadians can lay claim to a less volatile, non-confrontation national personality.

People who have come from other countries of the world, particularly since World War II, and who have become Canadians by choice, understand this fact of life perhaps more than those of us who are native-born Canadians. People who have, by adoption, embraced Canada as the land of their citizenship, to me and to our country bring a priceless ingredient, if we can recognize it as such.

I say this because I have noticed particularly during the months that I have been Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario that people of European backgrounds, from other cultures and ethnic groups, are proud to be Canadian first - but also proud to retain their cultural heritages.

This is one difference perhaps between people who have come here to live and work and people who have gone to the United States to live and work. There is a total assimilation into American culture and society. I am not saying that we, in developing that which is a multi-cultural society have something more desirable or less desirable. However, I suspect that we gain immeasurably as Canadians in

recognizing, understanding and cherishing the backgrounds of the people that make up our country because they have come from all over the world. Remember too, just about all of us, if we go far enough back in history, were immigrants to this country.

As an observer and as a student of Canada, I find it fascinating, but sometimes disturbing, to see the great emphasis placed on our regional differences - one area of the country compared to another. We can't all be in the same mold. Why is it that people, we'll say, in the Atlantic provinces appear to resent Ontario citizens and some of those of other provinces? Why is it that we in Ontario seem sometimes inclined to look with a jaundiced eye on people who live in Alberta because of prosperity, call it what you will, which has come by the accident of their environment? Why is it that mountains seem to act as a barrier for understanding among people in the East and people on the Pacific coast? I don't know the answers, but I do know that I am disturbed, increasingly so, by these regional rivalries. They are negative and debilitating. They are soul destroying. In short, they are not good for us as Canadians.

By the same token, the rivalries between the two founding cultures in Canada - English and French - seem to me to have the seeds of destruction in them and are not for the good of the country.

Regrettably, to-day through the world we seem to be prone to conflict, dissension and misunderstanding. I have noticed, however,

that the pendulum seems to be moving the other way just a bit. People, both young and old, are returning to the time-proven verities of truth, honesty and integrity. This means to me that people are attempting to return to a more simple basic set of values. Basic trust in one another after all should be part of the Reality of being a Canadian. My optimism is due to the fact that I have had the privilege, as Lieutenant-Governor, of visiting many of our smaller communities. My husband and myself have been struck by the very real pride that these people have in being Canadian, and, their sense of community with their fellow citizens.

May I turn to another point? Canadians, if they are realistic, recognize that they have a form of government quite different from any other country in the world - in other words, a Queen, as sovereign, who is represented by the Governor General and ten Lieutenant-Governors.

Canadians speak of democracy as a system of responsible government which involves a partnership of Crown and Parliament. What, then, is the Crown, and how does it function as an institution of democratic government in Canada?

The Crown is the supreme executive power of the state. It is not the sovereign. It is an executive power - that is a power concerned with safeguarding the laws and implementing their provisions, as well as devising policy and supervising its execution. The Crown is therefore a means of meeting a difficulty, so evident in history

shouldn't underestimate something that works". He continued: "It is not an organization. It is not established by charter. Its ideal is more a romantic one. It depends on what you put into it."

Interestingly enough, he echoed a point I made when I was named Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario when he said : "Ceremony and ritual are important because they add colour to men's lives in a rather drab world".

Everyone, every place, wishes to do "the correct thing", so that the ritual attendant on the visit of a Governor General or Lieutenant-Governor goes smoothly. Many years ago, when I was the President of the Dominion Drama Festival, and on the other side of the fence, so to speak, Governor General Vincent Massey was coming for the final performance and a dinner was arranged in his honour prior to the play. So many things went wrong in advance with the placing of people at the head table that it really became a joke. I knew by the twinkle in Mr. Massey's eyes that he had heard about all the changes; therefore when it was convenient during dinner I said to him, "You know, Your Excellency, everyone wants to do the correct thing and there are always conflicting ideas about just what is the correct thing. Don't you think it would be wise if a book or pamphlet could be prepared?" His reply was "Oh, Mrs. McGibbon, life would be so dull!" Now I know he was right. Flexibility for a Governor General or a Lieutenant-Governor is essential and contributes immensely to the interest of the position.

As I look at the past and present role of a Lieutenant-Governor, I am convinced that it relates to undefinable ties strengthened by tradition, which do not make our form of democracy any less strong. Events in other countries have caused even some who were anti-royalists in Canada to change their minds and have strengthened intellectual and emotional appreciation of those committed to our constitutional democracy.

Incidentally, on the subject of human relations, no one should take the position of Lieutenant-Governor unless he or she enjoys meeting people. Fortunately, I react to people as to a stimulant. In my view this is one of the main functions of this position - to meet people and where possible to give them encouragement in their work on behalf of Ontario and Canada. As I said when I was installed in the office in 1974, "The imperative to avoid political positions does not preclude one from creating an impression and an atmosphere - even colour and pageantry - that all countries need to-day to brighten our world."

As Lieutenant-Governor for the Province of Ontario, and representative of Her Majesty, The Queen, I serve in a dual capacity; first, as the representative of the sovereign for all purposes of provincial government, and second, as a federal officer in respect of the discharge of certain of the sovereign's functions. During his or her term in office (and as you know, I am the first 'her' in the Commonwealth) a Lieutenant-Governor is expected to visit as

many places in a province as possible. This is only natural, because even in this day and age, the symbolic meaning of the office is important and a Lieutenant-Governor holds an obligation to serve a province and its people to the utmost of ability and talent. As Lieutenant-Governors have been for countless years Canadian born, that, too, is part of the Reality of being a Canadian. Need I remind you, too, that since the year the Right Honourable Vincent Massey was appointed Governor General, our Governor Generals - Vanier, Michener and Léger, all distinguished Canadians, have been born and bred and educated in Canada.

In conclusion, surely more of us should be stepping back and looking at ourselves as individuals, as business people, as part of a community, as part of a province, as part of a nation and asking ourselves questions - Who are we? What are we doing? Where are we going? Why do we hold certain attitudes, prejudices if you will?

With answers, we can decide individually that part of the reality of being a Canadian is recognition - above all else - that we are the most fortunate of people in spite of set-backs occasioned by the inflation spiral and other factors which are part of our daily life. The fact that we are striving and searching for some solutions to our economic, political and cultural problems is a helpful and positive sign. Above all else, each of us wherever and whenever we can, has an obligation to express views and convictions on those matters which are our concern. Fortunately, we still live in a country that enables us to express what we feel and what we believe - and we must never give up this privilege. This is part of the Reality of being a Canadian.

Part of the Reality of being a Canadian woman to-day is to realize that in International Women's Year plus-one, we are making progress slowly but surely. More women are filling middle and upper management positions. Evidence of this is found on the business pages of our newspapers and in trade and business publications. But in common with women in the United States, we are certainly not on a par with women in England and some other more enlightened countries.

For a few moments, I have shared with you some of my thoughts. I perhaps haven't brought something new to you, something startling, something newsworthy if you will. My purpose, you see, has had only one objective and that is to start each of us thinking on this subject, recognizing always that we have much for which to be thankful and recognizing that it is within our power to make our community, our province, our Canada everything we want provided we believe enough and have convictions that we are right!

Vincent Massey after his service to Canada as High Commissioner in the United Kingdom from 1935 to 1946 and before he became our first Canadian Governor General, wrote in a beautiful little book entitled "On Being a Canadian" that our young Canadians have been given a formidable list of virtues. He said, "We are fortunate in Canada beyond our reckoning in our natural treasure; in our place on the great air highways of the globe and in our neighbourhood in America; in our links with the other British States; above all, fortunate in the skill and character of a people who can rise to any challenge." But there is one thing essential to these advantages he said, "and this is faith in ourselves. Without it, something will always be missing from the list."