

Notes for an Address

**“Making Progress in a One Party Democracy:
Priorities and Responsibilities”**

The Canadian Club of Kingston Luncheon

**Check against delivery*

Thursday, January 9, 2003
12:00 – 2:00 P.M.
Ballroom of Minos Restaurant
Kingston, Ontario

Hugh Segal
President, Institute for Research on Public Policy
Ivey Foundation Fellow, Queen’s School of Policy Studies

It is a privilege to be your first invited speaker for 2003; it is always a special joy for me to share thoughts and ideas in Canada's first capital, and the home where my wife was born and educated, where our daughter, Jacqueline graduated from Winston Churchill Public School and KCVI, and where Donna and I have been, for over a decade, most fortunate to make our home. As I began courting Donna when her parents, Donald and Jacqueline Armstrong lived on the corner of College and Johnston, and as we will be celebrating our twenty seventh year of marriage this coming spring, and, as she will firmly attest, I did not succeed in convincing her to marry me right off the bat, we have been knocking around this great city one way or another for over three decades. And, I have grown to love it, respect its unique and important history. I think the very nature of Kingston with its special mix of students and retirees, government, small business, military and higher education, with large companies manufacturing for and serving world markets, makes it a strong lens through which to assess and understand the economic and social priorities confronting Canada and Canadians.

It is in that vein that I want to share with you some thoughts on how we as Canadians can make genuine progress together within the economic, political and social contexts that now define us. What are those contexts? What is the progress we need to make?

Our proximity to the United States is both our greatest advantage in economic and strategic terms and our greatest challenge in social and political terms. This is not new. This is our history. It has been our past. It is our present. It will be our future. And, while the narrow nationalists on the far left lament the burden, I can think of no country in the world that would not eagerly trade their circumstance for that very same burden at the drop of a hat!

I have always suspected that the multilateralism of Canadian foreign policy, while certainly an expression of Lester Pearson's belief in multilateral bodies like the United Nations, was also very much a clear effort by successive governments to mitigate the Canada-US relationship through different and other affiliations around the world. So, as inveterate joiners and members of every international club going (APEC, OAS, Commonwealth, La Francophonie, NATO, Circumpolar Conference, NAFO, G8, to name just a few) Canadian governments are busy going to many meetings a year, and staffing all these organizational requirements, and summits, not only for their intrinsic value, which varies by organization, but for the balancing effect hoped for relative to the United States.

This, surely was what encouraged Mr. Trudeau to attempt to build a third option with the European community during the middle of his fifteen years or so in office. Some here at lunch today may have noticed that just before Christmas, Prime Minister Chrétien and European Community Chair Protti concluded an agreement about pursuing further agreements. And, I suspect that much of what has driven our present government to push through Kyoto ratification relatively quickly in Parliament was the clear and precise reality that America has neither agreed to the accord or appears interested in doing so.

Our economic context is one of growing penetration of the U.S. market, to the benefit of Canadians, Canadian companies, jobs and tax revenues. Not only is America our key export market, but thirty-eight American states list Canada as their primary foreign export market. For Canadians to sustain our standard of living and quality of life, our healthcare and social services, we must have an economy that serves more than our own population of thirty million. This is also

an indelible part of our economic history. And, our ability to finance a different view of society, a Canadian view – one that embraces healthcare, social diversity, education, freedom, community responsibility and social justice – is utterly dependant upon strong economic performance; those who would imperil our working relationship with our American allies are putting much more at peril than just our economic prospects.

In social and political terms we are clearly at a watershed in two key areas: we must manage changes to our healthcare programs and delivery systems now necessitated by expensive new technologies and serious shortages in health-care professionals at all levels; and we must also strive to preserve the maximum possible sovereignty for Canada and Canadians to make decisions that are in our own interests as Canadians both in terms of regional and local interests at home and our legitimate economic and strategic interests abroad.

I agree with those who argue that Canada is much more than its health-care insurance, and that the sinews of our citizenship were not freshly created only with healthcards in the 1970s. The sense of citizenship we share in this country embraces the Aboriginal first nations that were the stewards of settlement, community and early society in their land, the pioneer and United Empire Loyalist experience, the Ancien Regime in New France; it is built on the courage of those who fought on both sides of the battle for representative government in the mid eighteen hundreds; on those who defended freedom in three world wars with the maple leaf patch on their shoulders; on the immigrants from around the world who came here for economic opportunity, religious tolerance and who strengthened this country and our collective and individual prospects immeasurably. It is built on the magic that takes place in hockey arenas on early weekend mornings when young people of every race, colour and creed get on the ice to play that game of hockey so inextricably tied to our national soul. It is built on the economic, cultural and scientific achievements of Canadian men and women over the decades. Our citizenship is not only about health insurance.

But the sense of community that we share, and that underpins our concern for one another, the Canadian premise that we do not let people fall behind through no fault of their own, that premise is very much tied to how we manage health care and health insurance. What Senator Kirby and Commissioner Romanow indicated was that we need to use the public funds that come from provincial and federal taxpayers, (who are, just so we are not confused, the same taxpayers in the end,) to finance change in the system. Surely, our federal and provincial governments should see the meeting they are having at the First Ministers' level at the end of this month not as the end of a process they began when they signed a federal/provincial agreement before the last federal election, but as the beginning of a collective national process to strengthen health care delivery, health care quality and health care excellence. The strengths and weaknesses built up within our healthcare establishment did so over the better part of half a century. They will not be radically changed in eighteen months. In the end, it is the provinces who are on the front line, and back seat federal drivers barking out orders is both unhelpful and not in this country's confederal tradition. A mutual agreement where a clear basket of goals-embracing timeliness, reduced waiting periods, enhanced diagnostic and primary care initiatives-which leaves the provinces the freedom, as their constitutional jurisdiction clearly provides, to innovate, or make discrete choices based on local needs is clearly the way to go.

In terms of the much larger and more complex issue of enhancing and managing our sovereignty, we need a clear plan for how Canada can use its sovereignty – and for what domestic and international priorities sovereignty is a vital instrument.

Few Canadians would share the point of view often advanced in the United States, that membership in the United Nations is a serious dilution of our national sovereignty. In international agreements Canada has signed on refugees, on the treatment of prisoners of war, on the environment, on mutual defence as between the countries of NATO, or as between the signatories to the NORAD agreement, we have used our sovereign power to enter into binding international treaties to protect Canada and Canadians, enhance global humanitarian principles and protect our national security. These are good things. As are the agreements we have on freer trade with the United States and Mexico, with Chile and with Israel. As are the agreements we have on cultural and educational exchanges with Commonwealth and Francophone countries. Each one of these saw Canadian governments put a bit of our sovereignty, along with the other signatories, into an agreement or treaty that strengthens Canada. What narrow nationalists on the far left, mistakenly but sincerely believe is that national sovereignty can be static, permanent, unchanging and unyielding. Their views are important to our national debate and deserve to be heard and debated. But, they are wrong-and their prescriptions lead to the worst kind of isolation, an isolation this trading dependent Canada can ill afford.

That is not the kind of isolationists we aspire to be. It is not what sovereignty is about.

What we should be doing with our sovereignty, is what Canadians have always done, in peace and war, to create a better world, and by doing so a better country and life for our fellow citizens right here at home. We did it in Suez. We did it when we helped found NATO. We did it when Canadians crafted parts of the UN charter, the NORAD agreement, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

We should be looking now to help shape a new and clarifying Treaty of North America that specifies and underlines clear and precise areas of national sovereignty for Mexico, the United States and Canada as well as those areas where we agree to work together on disease control, continental security and defence, border management and the free movement of people, goods and capital within our three countries.

We need also to make a serious, measured and strategic multi-year investment in our armed forces focusing on the priorities that clearly enhance Canada's ability to deploy with our allies, with and for the United Nations, or on our own when vital domestic or international interests make it essential. This means long air lift capacity, increased personnel in all three services, enhanced special forces capacity, and the rapid acquisition of platforms-like helicopters-that can serve multiple purposes efficiently and effectively as do the patrol frigates and CF-18 fighter aircraft procured some time ago.

Those who argue that the choice is health or defence profoundly misunderstand the legitimate expectation on the part of Canadians that a modern industrial nation should be able to do both as we make progress together in this country. I am encouraged in the lead up to the coming budget season by the fact that John Manley's recent political prominence really dates back to his emergence after the September 11 attack in 2001 on our closest neighbour and ally as the first

Minister of the Crown in Ottawa to make clear what Canadians felt in our hearts-namely that we had young men in uniform buried in military cemeteries all over the world who underlined with their lives and sacrifice that Canadians do not turn and run when allies are attacked or freedom threatened. The thousands who came out on Parliament Hill to show solidarity with our neighbors, after September 11, 2001, the thousands of our fellow citizens who lined up at blood donor centres to donate blood that was sadly never needed, the elective hospital procedures that were postponed so Canadian hospitals and doctors and nurses could receive and help any American survivors-this is the true spirit of Canada and Canadians. And does anyone in this room doubt for a moment what the response would have been from our American neighbours had it been BCE place or Place Ville Marie that were attacked by the forces of darkness? I do not. Minister Manley spoke with uncommon clarity, historical accuracy and inspiring nobility. We need more of that mix in our national politics. We need a multiyear commitment in the coming budget that makes that implicit commitment real, in a way Mr. Martin's various budgets failed to do.

That would go a long way to enhance our real sovereignty; it would be a signal to Canada and Canadians and to the world, that this country is not in retreat, that we are more engaged than ever in building a better world, opposing dictatorship and oppression, and that the values of Canada and Canadians simply do not permit turning inward, turning away, averting our eyes from the tough challenges humanity must face.

Prime Minister Chrétien deserves great credit for the African aid initiative he brought to and had accepted by the G8 at the summit in Alberta-because that initiative not only embraced economic development, but also a bottom up agreement stipulating that increased democracy and decreased corruption had to coincide with that investment. That is Canada at its best, as was our work over decades on Cyprus and the Middle east, under Pearson, or our initiatives on apartheid under Prime Ministers Mulroney and Diefenbaker.

At home, we must not rest as long as any Canadian who tries to work their way out of poverty or who needs but cannot get the healthcare they require, or who cannot afford a post secondary education, is prevented from moving ahead by injustice, bad policy or systemic inadequacy. Abroad, we cannot rest as long as entire peoples, either for reasons of oppression, absence of democracy or ethnic discrimination and inhumanity are prevented from building better lives for themselves, their children or their communities.

Economic performance is how we pay for all this, and we must be resolute in removing unfair impediments to healthy markets. This requires, for example, that we address and diminish the constraints within our own country that prohibit the free movement of people, professions, students, capital and goods in ways that hurt economic performance must be undertaken.

Now some have argued that this is not possible within what appears to have become a one party democracy, where as things stand now, only one of our political parties has the apparent capacity to form a government at election time. While it is not the job of our Liberal friends to help other political parties coalesce or grow, the Prime Minister deserves both credit and support for his proposals to remove corporate and union donations from our political mix. This will strengthen democracy for both the large and smaller parties; more must be done-but this initial step is worthy of broad national support. It may not be perfect, but it is an excellent start. I say this as someone who has seen the system work, and who, while now a non partisan, approaches this and other

national priorities with a different partisan history than that espoused by our Prime Minister for over four decades.

As we look forward to the coming twenty four months of leadership contests, provincial and federal elections, we would all do well to remember that political parties are not private clubs or secret societies just for the edification of their own members. Political parties are public instruments that belong to us all, however we may choose to vote. Each party owes all Canadians the duty of sharing explicit party programmes that answer this question:

What kinds of policies, for what kind of government, for what kind of Canada, for what kind of world?

And, as we hold our parties to this basic duty, we must also ask the smaller opposition parties-what are they prepared to do, with whom are they prepared to collaborate both in the country and in the House of Commons, in order to advance specific public policy goals that not only serve all Canadians but make our democracy truly competitive once again? A political party Campaigning for just its own survival is the ultimate self-indulgence! Campaigning and forging workable policy frameworks that embrace more Canadians, underline explicit policy goals for this country is what the smaller parties owe all Canadians. In democratic parliamentary systems in continental Europe, in Scotland, in the United States, partisanship at election time does not mean lack of interpartisan agreement or cooperation thereafter. No party that aspires to govern - and no candidate that aspires to lead can avoid the duty to lay out how both the public good that party's priorities can be strengthened through working with others. And, there must be, if we are to once again have competitive democracy, a clear vision of what we are, as a society, trying to achieve.

What is that vision?

An independent, humane and strong democratic Canada, seeking to build the pillars of economic performance, social and environmental progress, stability and freedom at home, while committed strategically to democracy, national and international security, and human rights abroad.

It is not an impossible mission. It is what Canadians have the right to expect.

And, each of us as citizens must ask what we can do in our businesses, families, church groups, day to day work, think tanks, classrooms, political parties and other community organizations to help bring this about. We must be frank about what stands between our present reality and the vision we seek to achieve – and move as a country – to address those barriers.

It is the politics of the new reality. It is the ability to reach up and reach out. It is the will to leave no one behind.

Strong economic performance, genuine progress made by all Canadians on fiscal balance, important progress made on trade liberalization, tax reform and market access since 1988 puts this country in a strong position-with fair credit due to both Conservative and Liberal administrations in Ottawa, and provincial administrations of all political stripes in the provinces, over that period.

The ultimate sin would be to fritter that away, to let the progress we all made sacrifices to make happen dissipate because the less challenging road was chosen, the safe and complacent took precedent over the noble, practical and courageous.

Partisanship should define core principles and traditions. It must never be allowed to limit opportunities or genuine cooperation in the national interest.

Canadian history is about how people from different backgrounds empires, religions, languages, histories, parties and interests used compromise and creativity to build the greatest country in the world. Our history right here in Kingston reflects that same creativity.

All of us with children and grandchildren know in our hearts that, turning inward, looking backward, is not what our parents and grandparents did to build this country. And it is not what building this country requires of all of us today.

Happy New Year and God bless you all.

-30-