

For a competitive, compassionate, independent Canada

There is no inaugural address at the swearing-in of a Canadian prime minister and the cabinet. But three days before taking office on December 12, Paul Martin delivered what amounted to an inaugural address at a Liberal Party fundraiser in Toronto, where he laid out an agenda that included funding for health care and cities, and a stringent expenditure review to assure a continuing surplus, as well as renewing relations with the United States and reclaiming Canada's role in the world.

L'assermentation du premier ministre canadien et de son cabinet ne donne lieu à aucun discours inaugural. Mais trois jours avant son entrée en fonction le 12 décembre, lors d'une collecte de fonds du Parti libéral, Paul Martin prononçait à Toronto une allocution qui pouvait en tenir lieu. Ce discours, qui est reproduit dans les pages qui suivent, révèle un programme ambitieux englobant le financement des soins de santé et des municipalités, un réexamen rigoureux des dépenses visant à maintenir nos surplus budgétaires, de même qu'un renouvellement des relations canado-américaines et une réaffirmation du rôle du Canada dans le monde.

Our goal is to put Canada at the forefront of a world that is moving quickly, and to do this, we are going to have to bring in fundamental changes required to the way we are governed.

At the leadership convention I set out three objectives for our country: First, ensuring that Canada is at the leading edge of the 21st century economy. Second, ensuring that our social programs meet Canada's evolving needs. And third, ensuring that Canada's independent role in the world is one of pride and influence.

I want to lay out some of the changes in the way that government currently works, changes that I believe are crucial if we are to achieve these objectives. The first such change arises out of the fact that our finances are tight.

This is no surprise to anyone who saw John Manley's economic update last month. The issue is how do we realize the nation's objectives when our resources are constrained?

The answer is not rocket science — it is a culture shift that says that waste in government is not inevitable; it is much better financial controls; it is the recognition that if you have 40 priorities, you don't have any priorities. We cannot go off in every direction at the same time. We have to establish our priorities.

To begin with, we will immediately review every single existing government expenditure. And on an ongoing basis, we will continually review government programs to make sure they are doing the job they were meant to do.

Government has to be able to deliver on good ideas, without necessarily having to spend new money every time one arises. That means having the will to shut down what doesn't work and the discipline to focus on what can. Government has to understand that a dollar misspent is a dollar taken away from a Canadian who really needs it. We have to act as if every dollar counts, because every dollar does count.

Fundamentally, what we have to do is change the way that Ottawa works, and this in a multitude of areas.

First, we have to change the way Ottawa works with the other governments you elect. The first thing I did after the leadership convention was to meet provincial and territorial premiers at the Grey Cup. I did so because, if we hope to strengthen universal public health care, we have to work with the other provinces to do that; if we hope to create a learning society, we have to work with the provinces to do that.

The fact is that federal and provincial governments are going to disagree at times. There are going to be tensions. But those disagreements must be constructive in tone. Provinces rightfully expect the federal government to understand their needs. But this cuts both ways as well. The federal government also expects provinces to understand, and to come to the table as we make the tough choices that have to be made if national priorities are to be met.



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The federal government must also work better with city governments, Paul Martin tells a Toronto audience days before taking office in December. From the environment to immigration, the fates of our country and of our cities are inextricably linked.

In short, as leaders, we have to come together in common purpose for the common good. Canadians no longer have time for the “blame game,” or for finger-pointing politics. They want co-operation between their governments, not conflict — and they deserve nothing less.

The federal government must also work better with city governments. I recognize that cities fall within the provincial ambit, but from the environment to immigration, the fate of our country and of our cities is inextricably linked.

When Toronto faced SARS, all of Canada felt it. And when Toronto came back, when this city showed its vitality to the world, your efforts gave all of Canada a new strength. Cities are our signature to the world. If we want our young people to choose Canada, then we had better give them great cities — equal to the ambitions they have for their families and for their work.

Cities everywhere have to be able to deliver programs that provide decent housing. The GTA has to keep attracting industry and research that put Canada on the world’s cutting edge; it has to provide a setting that enriches and recognizes the cultural diversity of our whole country.

These responsibilities land on the doorsteps of every mayor in the country. They are 21st century responsibilities. But what these mayors have to meet them with is a resource base that was established in the 19th century. That is why we need a New Deal for our cities, and we have to begin the process of getting there now.

The second area where Ottawa has to change is we have to listen better to Canadians. What does this mean? It means we have to reengage Canadians in the political process.

Canadian democracy doesn’t belong to a prime minister; it doesn’t belong to

any political party. We must return Canada’s political system to its rightful owners: you, the Canadian people.

We are going to make your government more transparent and more accountable to you. We are going to make government worthy of your trust. And we are going to open up the parliamentary system. You will see parliamentary secretaries — with an enhanced role and greater influence on government — acting as a better bridge between Canadians, cabinet and MPs. You will see MPs set the terms of the national debate in a way we have not seen in decades.

Already, we have asked MPs for the first time ever to help draft the Throne Speech that will re-open Parliament. MPs must know that their check on the government extends beyond the theatre of Question Period.

So, your government will be built around the principle that free votes in Parliament are no longer the excep-

tion. Because if we want to make real changes that work for Canadians, we'll need MPs to support those ideas based on their merit, not based on party discipline.

We govern with the consent of the people. You grant that consent when you elect MPs, and you withdraw that consent when you refuse to vote — which Canadians are doing in ever increasing numbers. We have to turn this around, and, let me tell you, we are going to do just that. Your MP must be your messenger to Ottawa, not Ottawa's messenger to you. Parliament must become the frontline for the debate of new ideas.

If you have 40 priorities, you don't have any priorities... We cannot go off in every direction at the same time. We have to establish our priorities. We will immediately review every single existing government expenditure. And on an ongoing basis, we will continually review government programs to make sure they are doing the job they were meant to do.

The third area where Ottawa has to work better, if we are to accomplish our goals, arises out of the role we must play in the world. Increasingly, the world's multilateral systems are cracking under the pressure of nations retreating into their silos: the Doha Trade round falls apart at Cancún; the needed reform of the United Nations fails to take off. Every day 30,000 children die of preventable illnesses, and every single minute one woman dies in pregnancy or childbirth. The question is what kind of a world are we leaving for our children.

Now some say that there is not much Canada can do about all this. Well, I don't buy that. Not one bit. The world needs our values. The world needs us now — that is why we will be the first country in the world with legislation to open the door to increased export and production of patented medicines to help people suffering from HIV/AIDS, malaria and TB, among other diseases, in the developing world.

We are one of the world's wealthiest countries, and not just in economic

terms. Because of the incredible diversity of our population, we are where the world is going, not where it has been — and we are so much the richer for it. For this reason, we have a moral responsibility — reflective of our values as a people — to provide the catalyst that will cause the sovereign nations of the planet to assume their collective responsibility to the world as a whole.

And if anyone thinks that it's not in Canada's self-interest to make globalization work for everyone, I would ask them to reflect on this one point. We constantly seek to extend international rules in our dealings with the United States. Because when international rules are absent, problems like

the softwood lumber dispute arise. The problem looking ahead is it isn't enough to strengthen international rules between us and the world's lone superpower — the US. We have to do it across the breadth of the planet.

Why? Because within a generation there is going to be more than one economic superpower. What kind of a dilemma will we face 20 or 30 years from now, when China, India, Europe, perhaps Brazil and Russia are all economic giants — massive tectonic plates crashing and crushing those in-between. The answer is one heck of a dilemma — unless we act now.

We have the opportunity now to begin the process that will make the world work for everyone when our children and our grandchildren come of age. We owe it to them to do so. Canada has punched well above its weight on the world stage before. Let me tell you, we are going to do so again.

These are the opportunities and the challenges that await us in three days, when we form a new government. We are at an exciting juncture in our histo-

ry. Our future is in our hands and that future couldn't be brighter. Why? Ask the millions who chose Canada among the nations of the world, who said each day, "I will live here! I will plant my roots in this country!" In choosing Canada, they remind us of who we are and have always been.

We are a people who will not hunker down in fear behind our borders; we are a people who stand on the very edge of their own experience, who reach out even farther and place their hands in the hands of those who need our help. We are a people who, where others are shutting doors, open them. Other nations shun human

potential when it speaks differently or worships differently; we have long known a great truth — that the highest achievements in any field arise at the very spot and moment where people of vastly different beginnings come together in honest dialogue. This is a decisive moment in our history. One in which we have to build on our confidence, in who we are and what we can do.

We know as a nation we can do whatever we put our minds to. We are building a new Canada here — one in which we build best when our culture pushes the frontiers of human experience, and our science pushes the limits of human knowledge; one in which we build best when our businesses gain markets throughout the world, when our democracy is a model for others; one in which we build best when compassion and understanding are not simply words on a page, but the motivation that drives us.

As a government, we will set high goals for Canada. Because there is no limit to how high Canadians should set their sights. And make no mistake — we will achieve these goals. Because Canadians, working together, can and will make history.

Paul Martin is the 21st prime minister of Canada.