

Rt. Hon. Kim Campbell

Address to the Confederation Club of Kitchener, Ont.,

August 16, 1993

I have spent months crossing this country and listening to Canadians, to their concerns and their hopes -- for themselves, for their families, for Canada. This is a diverse country, with diverse perspectives and needs, but there is one thing that unites Canadians: a deep desire that their governments get back to basics and get those basics right. Canadians want government to focus on the issues that matter to them. Not on frills, but on fundamentals. Not on pretty promises, but on real progress.

Canadians want to be treated with respect. With respect for their dollars. With respect for their priorities. With respect for their future as Canadians. The United Nations calls Canada one of the best places in the world to live. But long before the UN started measuring those things, the world knew that. The hundreds of thousands of people who came here from distant shores knew that, knew that this country was special, knew that our prosperity and our peace and our capacity to care put us apart from others.

Well before the term was invented, Canada was world class. And the Canadian dream was born. We were able to build one of the highest standards of living on the planet. We constructed a network of social programs, believing that health care and education and dignity should come from being Canadian, not from being rich. We built a community based on law, on a deep respect both for rights and responsibilities. And we built a free federation, a free democracy in a world where freedom is known by too few.

Those have been our achievements. But Canadians today believe those achievements may be at risk. They worry that what has defined us as a country may be slipping away. They fear that precisely those things that have made Canada great are at great risk.

When you go to Ottawa, you get used to hearing all sorts of words, big words, clinical words, words created for the world of memoranda, not the world most Canadians live in. You've heard those words yourselves. Global competitiveness. Structural adjustment. I don't know what those terms mean to a banker. But I do know what they mean to Canadians. They mean the young person in Kitchener who leaves school without skills, who can't find a job in an industry where skills matter. They mean the young single mother in Fredericton, who must work, but who wants to learn, yet can't afford the time and the money to do that. They mean the middle-aged worker in Montreal, laid off in an industry that is fading, with little hope of rehiring, without the skills and the training for different work. And they mean the sad, empty fate of too many young people, everywhere, who know about rap, but not reading, much more about Muchmusic than math. That reality is painful. It hurts people, destroys hope, damages families.

Government cannot stand aside or hide behind the market, asking Canadians to accept the cruelty of crass capitalism, or fate. That is nothing more than blaming the victim. The challenges we face are fundamental. And clearly, we must meet those challenges head on. There is no generation of

Canadians that can do that except ours. And there is no chance except this one to do it right, and do it now.

Part of the challenge we face is to accept how our Canadian reality has changed. As a country, as an economy, we used to assume that the forests and the fish and what we could find in the ground and till from the soil would gild our future forever. Well, if that was ever right, it's not now. Others are able to produce natural resources as cheaply or more cheaply than we. And even when we succeed in those industries, the jobs there are dwindling because of progress in production.

The trend is towards industry that adds value. The trend is towards the provision of services, rather than the production of goods. The trend is away from the idea of harvesting to the harvesting of ideas. That is much more than a statement about economics. It has implications for education, for learning, for our youth, for our future. The basic question is clear: do we have the right stuff? The answer, unfortunately, is also clear: not enough. We are not learning well enough for today. We are certainly not learning well enough for tomorrow.

Canada is the only developed industrial country in the world that does not have a national department of education. Now, I know that education is a question of provincial jurisdiction. That's what the Constitution says. And I have no interest in challenging or changing that fact. And certainly, I have no interest and the country has no interest, in more battles over constitutional turf. Goodness knows, each and every government in Canada has enough on its own plate as it is. We don't need to pile more on. We need to do better with what we have.

This is about being good partners in a good cause. The provinces and communities across Canada are doing excellent work to begin the process of improving how we do as a country on learning. I am particularly pleased with the work being done by the Council of Ministers of Education on testing and the measurement of performance by Canadian students. But I believe there is a role here for Canada, for the national government. Not to force, but to facilitate. Not to act apart, but to work together with others. This is much more than a matter for governments. It is an issue for schools, for parents, for the private sector, for unions. We won't address the challenge by standing apart, as governments, or as a society. We can solve it by moving forward together.

We are beginning to do that in many places, in many ways. The excellence of the University of Waterloo is based on both the quality of its teaching and the quality of the partnership that exists between that institution and the private sector. For the unemployed here in Kitchener-Waterloo, an innovative Employment Skills Centre is enjoying a 70% success rate for training and placement. In New Brunswick, an exciting new partnership between Ottawa and that province, involving all sectors of society, is helping people learn better, helping people get jobs and keep them. Unemployment is down. Illiteracy is down. Training is up. Ottawa and Quebec have reached a consensus on key principles for a more rational, a more cooperative, a more effective approach to helping workers get jobs and keep them.

That is not constitutional change through the back door. It is improving the service to Canadians through the front door. It is about putting in one place the tools to help workers. It is about ending the insanity and the inhumanity of forcing people in need to bounce around town, from office to office, phone to phone, being put on hold when what they need is help. It is about governments,

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/2/4/h4-4044-e.html>

business, labour, educational and other groups sitting around a table deciding, not sitting across a table and bickering. It is about recognizing the fact that it is much more likely that the people of Trois Rivières -- or Truro or Toronto -- will know better what they need than a bunch of bureaucrats in Ottawa. I believe this new approach can work. It is an approach that is available to every other province. Indeed, discussions are now going on with other provinces such as New Brunswick and Alberta. I believe it is an approach that can put the wisdom of federalism to work for the well-being of the country.

And certainly, there is lots of work to do. Look at the facts. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the OECD, which studies and evaluates industrial economies objectively, puts Canada squarely in the middle on educational performance. In the middle is mediocre. The Canadian high-school drop-out rate is at least 20%. In Japan it is 2%. Universities are forced to become high schools, and teach basic skills to our students at age 20 what they should have been taught at age 12. Three out of 10 Canadians can't read well enough and four out of 10 can't count well enough.

The gap between leaving school and on-the-job training is far too long, often measured in years rather than months. We are training people for jobs that don't exist, and not training them for jobs that do. We should be training mechanics for fuel injection rather than for carburetors.

Now, the answer to those problems is not more money, certainly not on the part of governments. As governments, we spend more per capita on education and training than virtually any other industrial country. Some \$55 billion a year. The answer is not spending more. It's spending smarter. It's knowing why we must improve, and how.

When people of my generation were young, we assumed we had a real choice: to continue in school, or to stop and get a job. Ten days ago, I was in Prince George, in my home province of B.C. When I was young, kids there could choose: to go away to Vancouver to university, or to stay at home and work in the forests or the mills. Is that choice now there? The forest industry is prosperous, but the workforce is smaller. The people of Prince George know the meaning of that change. In fact, a university is being created there. The people of Prince George realize that a good education is not a frill in life now, but a fact of life.

In the past, whether we admitted it or not higher education was often something for the elites. It was open to everyone, but not everyone went. Some didn't need to. Some didn't want to. And many simply couldn't. But today, we can't afford a learning system that systematically leaves tens of thousands of Canadians out, whether for reasons of disability, or disadvantage, or family obligations, or gender. That is much more than a matter of justice. It is a question of being able to draw on our full potential as a people.

In the past, we believed that learning stops when we stop being young -- that school was a phase, like adolescence, to pass through, to move beyond. But young Canadians today will change jobs five or six times in their lives. And even if they stay in one job, that job itself will transform with technology, with new techniques, new demands. Life-long learning is not a slogan. It is becoming a staple. Today, more than ever, to earn means to learn.

As a government, we have put measures in place to help Canadian worker train better, to adjust. Today, the federal government spends \$3.8 billion a year on training and re-employment programs. This year, we have committed \$300 million in special assistance for workers who have been in their jobs for several years but have now been laid off. And we are pursuing partnerships with industry and unions and the provinces so that training can improve, so that workers get the skills they need to succeed and to meet the requirements of the 1990s economy.

But I believe that business simply must do better. Canadian workers are the best asset of Canadian business. More important than plants or technology, they are Canada's greatest natural resource. To upgrade technology while downplaying our workers is silly, and short-sighted, and unjust.

Look at how we're doing. Canadian governments spend two-and-a-half times what American governments do to help train workers. But in the past it has been estimated that Canadian companies spend one-half as much as American firms on training, one-fifth the amount of the Japanese, one-eighth the amount of the Germans. Studies have shown that barely 31% of Canadian firms train their workers, and most of that is for basic matters of health and of safety. In this day and age, anything like that is absolutely unacceptable.

Our shortcomings on learning are costing us dearly. It costs us dollars -- in the billions. Think about it. It is estimated that illiteracy costs the Canadian economy over \$14 billion a year. It is no coincidence that illiteracy levels in our prisons are much higher than anywhere else in society. It is no accident that those on welfare, on long-term UIC, tend to be those without the skills needed to get a job, and keep a job. If we do better on learning, we can save billions. And if we do better on learning, we can earn billions, through more trade, better products, better services.

But this is much more than a question of dollars. It is a question of dignity, of freedom. Illiteracy is a prison. To drop out of school today is to drop out of life. Inadequate training threatens the personal security of Canadians. But education empowers. Learning liberates. Knowledge can let the human spirit soar.

Today, I wish to describe a series of initiatives that we are taking, together with our partners, to help Canada learn better, earn better. In the past, we tended to look at learning very narrowly, in terms of red brick schoolhouses and classrooms and texts. But that is only how teaching takes place. It is not where good learning begins.

We must be more preventative in our approach. We must recognize the role of physical health and mental health and family health in creating an environment where the young Canadian going to kindergarten for the first time has the best chance possible to succeed. To meet that need, the government has put in place a Brighter Futures Program to assist children at risk and their families. That is being done in cooperation with the provinces through community level programs. Part of that initiative is a Community Action Program designed to help local groups in high risk communities provide prevention and intervention programming for children at risk. Protocols have been signed with three provinces and territories. I have asked that the remaining protocols with the other provinces be agreed and implemented as soon as possible so that this program can move forward immediately.

A second challenge. I believe that never before have the old basics been more important -- reading and writing and arithmetic. But there are new basics too, new fundamentals. We trumpet the arrival of the computer age. But across Canada, particularly in poorer communities, our schools do not have computers. Too many have too few. Some don't have any. We risk yet another form of functional illiteracy.

To help address that problem, I have instructed all federal government departments to donate their old computer systems, ones they must replace, to Canada's schools. This Computers For Schools program will include both software and hardware. Principals, teachers, parents and private sector partners in each province will decide where the need is greatest.

In addition, working with the provinces and with industry, we will expand a project called SchoolNet to link schools together by computer, to give students access to important information in science and mathematics. In the current pilot project 12 schools are involved. That will be expanded to 300. Our goal is to have every school in Canada electronically connected.

A third challenge. I believe it is crucial that we know why some schools succeed better than others. We want to fix what is wrong. But to do that properly, we must know what is right. To that end, we are putting in place an Exemplary Schools Project that will look closely at 20 successful schools from across Canada. The results should help every school, every student in this country.

A fourth challenge. I believe it is important to address the barriers that exist to participation in education. The rules that we have in place to encourage learning sometimes don't do that. They close doors, rather than opening doors up. For example, I do not believe that the existing tax credit for education works well enough. It does not reflect the rising cost of education. It discriminates against part-time students. It does not recognize the special needs of single parents who need child care to be able to go to school.

I believe we must put in place a new education tax credit that increases the deduction for full-time study; recognizes for the first time the eligibility of part-time students; and provides child care expense deductions for the first time for part-time students and responds better to the needs of single parents. I have asked the Minister of Finance to look urgently at this question.

A fifth challenge. Disabled Canadians clearly deserve special assistance in education, in training, in looking for and keeping a job. That is not a question of charity. It is a question of helping those people reach their potential so that this country can reach its potential too. Today, I am announcing the renewal of cost-sharing agreements with every province and territory so that Canadians with disabilities will be provided the opportunity to contribute to themselves and their country. Those agreements will fund counselling, and wheelchairs, and training, and books. They will involve the expenditure of over \$500 million.

Another challenge. Often, when students graduate from school to seek employment, they lack the money or the management skill and the training to set up a business. Banks often shut their doors. Young Canadian entrepreneurs, with good ideas, are left out in the cold. We will put in place a program to help address that. That program will provide training. It will provide access to start-up funds, through loans. It will foster independence, encourage prosperity, and create jobs.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I believe it is time, at long last, to reform the Canada Student Loans Program. For literally hundreds of thousands of Canadians, that program has been vital. Speaking simply as one former student, I know that I could not have gone on to university without a student loan. But the current system has not been fundamentally changed since 1964. It's not working nearly well enough. Not for our students. Not for the taxpayer.

There are many faults to fix. The cost of living for students has gone up 30% over the last five years alone, but the loan limits have not changed. Some students who don't really need loans get them. And students who do need them don't, or don't get enough. Part-time students are not provided for nearly well enough, despite the fact that part-time study is more common, and more necessary. Students in need graduate heavily in debt, with limited capacity to repay. The current system costs hundreds of millions of dollars through inefficiency and defaulted loans, money that does not go into the pockets of students. Defaults on loans have reached chronic proportions. Today there is over \$1 billion in defaulted loans, and the costs of defaults is running at about \$200 million per year. In effect, former students who can afford to repay their loans are today depriving students in need of support they deserve.

Together with the provinces, we will pursue reform that addresses those faults. Despite increases in student costs, the student loan program only provides about \$3,500 each year. We will raise that limit to \$5,100. We will increase assistance for part-time students, from \$2,500 to \$4,000. We will provide deferred grants and interest relief to those students most in need. We will alter the financing structure to substantially reduce costs and allow more successful pursuit of defaulters. We will increase assistance to the disabled. We will provide special grants for groups at risk, such as single parents, who are currently often shut out of the system.

Finally, we will take action to address the problem of the chronic and severe under-representation of women in Canadian doctoral programs, particularly in the areas of science, mathematics, and engineering. Taken together, through greater fiscal responsibility, these measures will put millions of more dollars directly into the hands of Canadian students every year.

Now, none of the initiatives I have described today will perform miracles. None will work overnight. And no measures will work, if we don't work together. We are making great strides. But if we are well begun, so too have we a long way to go.

We have to put an end to the era of the isolation of issues. We must act on the reality that family environment is connected to performance in school. The reality that getting through school isn't good enough if our students haven't learned the right stuff when they are there. The reality that training is essential for good learning in school and after. And the reality that for business and for workers, learning should not end with leaving school.

If we shouldn't isolate the learning challenges any more, neither should we be isolated from each other. Perhaps it was good enough in the old days to leave it to the schools. Perhaps it was satisfactory for business to stand aside, governments to stand apart, for parents and communities and governments and business to work alone. At the end of the day, leadership does require the will to act alone when one believes one is right. But wise leadership also requires the will to work together, because there is no stronger force than a strong and sure consensus.

I believe that a consensus must be built in this country on learning. I am talking about what ordinary Canadians want. Surely we agree that we are not doing well enough at the basics, not doing well enough to keep kids in school. Surely we agree that we need to do better in schools, at work, and in between, to prepare our young people for good jobs, good careers, with relevant and flexible skills. Surely we agree that no Canadian should be deprived access to learning because of disability or disadvantage. And surely, we can work better together than we have.

I believe that the most basic desire of every Canadian is that their children have at least the same opportunity, the same chances that we had. Canadians are worried that their children won't. We must help make sure that they do. Learning is not the only answer. But it is one answer, and it is vital.

I certainly don't claim a particular wisdom. But I have been a student and I have been a teacher. I have served as a school trustee, and I have served at both the provincial and federal levels of government. I have seen the pain that comes from not doing nearly well enough. And I have seen the pleasure that can come from the absolute joy of good learning. I have been there, at many tables, when we have fought each other rather than fighting for our students, for our youth, for their success. And I have seen the progress that can come from partnership, from Canadians.

I simply pledge to you today, that fully mindful of the rights and the roles of others -- in government and outside -- Canada's national government will act where it must, lead where it can, and help build consensus where it should. After all, there is nothing more important than ensuring that the next generation of Canadians is not the lost generation, but the best generation possible, one that earns better, one that learns better, one that can dream once again.