

**NOTES FOR AN ADDRESS
BY
PRIME MINISTER JEAN CHRÉTIEN**

To Michigan State University

**Lansing, Michigan
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Check against delivery

For all of you here tonight, this is a time for personal celebration. You have worked hard. Very hard. With the abiding support of your families, you have set high goals and achieved them. You have prepared yourselves to take on your future and the wider world.

When you leave Michigan State, you will be entering a world that has changed, almost beyond recognition, from the one I entered when I left school, many, many years ago. The scope and pace of change have been breathtaking.

We have seen an explosion of new technology. Breaking down old constraints of time and distance. Sweeping away traditional economic structures and assumptions. Creating a new economy, in which knowledge, innovation and creativity are the keys to prosperity. We have seen the collapse of outdated ideologies. The rise of a world-wide ethic of human rights and human security. And the rapid development of a truly global economy and a global village.

This is certainly an exciting time, no question. But times of great change can also be times of anxiety. For individuals and for societies. How can we find our place in a rapidly changing world? How can I remain who I am? How can I maintain my sense of values and priorities? My quality of life? My individual identity?

These are the questions we ask ourselves. These are also the questions each society must ask itself.

As people and nations reach out to each other in the global village, across time-zones, borders and cultures, what place will there be for diversity? What room will there be for nations and governments to protect and nurture unique values and priorities? Will our emerging global village impose a culture in which one size fits all?

Let me state at the outset that I am an optimist about the place of diversity in our global future. For reasons, I have to look no further than the relationship between Canada and the United States. And I cannot begin to describe its full vigour without mentioning the contribution of a distinguished public servant who is here with us today. One of your alumni. A great governor. A great ambassador. And a good friend of mine: James Blanchard.

Ladies and gentlemen, the friendship between Canada and the United States is as old as our countries. It is a global and hemispheric partnership based on shared, basic values of human rights and democracy. A model to the world of civility and openness. And, in my judgment, a guide to how nations can develop strong friendships while, at the same time, retain their distinctive identities in the global village.

Our successful business partnership is well known. More trade crosses our borders than anywhere else on the planet. But running much deeper than our ties of commerce, are the basic human values that we share. Values that are the basis of our historic partnership for progress, in the Americas and around the world.

Freedom is our birthright and our common cause. We understand that freedom is the source of human dignity and fulfilment. Through two World Wars and Korea, our sons and daughters have laid down their lives so that people elsewhere could retain its many blessings.

And today, as partners in NATO, our pilots are flying side by side in dangerous skies so that the people of Kosovo can enjoy the simple dignity of peace and security.

And I would like to take this opportunity to commend the resolve that President Clinton has shown in staying the course. Like those earlier struggles in which Canada and the United States have stood together, Kosovo is about standing up against oppression and the systematic destruction of a people.

That is not always easy or simple. But we will prevail!

As our trade figures show, Canada and the United States have written the book on the value of open trade and investment. Not just because they enrich the corporate bottom line. But because of what they mean in terms of new opportunity and a better quality of life for our people. We are champions of liberalized trade around the world. Because, despite their ups and downs, we believe that open markets are not only good for us...they are good for all people.

But while our two countries are similar in many ways, we are not the same.

History tells us that the 49th parallel is much more than a line on a map. It marks a continental divide. A friendly divide to be sure. But one that speaks to some fundamental differences. Differences that our intense closeness has not weakened or diluted.

Nor will it in the future.

We share values and goals. But our means of achieving them are different. And I want to talk about that.

In the US, those means are increasingly private sector. In Canada, in essential areas, we prefer the public approach.

This explains the strong preference for public schools in Canada. And the demand for low university tuitions. This also explains our choice as a society to develop a comprehensive social safety net. A network of public programs that give Canadians the support they need, when they need it. Programs that ensure income security and dignity in old age. Support to help the unemployed find jobs. Benefits for low-income families with children.

And our proudest achievement: our distinctive, publicly-funded health care system -- for everyone -- called Medicare. Under it, no Canadian can be denied coverage for essential health services, and no Canadian has to worry about medical bills -- ever.

In Canada, we consider Medicare to be the best example of how good social policy can be good economic policy, too. While reflecting the desire of Canadians to show compassion for their fellow citizens, Medicare also serves as one of our key competitive advantages. In Canada, employers are not saddled with the high costs of insuring their employees privately.

Our belief in the need to balance individual rights with the responsibilities of shared citizenship explains our decision to introduce anti-hate laws which, we believe, place reasonable limits on the right of free speech. This is also why we have adopted a much tougher approach to gun control.

We have one of the toughest gun control laws in the world. And Canadians want to keep it that way. I may be a big supporter of free trade, but, believe me, the National Rifle Association is one export Canadians will never buy. Charlton Heston should know that when it comes to his gospel on guns, Canada is not the promised land.

Canada has also been active in promoting cultural diversity. We know and respect the American Melting Pot experience. But our federation and our country came out of the founding partnership of the English and French cultures. And we have created instruments and programs that nurture the many other cultures that, over the years, have enriched our national life.

For all these reasons, Canadians expect their national government to strike an important balance. A balance that promotes individual freedom and economic prosperity, while, at the same time, sharing risks and benefits. It is this balance that has led to our unique quality of life in Canada.

That is our history. That is our reality today.

It is also what makes Canada especially suited to meet the challenges of globalization and of change as the world enters a new millennium. Because the foundation of a productive and prosperous society in the new millennium will be a healthy, well-educated and innovative population. That is what the efforts of all governments must be about.

Implicit in this balanced approach is the recognition that creating opportunity and prosperity are not enough. To be sustainable, they must be shared. This is why we must all deal with the growing gap between the haves and have-nots in our societies.

Some say we cannot afford to have a social safety net. The reality is that we cannot afford the costs of social exclusion and despair. An example of this is the fact that it costs less to educate a person than it does to incarcerate them. Give a person hope, a chance to contribute, and they likely will. And all of society will be stronger for it.

What is true within our societies is also true in the global village. The growing gap between the rich societies in the world and the poor ones is not sustainable. It is bad for international stability. It is bad for the eco-system we all share. And in this new millennium of globalism it is morally unacceptable.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe these are the key challenges we all face in this bold new era. And no one will face them more squarely than you, the young men and women in this hall, and your contemporaries around the world.

There are many ways that you can contribute to building that world. And I would like to recommend to you the path of public service. I have been in Canadian public life for 36 years. And I tell you, from my heart, that my efforts have been rewarded in ways that far exceed any material gain I might have made in private life. I ask you to keep that in mind as you prepare to take on the world.

Whatever course you choose, I have every confidence that when you set off to discover all that the world has to offer, you will find that the same forces that are bringing people and nations closer together -- the forces that are making us more alike -- will also permit sufficient flexibility for nations to be different.

To be proud of their uniqueness. Their diversity.

So that your generation and future generations will benefit from the rich diversity of the nations and cultures that now make up our global village.