

An Open Letter to New Brunswickers

The following letter expresses the opinions of the newly formed New Brunswick Business Council. The Council is a non-partisan group of chief executive officers of New Brunswick-based companies whose purpose is to promote the development and long-term interests of the province.

It is time for New Brunswickers to take a clear and hard look into the future.

Since the end of the Second World War, Canada has undergone a tremendous period of growth and change. New Brunswick has contributed to this progress, and today offers a positive environment in which to live and do business.

But our world is changing dramatically, and New Brunswick has to move forward with it.

A massive transformation of the global economy is taking place with the emergence of two new economic superpowers: China and India.

The stronger Canadian dollar is having a devastating effect on New Brunswick's natural-resource-based economy.

At the same time, the Canadian federation is changing. Old assumptions are being questioned, and new opportunities will emerge. Some are questioning efforts to reduce regional disparities. Others are challenging the results of equalization and other transfers, which contribute almost 40 per cent of New Brunswick's provincial budget.

New Brunswick also has challenges at home. Our numbers are declining in real terms and as a percentage of the population of a growing Canada. Many of our younger people are responding to opportunities elsewhere. New Brunswick attracts a growing number of immigrants, but we need to do a better job of helping them get established. An aging population means higher health-care costs.

We need to make significant improvement in student achievement as reflected in comparative testing. The rate of participation in post-secondary education must increase. We cannot continue to aspire to a modern economy and have one of the lowest literacy rates in Canada.

We have the basis for a successful transformation. We have a long and proud tradition of stable and capable democratic governance. We have vibrant institutions in our universities and colleges. We have growing urban areas, and strong social networks in our rural communities.

New Brunswick is a great place to do business — competitive tax systems, and a dedicated and capable workforce. We have successfully built world-class companies with deep roots in New Brunswick.

Although we remain below the national average on most economic indicators, we have, in the last 25 years, made substantial progress in closing the gap on a number of important indicators, such as real GDP and personal and disposable income.

We have the full powers of a province, and we have shown the capacity to respond more quickly and effectively than larger jurisdictions.

We are not the first place to face tough challenges. Some excellent examples of dramatic turn-arounds exist in Ireland, New Zealand and Finland. People working together toward common goals truly can create a brighter future.

The creation of a modern industrial economy in the immediate post-war period

and our transformation in the '60s through the Equal Opportunity program, show that we as New Brunswickers can rise to the task when we decide to.

As heads of New Brunswick-based enterprises, we are prepared to contribute to a New Brunswick renewal. The Premier has set five strategic goals for the Province and invited stakeholders, experts and citizens to engage in shaping our future. We, as a business council, are looking forward to being part of this process.

Our contribution can begin with helping to strengthen entrepreneurial capacity in the province, doing our part in a concerted effort to raise education and health outcomes, and supporting the development of a long-term vision for New Brunswick. We hope to work with government and others toward:

- encouraging growth in the number of innovative companies based in the Province;
- fostering the development of entrepreneurial skills among New Brunswickers;

- helping more New Brunswickers take full advantage of educational opportunities;
- investing in the wellness of our own employees, their families, and all New Brunswickers;
- contributing to a stronger policy dialogue in New Brunswick; and;
- encouraging New Brunswick to think bigger and for the longer term.

Of the many threats facing us, complacency is perhaps the most serious. In education, health, the arts, civil society, and business, we all have ambitions for the future.

As leaders of New Brunswick-based companies, we look forward to building a sustained effort to transform our province into a more capable and confident New Brunswick.

Members of the New Brunswick Business Council:

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