Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It really is a pleasure to be with you this evening. Thanks very much, Gordon, for that introduction. A little too generous, but I appreciate it nevertheless.

One of the real pleasures coming here has given me is the chance to read Gordon’s biography. What a distinguished Canadian public servant! In a sense, what I will be talking about towards the end of my remarks is that, once more, we have to do what we did after World War II, which was to build this glorious set of public institutions in the finest country in the world. It was Gordon’s generation that did it and what I will be suggesting is that it is now 60 years on and time for us to begin to dream and imagine again and fashion a new reality, a new narrative, for our country.

I would also like to thank Jodi for the very generous invitation to speak tonight. Gordon did his best, but as you can see, I’m well outside the mainstream of public administration and it was a bit of an act of courage to invite me here this evening. And I do have views.

Jodi and I met in Fredericton earlier this year at a conference organized by the Public Policy Forum. This evening’s invitation came out of a pretty provocative conversation we had there. Also, I would really like to thank any number of folks from the New Brunswick “mafia” here to protect me and take care of me if I get into trouble. Thanks for showing up. It means a lot to me.

So this conference in Fredericton was about the government of New Brunswick and the current methods and potential approaches to engaging the public in a deep conversation about our future as a people. It was organized around the release of a really excellent assessment by Don Lenihan of the Public Policy Forum of engagement practices in the government of New Brunswick and how we tend to engage people in a paternalistic, traditional fashion. It offered some really good ideas about how we had to move on, to try to craft a new way of engaging. Over a few days in May, folks came together for what was – no surprise – a pretty abstract, somewhat fuzzy conversation. We were dealing with stuff that is fresh, exciting, and innovative in some ways but still quite woolly and tough to tie down.

Out of this discussion, and I would suspect out of conversations and dialogues across the country, emerged questions about whether or not we’ve come very far yet in shaping what this new narrative is going to be about, as have concerns about the state of our current reality. These questions and concerns are deep and unbelievably important. I believe there is a sense – as real in Fredericton, Tracadie or Edmundston as it is in the centres of high finance – that we are entering a period of real uncertainty. And that’s beyond the current financial meltdown, horrific though that is. There is a sense that we are 60 years on from the end of the 2nd World War and a lot of our basic values, our core institutions, our perception of our reality and where we fit in the world are beginning to be tested. There is a sense that as we go through this period of change, we are not going to turn back the clock but are in fact on our way through a period of deep and profound change. Our leaders and institutions are frankly ill-prepared for the challenges that lay before us.
I think there is also a growing realization that as we begin to struggle about how to shape these challenges and develop the responses, the solutions can’t and won’t be left to the policy wonks or to the strategic retreats that parties go through periodically. This change is so deep and profound that the response will only emerge through a real, authentic and sustained engagement with our communities. In other words, we don’t have the solutions and there isn’t going to be the man or woman on a white horse will come in with the solutions. They are going to emerge and evolve over time from deep conversations within our communities. So for my talk this evening – and I apologize for being overly ambitious and the narrative will be thin on a number of fronts – but essentially I want to talk about three or four themes.

First, I really do think we have entered an era of deep change. It is driven in part, as you would expect, by the inexorable march of technology. But it is not just about technology. It is also about quickly evolving global, economic, social and environmental challenges, some of which are painfully obvious to us and some of which are just emerging. I also think these changes are at a deeper level – a deep personal and collective level – and there is almost a quest for a realignment about what our core beliefs and values are. There is a cascading effect – they are all important – but as you get deeper and deeper it is actually getting down to us as individuals and what matters to us and what has value to us going forward.

So that is my first theme. The second is that what passes as political discourse in this country is failing – absolutely failing – to engage the community in any kind of meaningful conversation about what these trends are, what these issues are and how we have to respond. We all know that in our heart and gut. The political theatre we have today is from a different era and we have to move on. And we are moving on in some ways. There are conversations evolving in this country, important conversations, but they are well outside the political mainstream. They are important and they provide some early, some tentative, but I think some important clues about a new future, a new narrative and who we can be as a people.

At the heart of my story, I also want to talk about what has been going on in my home province of New Brunswick. Maybe not the place you would expect a fresh, new story to emerge from, but in a sense you would be wrong because New Brunswick has had this conversation in the past – admittedly with its back to the wall, but it has done it. And there are lots of good and interesting reasons why my little province is the place trying to fashion this new conversation.

Finally, what is going to emerge from all of this is a new politics. It is going to take time, but I think we are going to see the most fundamental restructuring of our public institutions since at least the end of World War II. I also believe that the kind of significant change that emerged from the whole post-war reconstruction model, a model that is now ancient history, will happen again – and a lot sooner than perhaps you think.
I know this is ambitious stuff and I know I’ve got to tread carefully. It is certainly not the Canadian way to get too far out in front of the established conventional wisdom, but I think it is time for us to have a real conversation.

Having said that, I do recognize that we have to careful about our rhetoric and the rhetoric of change. We don’t want to get overexcited with the most recent fad. There is no question that when we talk about big and deep change we are often seduced by lots of individuals who are peddling the latest fads and fashions - invariably in a more and more breathless fashion. Whether Alvin Toffler and the 3rd Wave or Richard Florida or any number of people working with important, albeit rarely original ideas, but typically stretching them way beyond any natural limit or direction to support some kind of highly personal agenda. So we need to be careful as we get into this rhetoric of change.

I see it, for example, in this whole narrative of the new urbanism agenda in this country and the effort to pass it off as the core of our new story. It is becoming increasingly more difficult for people like me to hide our frustration, not only with the political process that doesn’t speak to me, let alone to my children, but also with the so-called national media and what passes for a class of public intellectuals – and I’m not saying they’ve meant to do this - who have effectively written off much of the country. If I have to read one more column by John Ibbotson or an editorial in the Globe & Mail which, under the guise of the new urbanism in this era of globalization, reduces the country to a few cities and some pretty scenery, I’m not only going to scream I’m going to go down to the corner and sign up for the Maritime Liberation Army.

The poverty of imagination coming out of that rhetoric! It is such a small derivative story and if that is all our country is about, it is so sad and disappointing that that is what we’ve retreated into. It is not only the folks who are peddling the fads and trying to pigeonhole us. There is also, more generally, in the world canvas beyond Canada the whole story of the decline of the West – the end of history crowd – the folks that come along like clockwork every twenty years with grand overpowering narratives that everything is so fundamentally changed. You may recall a famous example from the mid 80’s when the Yale historian, Paul Kennedy, in his book The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers saw the West, and the United States in particular, on the road to perdition. This was just four years before the suicide of the Soviet Union. He had it so completely wrong. And now, two decades later, with the much hyped great power shift towards Asia that will change the West into a has-been – that is equally suspicious.

It is important, before I get to my core narrative, to remind ourselves of Tony Judt’s wise council that, “before getting too carried away by all of this overheated rhetoric, we be careful of our urge to deny continuity and proclaim novelty on every possible occasion, as well as our insistence on asserting a new world, one whose risks and opportunities are without precedence.” The cautions are well taken, the caveats are clear. But despite the reservations, I really do believe we are in a period of profound change. As I noted earlier, it is driven in part by technology as it always is. The dotcom era, the Internet phenomenon from the 90s and how that provided infrastructure for this terrific globalization movement is well-known. It is currently being driven by the next generation
of advances of IT, whether Web 2.0, cloud computing or mesh collaboration. This is real and important and will continue to transform life as we know it. But reflecting on my recent term as President of the Canadian Academy of Engineering, you haven’t see anything yet. The 20th century was one of physics, chemistry and applied math; watch what is going to happen in the century of biology and how that will profoundly impact so much of our way of life.

Of course, at a deeper level, this cascades into the whole phenomenon of increasing complexity of globalization and, at the same time, a profound reshaping of our international environmental, political, economic and human geography in ways that we haven’t seen before and that are extremely important.

Finally, as I mentioned, beyond all of this, there is this fundamental quest that is evolving for meaning and value in a post-modern world. Our concerns about the environment, about our social and cultural realities are real – bedrock important – and we don’t yet really understand the impact they are going to have. To quote from an old Buffalo Springfield lyric: “There’s something happening here, what it is ain’t exactly clear”. There is a sense, though, that we are somewhere at the beginning of a period of profound change, at deeper and deeper levels with increasing complexity and uncertainty and, I think, at the beginning of an understanding that our traditional institutions and mechanisms for understanding and managing change increasingly are not up to the challenge.

The political process is one example. This is not about the individuals who go into politics – we have to celebrate every day the quality of individual politicians and the sacrifices they make – but our political process has become pretty bad theatre. There is this sense that it does not connect with us individually or collectively. It does not resonate and it does not deal with the real issues that are emerging. It does not allow us to be engaged in any meaningful fashion. There is a widespread acceptance – and it is funny how people are openly talking about this now – that our recent elections have been failures. People are actually using this language - failure to effectively engage us – not so much in partisan terms, but with every party failing to provide a new narrative that engages us.

Today, I met with a prominent geoscientist from Western Canada and he picked up on the same thing I did during the federal election, which was how frustratingly irrelevant so much of it was, including what should have been a very powerful conversation about the environment. But an issue you would never have expected was teased out and became important: culture. To a certain extent, the national media tried to put this story into a box. They wrote it off as a product of Quebec’s distinct society, the effect of minority and majority government and a concern only of Toronto’s artistic elite. It was portrayed as a bizarre topic for an election campaign.

It wasn’t bizarre however. In my little town of Fredericton the most interesting, exciting, passionate engagement during the election was a debate on the importance of culture. That culture matters. It brought out more people from a broader cross-section of society
for a deep, engaged evening about how this does matter. Forget about what triggered it, this is something we should be talking about. It does matter to us. That evening, in my local riding, we had five candidates running and every one of them went off script. Of course culture matters; it is about who we are and where we are going. The funny thing is that the fellow I met for lunch told me the same thing happened in Saskatoon.

The American election provided an example of how these cultural things can be important but also how much of this can be dismissed as theatre and rhetoric is from a different era. First, you have to celebrate a breathtakingly historical moment. To have elected an African American as President is unbelievably important. Thomas Friedman’s column the day after in the *New York Times* had a beautiful opening line: “And so came to pass that on November 4th 2008 shortly after 11:00 pm, the American Civil War ended.” Wow. It was hugely important.

But having said that, if you actually think about the US campaign itself, so much of it was frustrating in terms of content and coming to grips with the real issues. And despite the exaggerated hype about the power of the web and how the social networking tools would bring out people and get them engaged in new and different ways, in fact, once you got into this stuff, it was much more limited than that. There is no question that the web played a terribly important role, especially for Obama for fundraising, mobilizing the troops, and getting out the vote. But the actual election script, the issues that were debated, was as narrow as ever. Some of the very early post-election re-thinking going on about the role of the web has been quite contradictory. A lot of folks were already arguing that, despite Obama’s skills, it was in fact the most polarizing election in recent times. The web was used to do the slicing and dicing and picking up the very narrow constituencies that exaggerated this – and it did not help to bring us back to a shared narrative of any kind.

David Brooks, the prominent conservative columnist really captured the US election and what was going in late September or early October. Showing his frustration, he wrote a beautiful piece on the cognitive age and noted how there is terribly important stuff going on in this country that we need to talk about, but are not. Why aren’t we?

“This globalization paradigm is leading in this so-called political debate we’re having, to a certain historical narrative: there were once nation states like the US and western powers, whose economies could be secured within borders, but now capital flows freely, technology has levelled the playing field, competition is global, and it’s fierce. New dynamos like India and China threaten American dominance thanks to their cheap labour and manipulated currencies. Now everything is made abroad, American manufacturing is in decline, the rest of the economy is threatened and man, was this convenient for the politicians playing to the fears in Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania.”

But then Brooks went on to say “but there’s a problem with how the globalization paradigm has evolved. It doesn’t explain what’s going on. It’s real and important, no question, it’s just not the central force driving economic change. The chief force driving manufacturing is technological change. Thanks to innovation, manufacturing
productivity has doubled in the past two decades. Employers now require fewer but more highly skilled workers. Technological change in fact affects China just as it does America. For example between 1994 and 2004, the Chinese have shed 25 million manufacturing jobs, 10 times more than the US. The central process driving all of this in fact is not globalization, it’s the skills revolution. We’re moving into a more demanding cognitive age. In order to thrive, people are compelled to become better at absorbing, processing and combining information. This is happening in localized and globalized sectors and it would be happening even if you tore up every free trade deal ever inked.”

The wrong narrative was in play.

In the United States, if the political dialogue was wanting in the election and the same sense of shared frustration was there, President-elect Obama himself is a very interesting figure for any number of reasons. While I’m still not convinced he’s the saviour his supporters believe him to be, I do believe he represents change, and not just change of policy or even of style. As one prominent columnist wrote the day after the election, and despite the conventional wisdom, “lots of white conservative Americans chose Obama because they sensed how inspired and hopeful their kids were about an Obama presidency and they not only didn’t want to dash those hopes, they secretly wanted to share them.”

I know I want to.

When I listen to my children, now in their late twenties and early thirties, talk about what they want from their lives, I marvel at how centred they are and how they thoroughly believe in their capacity to thrive and be part of this new world. We all have stories about our kids, one in particular of my own that I’ve never forgotten: My oldest daughter is an artist living in Montreal and, like a lot of artists, she ekes together a living. She has a studio, she teaches art, she runs something. We have these typical weekend calls from Dad, “How are you doing? How are you making out? Are you paying the rent?” On one of these occasions, she stopped and she said to me, “Relax, Dad. I’m having a rich life.” Wow.

The children of the most affluent generation in history are indeed redefining what it means to be rich. For them, it is increasingly a question of fulfillment rather than simply the accumulation of wealth. We should welcome, celebrate and try to understand that realignment. As the same columnist I mentioned earlier said with respect to those older, whiter Obama voters, they intuitively embraced Warren Buffet’s view that if you are rich and successful today, it is first and foremost because you were lucky enough to be born in America. So we need to get back to fixing the country, we need a president who can unify us for nation building here at home.

I think Obama has captured some of that magic but clearly he can’t do that alone. Almost everybody knows this. More than anything, the people who voted for him don’t need him to be the one, they want him to be the first of many. What they are hoping for – and that’s all it is right now, a whisper, a hint of hope – is that his approach to government will
encourage others like him who want to reach beyond the divisions we have in our communities, whether they are of class, race, gender or ideology, and begin to build some kind of a new consensus that will bring us back together. One of the greatest criticisms the political class has levelled against Obama is precisely what the crowd likes in him: you are never quite sure where he stands on some of these major issues. The one thing I know about him is that he likes to talk to people. He listens, he reflects and he is very much part of this trying to bring together, to synthesize a new perspective out of these multiple conversations. At some point in his life, Obama figured out the power of the crowd. I don’t know when it happened and it doesn’t matter. What is important, what Canada’s political class needs to consider very carefully, is that someone in the Democratic Party recognized it too. They saw something in him and his methods that they knew would resonate outside of Chicago; that, in fact, times are changing and we have to figure out new ways of getting engaged.

As we in Canada wring our hands and reflect on how we somehow have to regenerate and rejuvenate our political process, I would say to our political parties that the next great Canadian political leader will not be the one grasping the ten-point plan, not the self-described populist who thinks he or she is speaking up for regular people, and I doubt it’s the one who is most familiar right now to the establishment. You will know him or her when you meet them. It is going to be someone who can not only read the crowd, but who can translate what they are saying and from whom you can get that sense of empowerment and engagement. In our own small, limited, tentative way, this is what we have been trying to do back home in New Brunswick.

I came back to the University of New Brunswick from South American at the end of the 1990s deeply concerned about the state of my province. We were and are a small province with huge problems. I remember the newspapers were full of these stories. Industry Canada had ranked all of the states and provinces based on standard of living and productivity and there was New Brunswick near the bottom of both. We were 57th in standard of living and 58th in productivity. Statistics Canada had released a report on demographic trends in Canada and for the first time had included New Brunswick in the list of provinces with a declining population. We were getting older and smaller. There were endless reports about the state of education and health care.

If that wasn’t depressing enough, what was even more depressing was the response to all of this. There wasn’t any. It was as if the people were getting hit, absorbed, and were unable to respond in any effective fashion.

So I came back and tried to be a part of building a new blueprint. I remember spending the first couple of years back at the university traveling the province, listening to folks all over the province. I went to town council meetings and rotary meetings and I discovered all of these terrific groups of senior citizens. I went to mills and plants and was up in the Acadian peninsula at fish packing plants. I remember them all. I remember being at the pulp and paper mill in Dalhousie, New Brunswick, one of two hundred mills in the world that look alike making a low end product for a third world market. These were good
people, smart people. But they knew they were at a dead end. They were not adding value. How could they compete in what is effectively a third world sector?

So I came back to Fredericton with two ideas. First, if anybody thought that somehow the DNA had been bled out of us, that all the smart New Brunswickers had gone to Toronto, that no one was left who understood what was going on, they were dead wrong. It’s not that they didn’t know what was going on. Some knew intellectually, some intuitively. Some knew because their kids were gone and couldn’t come back. But we knew that the challenges were real and deep. That was not the issue. The issue was that everybody was feeling isolated. There was no sense of a group dynamic or sense of how we were going to come together to begin to deal with this. The political process was awful. New Brunswickers were ready and eager to get on with a new conversation. So, what I and others did was launch “Next New Brunswick” in 2004, which was a public outreach project intending to try to bring people together to develop some new narratives, some new story that would connect us and help us to fashion something new and different. I remember the first day we launched this. I didn’t know what to expect. I thought reporters were going to say, “Who the hell made you God?” “What right does a university professor have to call for a new narrative and conversation?” There was none of that. There was, rather, a universal sense that there is a vacuum and we are desperate to get a conversation started. Who cares who starts it?

Over the next year, with the help of a lot of amazing people doing position papers related to potential futures for our province, we organized meetings and engagement sessions in French and English, all over the province. The eagerness to get involved was amazing. The next step was to get the young people more involved because that is where the leadership, the real change, is going to come from. So we developed an idea we called “21 Inc.” which was an attempt to find 21 young, committed New Brunswickers who want to fashion a new agenda for our province and get them involved over the next year. At the end we wanted to bring them together for a big conference and talk about it and see what resonates and where we go from here. The initial response was that it would be tough to find 21 bright, young New Brunswickers – they’ve definitely gone to Toronto or Fort McMurray.

Well, four hundred people applied from around the province, around the country and from Europe. It was magic. The selection committee picked a tremendous cross-section of people between 20 and 35. – young business entrepreneurs, artists, social activists, stay-at-home moms.. And they got to it. They had bus tours around the province and met with all kinds of people. They eventually came back to Fredericton and had this unbelievable evening at the Lieutenant Governor’s home, where they reviewed their experience. In a province riven by division – French, English, north, south rural urban, one little city against the next – that evening was unbelievable. Three hours of conversation; excited, engaged, no interest in the historical grievances, no interest in talking about the linguistic battles of the past. The conversation flowed back and forth between English and French. And it was all focused on how we can shape a new future for our people. It was unbelievable.
And out of that, these young people took control of that process and they’ve replicated it. They themselves incorporated and another young 21 cohort is out now touring the province. More people are getting involved and have organized a big Ideas Festival in New Brunswick that some folks here were at a couple of weeks ago. They have brought people in from across the country to help shape these new ideas. It has been an amazing exercise.

And then to move on from that, we built a lot of other components of what would be this provincial lever. New Brunswick had never had a business council. It was clear you can’t just focus on the young people; you need to bring more senior people together. And so for the first time ever we formed a council of Chief Executive Officers of New Brunswick-based companies – the Irvings, the McCains, the Ganongs, the [Assumption Life]. This turned out to be another fascinating piece of the puzzle. One surprise was that they didn’t really know each other – even in a small province – below the cocktail circuit. They had never before gathered in such a way that they could really sit at that table and share their concerns about business realities, the future of the province, and to actually begin to lay out stuff that really mattered to them. It was tough. It took time to build that level of trust and engagement. It took eighteen months actually, but it happened. And they got involved and have become a very important force in the province. One thing I should mention about this business council and this new narrative is that you might have though that once they started talking they would start talking about the softwood lumber regulations, business taxes, or better roads for the border. You could imagine what the agenda might be. But those topics never came up. As they began to talk about their shared vision for the future of the province, it was an entirely different agenda.

Beyond that, we’ve got a lot of other groups involved: roundtables on cultural matters, leadership networks for young people. Out of all this is slowly emerging not only a sense of power and engagement that we have not had for a long time, but a whole new story about where we want to be as a people. It is not a story about dependency, it is not a story about yesterday or about how someone else is going to take care of us. It really is a story about how, if we have to build our own future, what matters – and of course it’s an economic story about the new economy and how we get away from a traditional resource-based economy – is an emerging, deep understanding that we have to completely reform our public institutions and our infrastructure. In New Brunswick, as in Canada, we built this stuff in a different era for a different set of challenges. It is not about less government, it is not about Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher, but it is about different government. Fashioning this new agenda is going to be quite different than it was in the past.

At the heart of the story, and this has come from the business community as well as from other communities, is that at the very heart of our story going forward is the importance of renewing our cultural institutions. At the heart of our story is our belief in ourselves, our self-confidence and our trust in each other. What has value and meaning in our post-modern society is not a given – we need to develop and fashion that.
Truth be told, it is early days in New Brunswick. I’m terrifically excited to be part of it but it is tentative and it could fall back at any moment. There are lots of challenges but it has been unbelievably special to see the power of the community. Remember the book *The Wisdom of the Crowd?* There is a lot of truth to it. There are caveats galore of course – the herd instinct, the danger of getting homogenous perspectives, special interest influence – and you need to be careful. But if you can move beyond and deal with that stuff, the wisdom of the community to begin to wrestle with really deep and profound change is marvellous. It is completely counterintuitive to some, because these are technically important issues – the financial realities, for example, or the need to professionalize more – and that is dead wrong. In fact, the only way we are going to work through the deep solutions that are required is through a lot of different voices from a lot of deferent perspectives being engaged. Over time you will actually get better decisions because it is about deep change. You are also going to get a much stronger commitment to making those changes work and come alive.

New Brunswick, it turns out, is just one of many stories going on in this country. As we have gotten further into our story we have talked to more and more people from other places across the country. Canada is like a bunch of islands. There are a lot of people who get it. A lot of people know that the current political discourse is not working and that our institutions need some pretty deep reform. There are a lot of islands and we are not there yet. But it is coming and you can feel it. I want to applaud the work of Don Lenihan and the Public Policy Forum. They have become a very important partner to a lot of us who are trying to go down this path. New Brunswick and elsewhere are definitely on the right track.

Even so, I still do not think we entirely understand how profound the changes are going to be and I don’t think even yet we have the depth of understanding of the nature of the dialogue that is going to be required to get us there. For some time we have been moving from a consensus of sorts, rooted in those post war reconstruction plans and the shared vision model of building a middle class state. As Desmond Morton has put it, we emerged from a state of chronic poverty and prejudice to become one of the richest countries in the world and now we have entered an era that is very different. There is a cacophony of voices and opinions that are evolving. Many more actors are coming on the stage with very different points of view and want to be involved with multiple agendas. Our public space that used to be fairly well-defined is now informed by all kinds of new institutional geographies, the on-line and the physically anchored worlds is one, but there is also a breakdown taking place between the tradition divide between government, private sector and NGOs. A lot of these divisions do not make sense anymore and are a barrier to what we have to do. Increasingly, as we try to struggle with our current institutions to deal with the issues, we are getting further into overlapping functions and contradictory mandates. All of this is just getting more complex and we are getting more and more stresses as we try to use those institutions we built sixty years ago to deal with a whole new reality that requires something different.

Despite all the challenges, I’m going to say that I’m deeply optimistic about our prospects. I think in fact – and I talked earlier about the poverty of imagination in this
country and that’s not fair – there are a lot of imaginative people who are very engaged, excited, and who get it. But we have not had the dynamic in play to bring them together and to get them involved. The creativity and energy coming out of these exercises, like what we have gone through in New Brunswick, are unbelievable. I’m convinced that out of this is going to emerge a whole new narrative around a set of shared values and beliefs and a whole new sense of purpose that I don’t think we have seen for some time as a country. It is going to be a Canadian story within a global story. It is not going to be a derivative story or someone else’s story but our story that we fashion together.

I think there will be two groups that will have an important role to play as we go through this process. I was reminded by a thoughtful conversation in the reception earlier – that it is about all of us. It is not just about these two groups you want to talk about and that is fair enough. But these two groups will have an exceptionally important role to play in fashioning this new narrative and the new ways of public engagement. First, without question: the Millennials, the young Canadians. Pick your own age group, it doesn’t really matter. It’s a false thing to do. Teenagers, folks in their twenties, early thirties, they are going to have to take on this new leadership role and that is what New Brunswick has been about – that Next New Brunswick story – it is about really handing over to the younger generation. As Frank Graves from Ekos Research noted, “the country as we know it is undergoing a quiet but profound transformation, a protracted period of political leadership exerted by Canada’s unusually large baby boom cohort is about to be really disrupted.” Good thing, huh? There is no question we are now at the period where the younger generation needs to stand up and take a much stronger leadership role. If the story in New Brunswick is any testimony to it, they are doing it. They are optimistic, incredibly tech savvy and there is no question that they are eager to get on to addressing the challenges before us.

The other group I want to mention is my generation: the Baby Boomers. These folks have their eyes on retirement or semi-retirement. We long ago shed our counterculture ways if indeed we ever really had them. And there is no question we have become complacent, cautious and cranky in our outlook. But, because we are the boomers, we are going to get more involved in the community as we retire, as we always have throughout our time and in some ways we are a threat to dominate the conversation – as I guess you can argue I am this evening. We have got to resist the urges and instead cede the floor to our children and grandchildren who are far more adaptable to the changing currents. And our generation needs to do something we have never done before: follow someone else’s lead. Going back to New Brunswick for a minute, there are so many beautiful things to talk about but one of them has been that when we put together this business council with brand names – not just in New Brunswick but across the county – to a person they did not want to define the agenda. They were terribly eager to get involved with these young people, to provide support and provide mentoring, and be there to help them. But you really had the sense of “passing of the torch” – that they wanted to be supportive and engaged but not take the lead.

We have come to an important point in our country where we have been talking for quite awhile now about this desperate need for a new narrative, something that can transcend
our tribalism, our local geography. We need new processes to get there. And, out of those processes will come new institutions. It is going to take a level of imagination and courage that we have not seen in this country for some time, but the time has come to get on with it. I think we have the generation that is ready to do that. It is terrific by the way to see so many of them in the room this evening. It is an exhilarating time and unbelievably important time and I am really proud to be part of the community that is trying to support it.

Thanks very much.