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BUSINESS COUNCIL ON NATIONAL ISSUES · CONSEIL CANADIEN DES CHEFS D'ENTREPRISES

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## RESOLVE CONSTITUTIONAL IMPASSE DECISIVELY BUSINESS LEADERS URGE GOVERNMENTS

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Canadian business leaders appeared today before the Special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada.

Speaking on behalf of the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI), were Council President and Chief Executive, **Thomas d'Aquino**, and the members of the BCNI Task Force on the Canadian Constitution, **Bertin F. Nadeau** and **William W. Stinson**. Mr. Nadeau is Chairman of Provigo Inc., and Mr. Stinson is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Canadian Pacific Limited.

The BCNI spokespersons, reflecting the views of their colleagues -- leaders of major enterprises across Canada -- praised Canada as a remarkable country with an impressive record of political and economic achievements... "achievements realised within a federal system possessing strong stability and a great capacity for adaptation".

Warning that the current constitutional impasse threatens to undermine this enviable record of political stability and economic prosperity, the BCNI calls for a sense of perspective and common sense in the debate about Canada's political future.

"The political malaise gripping Canadians has driven many to think apocalyptically, and to denigrate our past successes and our future potential. We reject this view. Political change is eminently manageable and our differences can be resolved," the chief executives say. "The constitutional issue should not be thought of as a crisis, but rather as an opportunity...to correct some historic grievances, to strongly reaffirm who we are as Canadians, and to modernize the institutions of government..."

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Taking sharp aim at those who wish to break Canada apart, the business leaders state that "we are, and will remain, stronger in a united country, and partition or fragmentation will carry incalculable costs".

Turning to the economic dimensions of the debate, the BCNI says "there are powerful and compelling reasons -- perhaps unprecedented in their urgency -- for resolving the constitutional deadlock and getting on with putting political changes in place. These reasons are economic. The very painful effects of the current recession aside, Canada faces profound challenges in virtually every aspect of our economic life. We need to rebuild the competitiveness of our industries... ensure that Canadians can continue to count in the future on abundant jobs and good incomes...and tackle head-on those problems that are sapping our economic strength....We believe that the vast majority of Canadians see our economic challenges as foremost -- for themselves and their children -- and will not tolerate much longer the failure of our elected representatives to apply themselves to these economic questions with all their energies."

To complement their statements, the Council spokespersons tabled a response to the federal government's 28 constitutional proposals. Entitled **Canada's Constitutional Future**, it recommends that priority attention be given to

- A reinforcement of Canadian values and characteristics, primarily through the means of a "Canada clause" in the Constitution.
- Recognition of Quebec as a distinct society within the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**.
- A recognition of the right to self-government of aboriginal peoples in Canada, subject to the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**.
- The reconstitution of the Senate of Canada into an elected body with enhanced representation from parts of Canada, other than Ontario and Quebec, and in particular from the West.
- A more effective federal system with an appropriate balance of power and influence between the central government and the governments of the provinces, with the overall objective of establishing more efficient and accountable government for Canadians.
- A strengthened economic union in Canada with the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of the flow of labour, capital, goods and services, and appropriate mechanisms for vastly improved intergovernmental co-operation and macroeconomic management.

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In concluding their statement, the business leaders appealed for tolerance, reason, and flexibility.

"While, in our view, convincing action on each of these fronts will be necessary to break the current constitutional deadlock, we should not expect the unreasonable nor the impossible. Progress in reaching a political accommodation should not be stymied by an all or nothing approach. This is the recipe for crisis and a reflection of a failure of trust and statesmanship. We urge all Canadians to work towards a solution in the confidence that every step forward will make us a better country and a stronger people."

The Business Council on National Issues is the senior voice of Canadian business leaders on public policy issues in Canada and abroad. A non-partisan, non-profit organization, it is composed of the chief executives of 160 leading Canadian companies. The Council carries out an active program of research, consultation, and advocacy in four principal areas: the national economy and competitiveness; foreign affairs and the global economy; the environment and sustainable development; and political governance.

The member companies of the Business Council are active in every major sector of the Canadian economy. They employ over 1.5 million Canadians, manage over \$1 trillion in assets, and have an annual turnover of approximately \$390 billion.

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Reference:

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