

Beyond Admiring the Problem: Solutions for a Stronger Canada

**The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary and The Palmer
Institute for Canadian Leadership, Confederation Centre of the Arts**

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On October 7, 2026, the University of Calgary's School of Public Policy and the Confederation Centre's Palmer Institute for Canadian Leadership co-hosted *Beyond Admiring the Problem: Solutions for a Stronger Canada*, a half-day public forum focused on finding practical pathways to greater Canadian resilience, economic competitiveness and unity. The event brought together former first ministers, senior military leadership, national business figures and leading political commentators for a series of panels before an audience of 100 fellow citizens in Calgary.

Each panellist pitched one concrete idea to strengthen Canada in ten minutes and the thirteen ideas that follow emerged from their presentations and the ensuing exchanges with the audience. They offer a set of practical starting points for building a stronger country, organized under three priorities: Better Governance, Getting Things Done, and Strengthening Sovereignty. Remarkably, despite no prior coordination between the speakers, one cross-cutting theme emerged for building a stronger country: **Canadians need to understand one another better.**

The partnership behind this forum reflects this theme in both its origin and its purpose. Both the School and Institute were made possible through the generosity of the Palmer Family. Bringing the two institutions together in Calgary built on the family's journey from Prince Edward Island to Alberta and gave expression to the power of the enduring personal relationships that traverse and bind this country. The forum honoured the late Jim Palmer's legacy by putting into practice the national connection and collaborative policymaking he championed throughout his life.

The Palmer Institute's first new and off-island event also continued a long tradition of east-west collaboration at the Confederation Centre. Opened in 1964 on the centenary of the Charlottetown Conference, a living memorial to the country's founding was the brainchild of an Albertan, businessman Eric Harvie, and an Islander, academic Frank MacKinnon. Their shared conviction that Canada is stronger when its people and regions are connected remains a fitting foundation for bringing Canadians together to consider the country's future.

By convening in Calgary during a period of debate about Alberta's place in Confederation, we sought to affirm the strength of the relationships that bind Canadians and create space to work through the challenges we share. The ideas collected here are offered in that spirit: as practical proposals to discuss, develop and act upon in building a stronger Canada, coast to coast to coast.

Martha Hall Findlay
Director, School of Public Policy
James S. and Barbara A. Palmer Chair in Public Policy
University of Calgary
Calgary, Alberta

Dr. Jeffrey F. Collins
Director
Palmer Institute for Canadian Leadership
Confederation Centre of the Arts
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

PART I: IDEAS FOR BETTER GOVERNANCE

1. Work the Traplines

It's time to stop talking about how big and divided the country is. Living in the world's second largest country can mask the few degrees of separation between us. Canadians need to take the time to show up and build relationships. 'Work the traplines', get out of your comfort zone and meet people who you otherwise would not engage with. This is something anyone anywhere in this country can do. It does not require a government program.

2. Don't Wait for Perfect

Canada has always moved forward through struggle, deal-making and practical workarounds rather than ideal solutions. Compromising is built into the Canadian experience: From pre-1867 Crown-Indigenous Treaties, to Confederation itself, and the creation of the modern welfare state in the 20th century. But be humble: Getting things done takes fiscal discipline, respect for the rule of law, economic success, and different orders of government working together.

3. Everyone Has a Part to Play

Canadians should not expect their politicians to solve everything. It is a civic duty for each citizen to do their own job, use their brains, and keep a sense of irony to avoid getting pulled into binary arguments. And remember, Canadian civic life is just as much the product of arts and personal connections as it is of politics. Everyone has a part to play.

4. Invest in Social Infrastructure

Re-establishing social trust requires getting people back out into shared public spaces, where they talk face to face and work through disagreements. Canadians of all ages still need something to do and somewhere to go, especially as cost-of-living prices some people out of various community activities and social media now often substitutes for a normal social life. Canada needs to invest in libraries, community centres, sports facilities and other "third places," in making sure they are accessible to all, and that people know about them. At these spaces, people can meet strangers and build relationships.

5. Establish a Public Lobbyist

A Public Lobbyist to mitigate the problem of those not in the 'right' social networks being unable to fully access various government services. This idea would address the problem of needing to 'know' someone in order to get into the line. Competing with private lobbying, the Public Lobbyist would either be at arm's length from government or acting as its agent. It would look at upcoming bills and actively find witnesses and experts from outside the usual partisan and lobbying circles. This would give lawmakers more regional and class perspectives in their deliberations.

PART II: IDEAS FOR GETTING THINGS DONE

6.

Global Food Security is Our Strategic Advantage

With abundant land, water, agricultural expertise, and growing global demand for affordable, sustainable protein and other foods, Canada can help address hunger, strengthen global stability, and generate long-term prosperity through agri-food exports. Being able to ‘feed the world’ is our ‘moonshot’ for becoming a reliable and sought after global trading partner and reducing our reliance on the US market.

7.

Twenty-Year Trade Infrastructure Investment

To meet this ‘food’ opportunity and those presented by all of our other resource wealth, Canada needs a 20-year national strategy focused on East-West trade corridors, ports, especially deep sea, transportation networks, and regulatory modernization so it can reach new markets, capitalize on trade agreements, and compete globally without reducing its important economic relationship with the United States.

8.

Think ‘Domestic Economic Opportunity’, not ‘Internal Trade Barriers

Rather than focusing on the technical language of “internal trade barriers,” Canadians need to think about the opportunities of opening our own domestic economy and doing more business with each other. This shift in mindset emphasizes building opportunities rather than simply removing obstacles. A starting point: reducing regulatory fragmentation and labour mobility barriers so businesses and workers can operate more easily across provincial boundaries. How? Start by establishing a Canadian internal version of the Canada-U.S. Regulatory Cooperation Council (RCC), to provide a forum for industry groups to discuss opportunities for regulatory harmonization, how to lower cross-border red tape, and opportunities for expanding the Canadian market for Canadian businesses.

9.

Think Beyond Boundaries

We tend to think too much about what to do within our respective provincial boundaries, but this is too small. Governments, businesses, and **regions** must work together to build globally competitive industries, infrastructure, and supply chains while maintaining provincial autonomy. What is needed is a collaborative, long-term approach where governments and industry share responsibility for investment, regulatory reform, productivity, and measurable economic outcomes in select pan-Canadian sectors: energy, critical minerals, food, oceans, defence, and advanced manufacturing. This will require significantly more collaboration between governments and between governments and business.

10.

Adopt a Generational Economic Mission

Canada’s decisionmakers in business, government and other fields should set as a collective goal that a child born today should have greater economic opportunity at age twenty-five than their parents did. As simple as it may sound, this philosophy would change how we think about economic policy, prioritizing productivity supporting higher living standards and globally competitive industry supporting career opportunities and durable prosperity. It requires building the capital, infrastructure, energy, housing, and talent to support that growth while unlocking the economic potential of every region of the country.

PART III: IDEAS FOR STRENGTHENING SOVEREIGNTY

11.

Remember the Three- Legged Stool

That every region of Canada enjoys respect, investment and economic opportunity is an as-yet unfulfilled promise of our Constitution. Economic development, Arctic sovereignty, and reconciliation must go hand in hand. Canada's northern resources are strategic assets that can strengthen national security and economic prosperity, but success depends on strong public-private partnerships, and meaningful Indigenous ownership and participation in major projects. Leave one out, and the stool topples. The solution? Build on proven examples like the progress of Indigenous communities in the Yukon achieving self-government, increasing equity partnerships with respect to resource development, and the promise of nuclear energy to help unlock even more resource wealth, for the benefit of all Canadians.

12.

Security Starts at Home

Resilient communities, trust between citizens, and a culture of mutual responsibility are the real pillars of national strength. This is achieved in part by societal investments in developing independent thinkers and informed citizens, essential to preserving democracy and social cohesion, but also personal responsibility. Citizens have a duty and many opportunities to help their neighbours, respect different viewpoints, and rebuild the civic culture.

13.

Rebuild Imperfect Relationships

Disagreement and diversity have always been part of Canada's story, but national unity depends on trust, belonging, and a willingness to maintain and repair relationships rather than walk away from them when they become difficult. First Nations are demonstrating through economic leadership how communities can acknowledge past harms while still investing in a shared future. Stronger relationships, honoured commitments, and collaborative economic development can create a future that benefits both local communities and the country.

CONCLUSION

It is extraordinary what positive ideas can come from convening passionate Canadians from different parts of the country and different walks of life, specifically tasked not with ‘admiring the problems’ we have in Canada, but to actively propose solutions. This effort, as is true for Canada itself, is a work in progress. Canada is a great country, but we all know that the status quo can— and must be—improved upon. This output represents one contribution.

A special thank you to our engaged audience and the nine speakers:

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