On February 10, 1964 the National Bureau of Standards of the United States issued the following statement: "Henceforth it shall be the policy of the National Bureau of Standards to use the units of the International System (SI), as adopted by the Eleventh General Conference on Weights and Measures (October 1960), except when the use of these units would obviously impair communication or reduce the usefulness of a report". SI is the abbreviation of Système International, the internationally recognized term used in reference to the metric system. On July 2, 1971 following the report of a metric conversion study committee, the US commerce secretary recommended gradual changeover during a 10-year period at the end of which the United States would be predominantly, but not exclusively, on the metric system.

Already the United States is moving quickly in some influential sectors. For example, 50% of all components in General Motors automobiles are now in metric dimensions. The Ford plant in Lima, Ohio, has been producing all-metric engines since 1973, and the essentially all-metric General Motors Chevette is now on the market. Chrysler intends to launch an all-metric sub-compact in 1977, and newsprint, 80% of which the US imports from Canada, will be in metric measure within two years.

The President of the United States signed the Metric Conversion Act on December 23, 1975 formalizing the US government's involvement in bringing about a smoother transition to the use of the metric system in America. It outlined the general duties and responsibilities of the United States Metric Board which was to coordinate and synchronize increasing use of metric measurement in the various sectors of the economy.

Background to metric conversion in Canada

Canada's long interest in the metric system began in 1870. In that year, Parliament appointed a committee to inquire into the United Kingdom's progress in establishing a uniform international system of decimal measures, weights and coins, and to report on how such a system might be applied in Canada.

The committee reported in part to the House of Commons: "In contemplation of the early adoption of the metric system, and with a view that the youth of the country be made acquainted with it, your Committee would call the attention of the House to the propriety of suggesting to the Government the importance of causing this system to be taught in all schools over which they have control directly or indirectly. It is simple, easily learned, and not readily forgotten; and young men instructed in it will thus acquire additional facility in understanding the trade with countries where this system prevails exclusively."

Following the committee's recommendations, Parliament passed an act in 1871 whose object was "to render permissive the use of the Metric or of the decimal system of Weights and Measures." This event was recorded in *The Canada Year Book 1872-73:* "The measure found very strenuous and earnest advocacy in the House of Commons and its success not only in Great Britain but throughout the civilized world is only a question of time." This was followed in 1873 by the Weights and Measures Act legalizing the use of the metric system in commerce and trade.

Despite this encouraging beginning, Canada did not advance very far toward metric until almost 100 years later. It kept a foot in both the metric and inch-pound camps, however, which was in itself something of a feat. For example, in 1907 Canada became the first country of the British Empire after Great Britain to sign the Treaty of the Metre, and Canada has participated ever since in the activities of the International Bureau of Weights and Measures. By 1913, all precise measuring instruments were being verified in terms of the metre. In 1951, Parliament passed the Length and Mass Units Act which defined the yard as a fraction of the international metre and the pound as a fraction of the international kilogram. At the same time, it passed a new Weights and Measures Act which provided for the standards of measure and weight to be calibrated and certified in accordance with the provisions of the Length and Mass Units Act. About the same time, the Electrical