

Thank you, Alex,¹ for your introduction. This is an important day because today we are formally launching Services Month in Canada, the second ever held.

Last November, we set out to recognize the critical role that service industries play in the Canadian economy. And we set out to discover how governments and the private sector can work more effectively, individually and together, to increase Canadian service sector prosperity. This launch resulted in a voyage that lasted all year, and crossed Canada several times.

What we collectively discovered is embodied in several reports including the report from the six Services Conferences last year, various submissions to the Prosperity Steering Group and the report of the group itself that was released last week. But the thrust of these reports is summarized in the theme of this year's Services Month, "turning opportunities into success."

I want to spend some time on this theme but before I do, I want to set in context another of last week's events.

On October 26, the people of Canada turned the page on constitutional reform. I took from their response the clear message that Canada's future is going to be built within our existing constitutional framework. That we will do, and we will be doing it in a spotlight of public interest fuelled by the media, which no longer has the bone of constitutional reform to chew on.

As the media rediscovers the economy, there is a temptation to think that the government itself has been ignoring economic matters while the debate raged on the constitution. In fact, work has been ongoing and accelerated over the past year in our efforts on the economic front.

We have been implementing the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and our exports have been soaring; services have been a major beneficiary.

We have successfully negotiated a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the U.S. and Mexico. This agreement contains many important opportunities for service companies.

Most importantly, we have participated in the Prosperity consultations along with thousands of individual Canadians from across Canada, every key economic sector and hundreds of business leaders. The result of the consultations is a series of blueprints to build on opportunities, to achieve success. These blueprints cover not just the 54 summary recommendations of the Prosperity Steering Group. They include reports from individual

¹ Alex Taylor, National Services Conference Chairperson and President, Agra Industries.