

Ms. Cohen, head table guests, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank all of you for your participation here today. I would especially like to thank Dian Cohen for chairing the Conference, and Mr. Ronald Begg, Mr. Wayne Bowes and Ms. Gail Cook-Bennett, for chairing the three workshops. I am looking forward to listening to their report on your discussions this morning.

It is a pleasure for me to speak at the first of the six National Services Conferences, which bring together, for the first time, the people who make up the "invisible giant" of our economy -- the service industry.

This Conference today, and the conferences to follow in Halifax, Montreal, Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, are an opportunity for you to discuss the challenges your sector faces and the role your sector plays -- and can play -- in the Canadian economy. Because of the size and importance of your sector to the Canadian economy, it is fitting that this should be the first among many consultations with all sectors over the next few months as part of the Prosperity Initiative.

This conference is also an opportunity for you to make the invisible giant more visible -- not only to the public but also to yourselves -- to challenge the perception that "if it doesn't have a smokestack, it's not an industry," and to put to rest any myth about the nature of jobs in the service industry.

Why do I call it the invisible giant? First, because too few Canadians realize its contribution to our standard of living. Yet, in 1990, the value of services produced in Canada was more than twice the value of goods. The service industry is now Canada's major employer, providing employment for 8.9 million Canadians -- 71 per cent of the country's labour force.

Business services -- companies that provide professional, technical, financial, transportation and distribution knowledge, expertise and skills to other businesses -- drive the sector. They account for almost half the value of total service sector production and employ about 35 per cent of Canada's labour force. The service industry, overall, in the last decade, has created 9 out of every 10 new jobs in Canada -- a record that is expected to continue in the 1990s.

Another measure of the importance of service industry is its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP). And the contribution of the invisible giant is hefty -- 65.4 per cent of the GDP.

Despite this evidence, until now, too few Canadians -- and their governments -- have recognized the giant in their midst. Because your sector makes such a hefty contribution to the health and competitiveness of every other sector, that contribution is largely invisible, which is why we have called the service sector an invisible giant.