

believe exists in individual Canadians and in the business community. And, as far as I'm concerned, nowhere can this dynamism be better put to use than in and through Canada's trading houses.

I think all of us here recognize the importance of exports to the Canadian economy. They bring in three dollars out of every ten we earn. Since trading houses account for more than 13% of our exports, a little quick calculation will come up with a fairly startling figure. Canada's trading houses -- all 500 of you -- account for roughly 4% of our GNP.

Obviously, trading houses have become a very important vehicle for Canadian products to reach overseas customers. The trading house performs a variety of useful functions: it is exporter, importer and third-country trader. It is merchant, agent, buying house and export manager. For a relatively small sector, and one which until recently operated with very little public visibility, Canadian trading houses have done a very commendable job. I am also impressed with the potential of trading houses for introducing small to medium-sized companies to the export market.

The trading house community in Canada has reached a milestone in its development today. Much past effort and activity has culminated in this conference. The most recent and significant, of course, was the Trading House Task Force, which was active last year. While I had the pleasure of meeting and thanking the Task Force members in February, I would like to take this opportunity to go public and congratulate Tom Burns, the Chairman, and the 13 members of the Task Force for the excellent work they did in assembling the report.

The Task Force findings demonstrate that assistance to small and medium-size trading houses is perhaps a better way of increasing Canada's exports than, for example, trying to emulate the Japanese approach -- channelling everything through a small number of very large,