

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ENTHUSIASM FOR ECONOMY GROWS: SURVEY

Canadians Recognizing Strong Economy But Regional Disparity Evident

TORONTO, March 24, 2006 – Consumer confidence in the current state of the Canadian economy has risen dramatically since mid-November, and the outlook for future performance is also better, suggest the latest findings from TNS Canadian Facts' *Consumer Confidence Index*.

"The public's confidence mirrors strong economic statistics," said Richard Jenkins, vice-president of TNS Canadian Facts, a Toronto-based marketing research firm.

TNS Canadian Facts' monthly tracking of consumer confidence indicates that the overall picture today is overwhelmingly positive. The *Present Situation Index*, which captures evaluations of the overall state of the economy, the employment situation and household income, now stands at 110.6, a slight decline from 111.7 in February but up significantly from 98.0 a year ago.

While Canadians' assessment of the current economy has faltered slightly, the *Expectations Index*, which measures consumers' estimation of the economy six months from now, rose to 103.5 from 101.8 the previous month. This represents the highest level of optimism about the future economy since the index was created nearly two years ago.

The *Buy Index*, which gauges the degree to which people think the current period is a good time to make major purchases, fell slightly. The *Index* now sits at 97.5, down 1.4 points since last month.

Confidence is higher on two of the three measures today than it was a year ago. The *Present Situation Index* is up a significant 12.6 points from where it stood in March 2005 (110.6 today versus 98.0 a year ago). Meanwhile, the year-over-year rise in the *Expectations Index* is a respectable three points (103.5 today from 100.6). But the *Buy Index* is down 7.1 points from where it was this time last year (97.5 today from 104.6).

“Canadians are clearly feeling that the Canadian economy is not headed for a downturn anytime soon,” Jenkins added.

Regionally, positive assessments of the economy (current and future) continue to be highest on the Prairies (particularly Alberta) and lowest in Quebec and the Atlantic region. For example, 67 per cent of those who live in the Prairie provinces (75% in Alberta) think the economy is good compared with 46 per cent in Quebec and 51 per cent in the Atlantic Provinces.

“Though regional disparities in terms of economic fortunes are clearly evident, the performance of the economy over the past several years has benefited all regions to varying degrees, and has perhaps insulated the federation from the strains of economic inequality so far,” Jenkins added.

Consumer Confidence Index tracks Canadians’ attitudes about the economy each month and is part of a global study conducted by TNS in 18 countries around the world. Three indices are produced each month to show how confidence in the economy is changing: *Present Situation Index*; an *Expectations Index*; and a *Buy Index*. The Canadian fieldwork is conducted using the firm’s national bi-weekly telephone omnibus service, TNS Express Telephone. A total of 1,015 nationally representative Canadian adults were interviewed between March 6 and 9. The survey results are considered accurate to 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

TNS Canadian Facts (www.tns-cf.com) is one of Canada's most prestigious full-service marketing, opinion and social research organizations.

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- A leader in political and social polling
- A major supplier of consumer panel, media intelligence and TV and radio audience measurement services.

TNS operates across a global network in over 70 countries, allowing us to provide internationally consistent, up-to-the-minute and high quality information and analysis.

The group's employees deliver innovative thinking and excellent service to local and multi-national clients worldwide. In the custom business, they combine in-depth sector knowledge with expertise in the areas of new product development, positioning and segmentation research, brand and advertising research and stakeholder management.

TNS' strategic goal is to be recognized as the global leader in delivering value added information and insights that help our clients to make more effective decisions.

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