



Infommat

A Weekly Review

Friday, June 9, 2000

OVERVIEW

◆ Domestic demand and exports boost GDP

Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew 1.2% in the first quarter of 2000, continuing the solid performance seen throughout the past year.

◆ Economic activity surges in March

After receding in February, gross domestic product rose 0.7% in March. This advance marks a return to the solid growth path that saw economic activity rise for 18 consecutive months.

◆ Large goods surplus pumps up current account balance

Following a small deficit in the fourth quarter of 1999, Canada's current account balance swung strongly into surplus in the opening quarter of this year. A sharp upswing in the goods surplus led the turnaround.

◆ Another record in large retailers' sales of home furnishings and electronics

March's 13.8% increase in sales of home furnishings and electronics represents the largest year-over-year rise in this category since the introduction of the Monthly Survey of Large Retailers.

◆ Number of international visitors to Canada reaches 25-year high

Canada hosted more than 19.4 million overnight international travellers in 1999, the highest annual level in the 25 years that international travel data have been collected.

◆ Canadians are logging onto the Internet in growing numbers

The proportion of households that contained at least one regular user jumped to 41.8% in 1999. Canadians increased their use of the Internet at home and at school, but access at work decreased slightly.

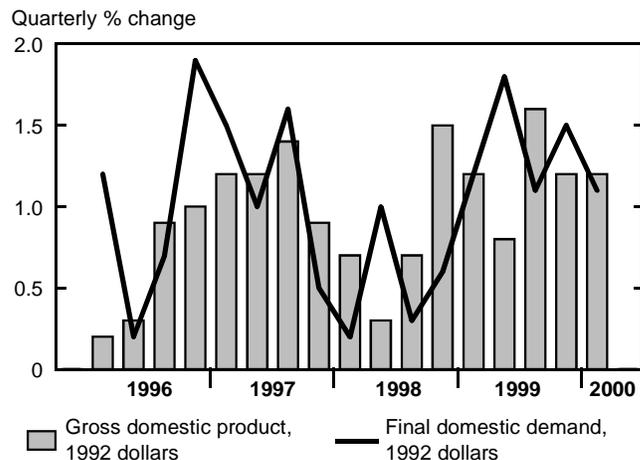
Domestic demand and exports boost GDP

In the first quarter of 2000, real gross domestic product (GDP) grew 1.2%, continuing the solid performance seen throughout the past year. Export demand and a strong domestic economy contributed to this advance. For the first time, Canada's GDP in nominal terms exceeded \$1 trillion.

Export growth accelerated to 3.3%. Exports of machinery and equipment were strong, especially in the case of telecommunications equipment and aircraft. Exports of telecommunications equipment have increased 54% since the first quarter of 1999. Exports of Internet infrastructure equipment to the United States were a major contributor to this increase. Automotive product exports advanced for a third consecutive quarter. The volume of exports of crude petroleum products jumped by 16.1%, while natural gas exports fell.

Business plant and equipment investment rose a healthy 2.7%, on top of an even more robust gain in the fourth quarter of 1999. Investment has been fuelled by healthy gains in corporations' incomes, as undistributed corporate profits have increased an average 15% per quarter since mid-1998. Investment in non-residential structures grew 3.0%; gains were mainly concentrated

GDP and domestic demand



(continued on page 2)



... Domestic demand and exports boost GDP

in engineering construction, as oil patch activity picked up in response to higher prices.

Business machinery and equipment investment increased 2.5%, with purchases of computers and other office equipment contributing a large part of the gain. Other areas of strength in machinery and equipment investment were: transportation equipment other than cars, industrial machinery and telecommunications equipment. Investment in autos fell 9.5%, following two solid quarterly increases.

Personal income grew in the first quarter by 1.4% in nominal terms, extending a string of several solid quarterly increases. Labour income rose 1.9%, the highest quarterly increase since the late 1980s. The main contributor was the business sector, where payrolls increased 2.3%.

Consumer spending grew 0.8%, down slightly from the rates seen throughout 1999. Personal outlays on new and used motor

Gross domestic product at 1992 prices¹

	% change	Annualized % change	Year-over-year % change
First quarter 1999	1.2	4.8	3.7
Second quarter 1999	0.8	3.3	4.3
Third quarter 1999	1.6	6.5	5.2
Fourth quarter 1999	1.2	5.1	4.9
First quarter 2000	1.2	4.9	4.9

¹ The change is the growth rate from one period to the next. The annualized change is the growth rate compounded annually. The year-over-year change is the growth rate of a given quarter compared with the same quarter of the previous year.

Note to readers

With this release of first quarter 2000 data, the Income and expenditure accounts and Estimates of labour income for 1996 through 1999 have been revised.

A major conceptual change has been introduced to the Income and expenditure accounts relating to government employee pension plans, which are now part of the personal sector. The change results in an upward revision to personal income and an equivalent downward revision to government saving. This conceptual change applies back to 1961. For more information, please see the following Statistics Canada web page: www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/disap2_f.htm.

vehicles stalled in the first quarter, after showing strength last year. Spending on financial, legal and other services rose for the fifth straight quarter, boosted by an increase in transactions on Canadian financial markets.

Residential construction remained strong in the first quarter, rising 2.4%. Renovations increased strongly for a second consecutive quarter. Ownership transfer costs showed robust growth, which indicates a strong home resale market. However, new housing construction slowed to 0.8%, after a stronger increase in the fourth quarter of 1999.

The first quarter of 2000 issue of *National income and expenditure accounts, quarterly estimates* (13-001-XPB, \$44/\$145) presents the full report. For more information on products and services offered, contact the customer services officer (613-951-3810; iead-info-dcrrd@statcan.ca). For analytical information, contact the information officer (613-951-3640), Income and Expenditure Accounts Division.

Economic activity surges in March

After receding in February, gross domestic product (GDP) rose 0.7% in March. This advance marks a return to the solid growth path that saw economic activity rise for 18 consecutive months. All of the economy's main industrial sectors advanced, except utilities and health services. The March increase caps a robust first quarter.

Manufacturing accounted for about two-fifths of the overall March advance. After slumping 1.7% in February, manufacturers raised output by 1.6% in March, paralleling a resurgence in export demand. Overall, 19 of 22 major industry groups, accounting for over 95% of total manufacturing production, advanced. This broadly-based increase in output was led by the transportation equipment, fabricated metal, and printing and publishing industries. The most significant decline was in other manufacturing industries, especially sporting goods, musical instruments and jewelry.

There was a recovery in retailing and wholesaling in March. Retail sales bounced back 1.3% from a disappointing February. Higher auto sales deserved most of the credit. Excluding this key component, sales showed a muted gain. Wholesaling activity rose

Note to readers

Monthly gross domestic product (GDP) is valued at 1992 prices. The estimates presented here are seasonally adjusted at annual rates.

1.5%, offsetting the February decline. In particular, wholesalers of farm machinery and lumber and other building materials raised their output.

Buttressed by continued housing growth, construction activity resumed its upward course in March (+1.0%), after slipping in February. A healthy housing market led to a sharp increase in real estate agents' services.

Transportation industries benefited from higher industrial activity, posting an increase of 1.4%. The increase benefited trucking firms the most, although rail and shipping companies also enjoyed increases. Output in the air transportation industry was steady.

Mining output continued to show signs of slowing in March (+0.4%). This contrasts with the steep rise in the second quarter of 1999, which was induced by the high price of oil. The growth in March was largely the result of a new increase in drilling and rigging activity. Scheduled maintenance shutdowns forced the

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... Economic activity surges in March

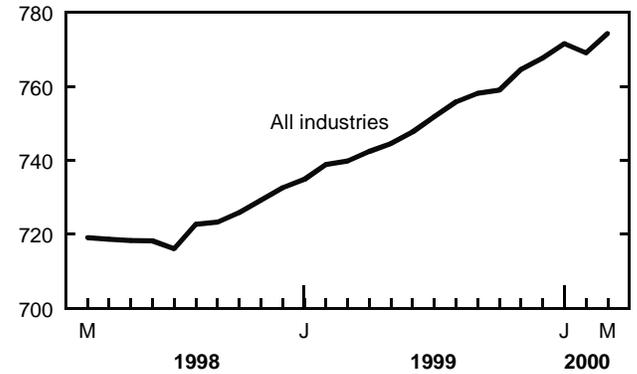
output of crude petroleum and natural gas lower, and metal mining also fell. However, output of potash surged, buoyed by record shipments abroad, particularly to China.

After two months of higher demand, unseasonably warm March temperatures reduced heating needs and led to a 4.4% drop in utilities' production. Electric power generation and gas distribution both fell. The finance industries had another busy month, buoyed by continued record stock market activity. Business services rose 0.6% as increased activity in miscellaneous and accounting and legal services more than offset a decline in computer consulting. The decline in the latter was the first in three years, and was partly due to layoffs after Y2K-related contracts expired. There was a minor decline in health and social services.

The March 2000 issue of *Gross domestic product by industry* (15-001-XIE, \$11 /\$110) is now available. To purchase data, contact Yolande Chantigny (1-800-877-4623; imad@statcan.ca). For analytical information, contact Richard Evans (613-951-9145; evanric@statcan.ca), Industry Measures and Analysis Division. See also "Current Trends" on page 8.

Gross domestic product at factor cost

\$ billions (1992 dollars)



Large goods surplus pumps up current account balance

Canada's current account balance swung strongly into surplus in the opening quarter of 2000, following a small deficit in the fourth quarter of 1999. Canadian residents earned \$4.8 billion more abroad on goods, services, investment income and transfers than they spent abroad. A sharp upswing in the goods surplus led the turnaround, which was accompanied by lower deficits on direct investment income and on travel.

An unprecedented \$3.3 billion resurgence boosted the goods surplus to \$12.0 billion, just short of the record \$12.3 billion reached in the second quarter of 1996. Nearly all broad sectors posted either a greater surplus (notably energy, autos and forest products) or a smaller deficit (especially machinery and consumer goods). After pausing for a quarter, Canada's surplus with the United States continued its strong growth. The deficit with all other trading areas except the United Kingdom narrowed, as oil imports increased substantially.

Reduced net profits on direct investment led to a decline in the deficit on investment income to \$6.6 billion, its lowest level since the second quarter of 1997. The quarterly deficit on travel fell to its lowest point since the Expo-related surplus of mid-1986, except for a similar result in the first quarter of 1999. The current decline is attributable to lower spending by Canadians abroad. It was partly offset by higher deficits elsewhere in the services account, notably commercial services (higher net payments of fees and commissions on securities) and transportation.

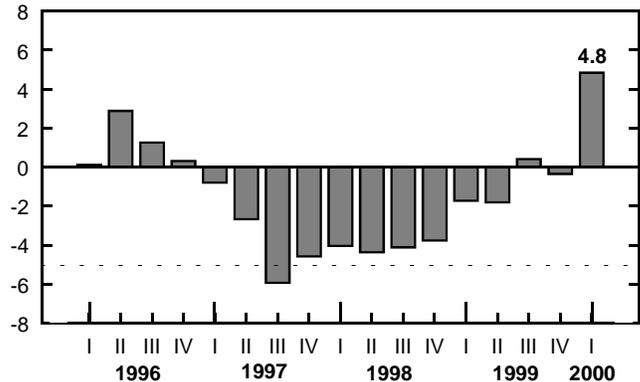
In the financial account, Canadian investors bought a record \$12.3 billion worth of portfolio foreign securities in the quarter. The \$10.4 billion investment in shares came solely from purchases on the secondary market, about evenly split between U.S. and overseas shares. Canadian residents also invested \$1.9 billion in foreign bonds, mostly overseas bonds.

Note to readers

Current account data are seasonally adjusted. Financial account data are not seasonally adjusted.

Current account balance

\$ billions, seasonally adjusted



For the second consecutive quarter, Canadian companies made a number of high-profile acquisitions of American firms, mainly through share exchanges. In total, they poured a massive \$13 billion into foreign economies, the third highest direct investment on record.

Canada's official reserve assets rose by \$4 billion, an increase similar to that of the fourth quarter. While the majority was again invested in U.S. securities and deposits, one quarter went to securities and deposits denominated in other foreign currencies.

On the liability side, foreign investors put an unprecedented \$22.8 billion into Canadian portfolio equities, chiefly in the

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... Large goods surplus pumps up current account balance

technology sector. For the first time in five quarters, they also bought \$3.8 billion worth of Canadian money market instruments. Meanwhile, they divested themselves of a record \$7.7 billion in Canadian bonds, as retirements exceeded new issues, especially in government securities. On the other hand, they bought a moderate amount of corporate bonds.

After averaging almost \$11 billion in the preceding three quarters, foreign direct investment totalled only \$4.4 billion in

the first quarter. While foreign acquisitions played a significant part in the investment during 1999, there was no appreciable activity in the current quarter.

The first quarter 2000 issue of Canada's balance of international payments (print version: 67-001-XPB, \$38/\$124; on line at www.statcan.ca: 67-001-XIB, \$29/\$93) presents the full report. For more information, contact Arthur Ridgeway (613-951-8907) or Patrick O'Hagan (613-951-1798), Balance of Payments and Financial Flows Division.

Another record in large retailers' sales of home furnishings and electronics

March's 13.8% increase in sales of home furnishings and electronics represents the largest year-over-year rise in this category since the introduction of the Monthly Survey of Large Retailers. Robust consumer demand for big-ticket items continued to push up sales. Home electronics sales continued to advance at a healthy pace (+18.2%), as did furniture sales (+15.4%) and sales of appliances (+11.8%). Sales of home furnishings, such as floor coverings, draperies and linens, were up 6.3%.

Sales in March were up in all the major commodity groups sold by the group of large retailers, with sales totalling \$5.7 billion, up 8.1% from March 1999. For the second consecutive

Note to readers

Changes in 1999 to the composition of the group of large retailers affect year-over-year sales comparisons. This is especially true in the food sector, where several supermarket chains have been restructured. All data in this report are unadjusted for seasonal factors.

month, the commodity groups with the largest year-over-year percentage increases were "other" goods and services (+16.0%), hardware, lawn and garden products (+15.7%), and home furnishing and electronics (+13.8%).

The three largest product lines within the "other" goods and services category were tobacco products and supplies (with sales of \$166.6 million), automotive fuels, oils and additives (\$121.9 million), and automotive parts and accessories (\$109.3 million). Notably, sales of automotive fuels, oils and additives rose 43.6%. The strong increases in the price of crude oil have led to higher energy costs; gasoline prices were up 38.0% from March 1999.

Sales of hardware, lawn and garden products advanced 15.7% over March 1999. The commodities within this category that posted the largest increases were lawn and garden furniture (+43.8%), lawn and garden-related products such as barbecues, wheelbarrows and garden tools (+26.1%), and nursery stock, flowers and potted plants (+22.2%).

Fuelled by strong increases in prescription and over-the-counter drugs (+22.3%), March sales of health and personal care products rose 11.9%. This continues the trend of double-digit year-over-year increases posted in this category since the beginning of the survey.

For data or general information, contact the Client Services Unit (613-951-3549 or 1-877-421-3067; retailinfo@statcan.ca). For more information, contact Catherine Draper (613-951-0669; drapcat@statcan.ca), Distributive Trades Division.

Large retailers' sales

Not seasonally adjusted

	March 1999	March 2000	March 1999 to March 2000
	\$ millions		% change
All commodities	5,249	5,677	8.1
Food and beverages	2,005	2,111	5.3
Clothing, footwear and accessories	1,009	1,038	2.9
Home furnishings and electronics	672	765	13.8
Health and personal care products	415	465	11.9
Housewares	238	265	11.5
Sporting and leisure goods	213	226	5.9
Hardware, lawn and garden products	170	196	15.7
All other goods and services	527	611	16.0

Number of international visitors to Canada reaches 25-year high

Canada hosted more than 19.4 million overnight international travellers in 1999, the highest annual level in the 25 years that international travel data have been collected.

About 4.2 million tourists came from overseas, an increase of 6.4% compared with 1998, and the first increase since 1996. Recovering Asian markets spurred much of this growth, particularly South Korea (+52.3%) and Taiwan (+26.0%). In contrast, European markets expanded just 4.9%. Among Canada's top 10 overseas tourist markets, Hong Kong was the only one to produce fewer travellers (-9.5%).

However, most tourists—about 15.2 million (78%)—came from the United States, up 1.9% from 1998. A record 1.1 million Americans (+8.7%) passed one night or more in the Atlantic provinces, and Quebec saw the second highest regional increase (+5.6%). The majority of American travellers—1.9 million—came from New York State. However, Texas has increased in importance as a tourist market for Canada over the last decade, mostly because of the rise in the number of flights to that state.

Canada's top 10 major overseas markets

	1998	1999	1998 to 1999
	thousands		% change
United Kingdom	747	780	4.4
Japan	484	516	6.6
France	402	414	3.0
Germany	379	392	3.4
Taiwan	123	155	26.0
Australia	145	152	4.8
Hong Kong	148	134	-9.5
Mexico	112	127	13.4
Netherlands	110	121	10.0
Italy	101	111	9.9

The rate of increase in American trips by air (+3.8%) again exceeded the growth rate by car (+2.2%). Since 1990, the rate of increase has been respectively 58.6% and 14.6%. The 1995 Canada-U.S. Open Skies Agreement has contributed to the acceleration in air travel.

For their part, Canadians made 14.1 million overnight trips to the United States, up 5.1% compared with 1998 when such trips plummeted 11.2% to their lowest level on record. The recent improvement in the value of the Canadian dollar has been influential. New York remained the most popular state for Canadian travellers, the only state to attract more than 2 million Canadians. However, 1.7 million Canadians visited Florida, down 1.8%, the second straight annual decline.

Canadians flew to the United States on almost 5 million trips in 1999, up 7.8% compared with 1998. Due in part to the Open Skies Agreement, 35% of Canadian overnight trips to the United States were made by air, compared with 23% in 1990. On the other hand, auto travel south of the border slid from a high of 14.3 million trips in 1991 to 7.9 million by 1999. Since such trips are often for pleasure, they are more sensitive to exchange rate fluctuations.

Canadians made 4.3 million trips to overseas countries, up 0.8% from 1998, the slowest annual growth rate of the 1990s. Nonetheless, this was the highest number of trips during the past three decades. Canadians made 350,000 visits to Cuba, almost double the level in 1998, moving Cuba from sixth to fourth place on the list of top 10 overseas destinations visited by Canadians. Despite a near-double-digit decline by Canadians, France remained in third position on the list.

This report summarizes data from the International Travel Survey. The tables, various statistical profiles, and microdata files of characteristics of international travellers for 1999 are available on request. To order, contact Pearl Bellefeuille (613-951-1674; fax: 613-951-2909; pearl.bellefeuille@statcan.ca). For more information, contact Laurie McDougall (613-951-6766; fax: 613-951-2909; laurie.mcdougall@statcan.ca), Tourism Statistics Program.

Canadians are logging onto the Internet in growing numbers

In 1999, the proportion of households with at least one regular Internet user jumped to 41.8% from 35.9% in 1998. The Household Internet Use Survey shows that Canadians have continued to increase their Internet use at home and at school. However, Internet use at work decreased slightly and remained unchanged in public libraries.

For the first time, home was the most popular location for Internet use at 28.7% of households in 1999, up from 22.6% of households in 1998. This might reflect expansion of Internet services offered to households and lower connection costs.

Regular household Internet use from work dropped into second place at 21.9% in 1999 from 23.3% in 1998. This could be due in part to the development of workplace policies limiting personal Internet use.

At school, Internet use rose to 14.9%, up from 12.1% in 1998, making it the third most popular location. Internet use from public libraries was steady at 4.5% in 1999. Other locations, such as the homes of friends, neighbours and relatives as well as Internet cafés, saw an increase to 4.1% in 1999, up from 2.6% the previous year.

Alberta continued to lead with the highest proportion of households with regular Internet users, from any location, at 50.8% in 1999. British Columbia was a close second at 48.1%. The province with the highest proportion of regular home Internet use was British Columbia (35.8%), just ahead of Alberta (34.1%).

Proportion of households in top 15 Census Metropolitan Areas with at least one regular Internet user

	1997	1998	1999
	% of households		
Canada	29.4	35.9	41.8
Calgary	41.1	52.8	60.1
Ottawa ¹	55.6	55.4	59.9
Victoria	40.1	48.5	56.4
Halifax	39.2	50.3	52.4
Vancouver	35.9	45.7	49.7
Edmonton	35.9	43.9	48.8
Toronto	38.0	42.0	48.5
London	31.8	41.2	45.9
Kitchener	34.9	42.4	43.7
Hamilton	30.4	41.2	43.1
Winnipeg	33.1	37.8	42.1
Montréal	24.3	31.6	39.1
St. Catharines-Niagara	26.1	29.3	34.4
Québec	23.9	28.6	33.9
Windsor	25.7	26.8	33.6

¹ Ontario portion only of the Ottawa-Hull CMA.

In 1999, for the first time, Calgary had the highest proportion of households with regular Internet users at 60.1%, just ahead of Ottawa. Victoria and Halifax swapped positions from 1998 to 1999.

Custom tabulations are available upon request. For more information, contact Jonathan Ellison (613-951-5882; jonathan.ellison@statcan.ca), Science, Innovation and Electronic Information Division.

New from Statistics Canada

Innovation analysis bulletin

May 2000

The May 2000 issue of *Innovation analysis bulletin* contains articles on innovation in service industries, the deployment of science and technology skills, and research and development tax incentives.

The *Innovation analysis bulletin* focuses on trends in science, technology, and the information society. It includes updates on government science and technology activities, industrial research and development, intellectual property commercialization, advanced technologies and innovation, biotechnology, connectedness, telecommunications and broadcasting, and electronic commerce.

The May 2000 issue of ***Innovation analysis bulletin*** (88-003-XIE, free) is now available online at www.statcan.ca. Click on "Products and services," then on "Downloadable publications (free)." For more information, contact Michael Bordt (613-951-8585; fax: 613-951-9920; michael.bordt@statcan.ca), Science, Innovation and Electronic Information Division.

Profile of active volunteers

1997

Four million Canadians give more than 60 hours of their time each year as volunteers. The report *Distinguishing characteristics of active volunteers in Canada* provides a detailed statistical portrait of these individuals. This report is based on a study that analysed data from the 1997 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating. A sample of 18,301 people aged 15 and over participated in the survey.

The study profiles the principal characteristics of active volunteers from a set of nearly 50 traits that were examined. One of the characteristics that sets apart the majority of active volunteers across the country is their high level of involvement. The study also reveals how these volunteers have different patterns of distinctive characteristics in different communities and different regions across the country.

Distinguishing characteristics of active volunteers in Canada (75F0033MIE, free) is one of a series of studies on the non-profit sector, conducted under the auspices of the Nonprofit Sector Knowledge Base Project. It is available on Statistics Canada's Web site (www.statcan.ca). For more information, contact Paul Reed (613-951-8217; reedpau@statcan.ca), Statistics Canada.

World trade analyzer

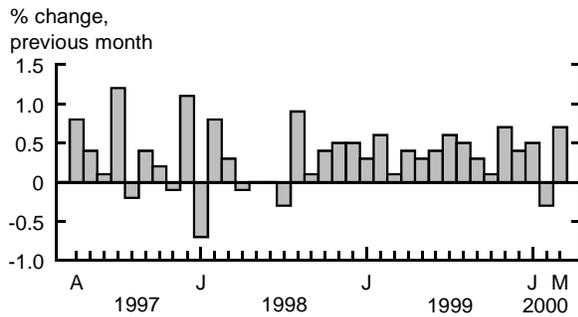
1980 to 1998

United Nations adjusted commodity trade data for 1998 are now available on the *World trade analyzer* CD-ROM in a time series covering 1980 to 1998. This product contains data on more than 800 commodities based on the Standard International Trade Classification Revision 2, covering approximately 180 world trading partners.

To order the ***World trade analyzer*** (65-F0016XCE), or for more information, contact Jocelyne Elibani (1-800-294-5583; 613-951-9786; fax: 613-951-0117; trade@statcan.ca), International Trade Division.

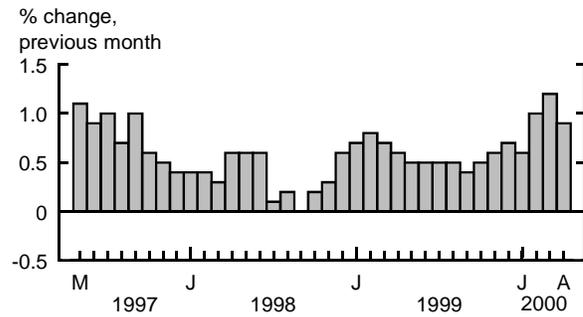
Current trends

Gross domestic product



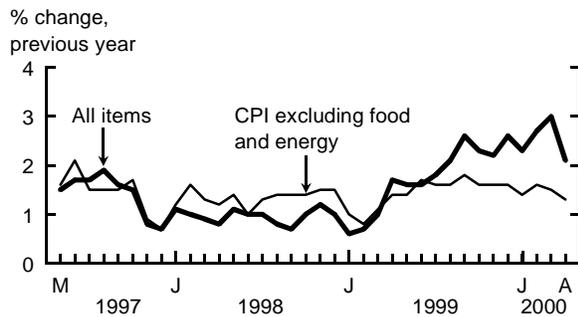
After receding in February, economic activity surged 0.7% in March. The advance marked a return to the solid growth path.

Composite Index



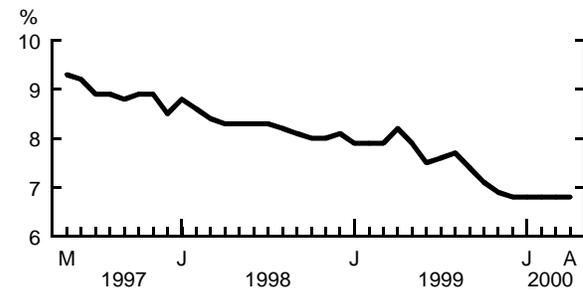
The growth of the leading indicator slowed from 1.2% in March to 0.9% in April. Household demand lost some of its vigour and financial markets slowed.

Consumer Price Index



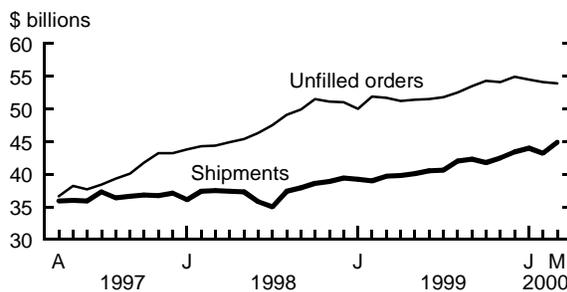
Consumer prices for goods and services were 2.1% higher in April 2000 than they were a year earlier. Excluding food and energy, prices rose 1.3%.

Unemployment rate



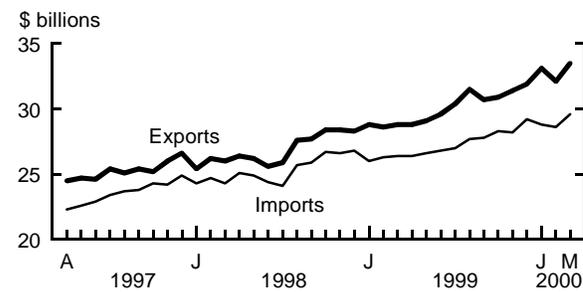
In April, the unemployment rate remained at 6.8% for a fifth consecutive month.

Manufacturing



Manufacturers' shipments rebounded 3.8% in March to \$44.9 billion. The backlog of unfilled orders decreased 0.3% to \$53.9 billion.

Merchandise trade



In March, the value of merchandise exports rebounded 4.5% from February to \$33.5 billion. Imports climbed 3.7% to \$29.6 billion.

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted except the Consumer Price Index.

Latest statistics

	Period	Level	Change, previous period	Change, previous year
GENERAL				
Gross domestic product (\$ billion, 1992)	March	774.3	0.7%	4.7%
Composite Index (1992=100)	April	161.6	0.9%	8.2%
Operating profits of enterprises (\$ billion)	Q4 1999	43.9	7.8%	27.1%
Capacity utilization (%)	Q1 2000*	87.6	1.1†	4.3†
DOMESTIC DEMAND				
Retail trade (\$ billion)	February	22.3	-1.1%	4.9%
Department store sales (\$ billions)	April*	1.50	1.4%	3.9%
New motor vehicle sales (thousand of units)	March	134.9	6.5%	8.8%
Wholesale trade (\$ billion)	March	31.6	2.0%	8.7%
LABOUR				
Employment (millions)	April	14.86	0.0%	2.9%
Unemployment rate (%)	April	6.8	0.0†	-1.4†
Participation rate (%)	April	65.8	-0.1†	0.0†
Average weekly earnings (\$)	March	624.11	0.3%	3.0%
Help-wanted Index (1996=100)	May*	169	1.2%	7.0%
INTERNATIONAL TRADE				
Merchandise exports (\$ billion)	March	33.5	4.5%	16.3%
Merchandise imports (\$ billion)	March	29.6	3.7%	12.5%
Merchandise trade balance (all figures in \$ billion)	March	3.9	0.4	1.4
MANUFACTURING				
Shipments (\$ billion)	March	44.9	3.8%	13.0%
New orders (\$ billion)	March	44.8	4.5%	13.3%
Unfilled orders (\$ billion)	March	53.9	-0.3%	4.2%
Inventory/shipments ratio	March	1.28	-0.03	-0.01
PRICES				
Consumer Price Index (1992=100)	April	110.1	-0.4%	2.1%
Industrial Product Price Index (1992=100)	April	126.8	0.0%	5.6%
Raw Materials Price Index (1992=100)	April	134.1	-6.0%	19.7%
New Housing Price Index (1992=100)	March	102.5	0.1%	2.0%

Note: All series are seasonally adjusted with the exception of the price indexes.

* new this week

† percentage point

Infomat

A weekly review

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Published by the Official Release Unit, Communications Division,
 Statistics Canada, 10th floor, R.H. Coats Bldg., Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6.

Price per issue: paper, \$4; online at www.statcan.ca, \$3. Annual subscription:
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