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SOURCE: PMO

DATE: APRIL 12, 2006

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE: 1204doc1

LOCATION/LIEU: GANDER, NFLD.

TIME/ HEURE: 09H30

LENGTH/DURÉE: 12:00

P.M. SPEECH IN GANDER, NEWFOUNDLAND

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MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, it's a great day to be here, in Gander, Newfoundland. I would ask you all to give a warm welcome to the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper.

(applause)

STEPHEN HARPER (premier ministre du Canada):

Thank you very much. Bon matin, Mesdames et Messieurs. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a great pleasure for me to be here today with all of you. I know there are many special people in the crowd today, but if you don't mind, I would just like to pay particular note to several. First of all, I gather in... I don't think up here today. No, up here is with me Kevin O'Brian, your local provincial member of the Legislature is here. Give Kevin a hand.

(applause)

I'm also told your local member of Parliament Scott Simms is here. Where is Scott?

(applause)

Of course, the Premier of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Danny Williams, is here.

(applause)

Member of Parliament from Avalon and chair of our Atlantic Canada caucus, Fabian Manning, who's up here with me.

(applause)

I don't want to forget, I know he's already been introduced, but Newfoundland and Labrador's representative in the new federal cabinet, the Honourable Loyola Hearn. Give him a big hand.

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(applause)

And I'll just draw attention to a couple of people who I know are here but not up on stage with me, a young man I think who deserves considerable credit for why we are here today, Erin Heinz. Where is Erin? There he is.

(applause)

And the man I first met in St. John's a couple of months back, where he signed a petition, I'm sure something he had a few of you do, and that's the Chair of the Committee to reinstate the Gander Weather Centre, Mr. Pat Dwyer. Where is Pat?

(applause)

And I'd also just like to thank my Minister of the Environment, Ron Ambrose, who is not here today but has something to do with all these things and we'll be doing some interviews later today.

Now last December, friends, I made a promise to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to recognize and respect the fact that yours is a unique geographic area with special characteristics. As you all know, Newfoundland and Labrador is a land of majestic, raw beauty, a gem in the North Atlantic. But being situated in this part of the world in these highly charged waters does create complications, including making the province susceptible to harsh turns in weather.

Of course, bouts of wild and unexpected weather are nothing new. Newfoundlanders have weathered the forces of Mother Nature for generations. But what is relatively new is scientifically accurate weather forecasting technology, a technology our government believes the people of Newfoundland and Labrador should be able to benefit from.

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Dans une démarche peu clairvoyante, le gouvernement précédent a fermé les services de prévision météorologique du bureau, forçant la province à utiliser les bulletins de la Nouvelle-Écosse. La fermeture a peut-être fait économiser quelques dollars au gouvernement libéral mais avec les mauvais résultats pour Terre-Neuve et Labrador.

C'est pour cela que j'annonce aujourd'hui notre plan de restaurer la capacité de prévisions météorologiques au bureau ici, à Gander.

Now, for years, this province has had to endure inaccurate weather forecasts from nearly 1,000 kilometres away in the Maritimes. Such forecasts aren't just an inconvenience but at times pose a real danger to public safety. Particularly affected by inaccurate forecasts are the thousands of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who work off shore. These men and women have to contend with some of the harshest conditions in the Atlantic on a good day. On bad days, raging winds, frigid swelling waters pose a grave danger to their personal safety.

The reality, this reality, this is a reality that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know only too well. That's why I'm announcing today that one of the first acts of our new government is to restore forecasting capabilities to the weather office here, in Gander.

(applause)

Newfoundlanders, Labradorians deserve better than to be told to expect five centimetres of snow only to wake up to 10 times that amount. The education, the province's youngsters shouldn't suffer because schools closed their doors for storms that failed to materialize. The lives of men and women who work in the already choppy waters of the Atlantic

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shouldn't be needlessly endangered because of the arrival of an unforecast squall.

In short, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve accurate forecasts that reflect the reality of the province's unique weather. This is a commitment I made to you in December and as Prime Minister, I can say without reservation, promise made, promise kept. Our government...

(applause)

Our new national government is committed to strengthening safety in Canadian communities from coast to coast to coast and restoring forecasting capabilities through the reopening of the Gander Weather Office is just such a step here, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In the months and years to come, our new government will continue to fight for this province and its unique needs, including examining whether any greater use can be made of the weather office here, in Gander.

Whether it's acting to protect your fishing resources inside or beyond the continental shelf, exempting fishing property transferred within a family from capital gains, or working with the province to increase its power over local fisheries, our government will continue to stand up for the interests of Newfoundland and Labrador in Ottawa.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.

(applause)

DANNY WILLIAMS (Newfoundland and Labrador Premier): Prime Minister, Minister Hearn, MHA Kevin O'Brian, member of Parliament Fabian Manning, member of Parliament Scott Simms, Your worship, Mayor Elliott, I don't think I've forgotten anybody, ladies and

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gentlemen, residents of Gander, what a great morning this is. What a wonderful morning!

(applause)

From a personal perspective, Prime Minister, it's so nice not to have to drag a Prime Minister kicking and screaming to fulfill a promise to our province. Thank you very much.

(applause)

And you know, I think that's the true part of the significance of this, and I'm going to deal with the other parts as well, but you know, the fact that this Prime Minister and this government, within 90 days of their election, have come to your community and to our province to deliver on a commitment that was so very, very important.

I mean, we take great pride, Prime Minister, in our culture and our people and our heritage and our music and our accents, but our weather is really important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, extremely important.

And that's because we've learned some hard lessons over the years and you know, the unpredictability of what can happen in the north Atlantic has very serious consequences. I even remember just a very small incident as a young man, when friends of mine who were fishermen in Kittivitty(phon) Village left on a sunny winter morning to go out and actually shoot some seabirds at the time, which was an illegal exercise, by the way.

(applause)

But they left on a sunny morning and within an hour, a winter squall came up and six hours later, they found them and they lost

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fingers and toes and limbs as a result of that. That's the kind of thing that can happen in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So for us to have our weather forecast from 1,000 miles away is insulting to us, and it's very, very dangerous to our people. And we thank you for restoring that service to our province.

(applause)

The other thing that's so very, very significant here is the whole issue of federal employment presence in our province. As Minister Hearn knows and has spoken about, even when he was in opposition, since 1990. Our federal employment presence here has diminished by about 39 per cent whereas the average in the entire country was 18 per cent.

From the 1980s, actually, in 25 years actually, on a per-capita basis, employment has decreased five times in Newfoundland and Labrador what it has for the average in the rest of the country. We don't even have any Atlantic regional offices in this particular province.

This is a significant first step. The number of jobs is significant but the statement that you're making to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is a very, very important one because we are still the province in this country that has the highest rate of employment. We have 15 per cent employment. I saw statistics the other day. This is a national average of about 6 per cent.

The prairie provinces, for example, are all below that national average. So we're still out there. We need these jobs. These jobs are very, very important to us. Those jobs, I think that the difference between the 39 and the 18 per cent would have meant about 2,700 and 70 jobs to our

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people in this province. That's a huge number and it's very, very important to us.

There's a tremendous significance in what you've done here today and we are extremely grateful for what you've done.

(applause)

However, it's all very nice for the politicians to stand up on the stage here and take all the credit for this, but there is a gentleman here, in the audience, who in my opinion deserves all the credit for this, and that's Pat Dwyer who is standing right there.

(applause)

To put it bluntly, this man worked his guts out to try and make this happen and to have 125,000 names on a petition is an enormous exercise. It's a credit to you and it's a tribute to you.

And I remember, when I came back in the Atlantic Accord and I came down those steps at Tour Bay Airport, and I was met by this gentleman, and when he got to the bottom of the stairs, he said to me, "This is not about money. This is about respect."

And that's exactly what it was all about and he's carried that drive and that fervour, and this is all about respect for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the federal government are giving us our just deserve and are respecting us. It's because of the work that you've done and the 125,000 people that have signed your petition that we are here as a group today to show what happens when governments and communities and people work together.

So that's what this is all about.

(applause)

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So in closing, Prime Minister, you're welcome to come back to Gander any time you want to make an announcement like this, or anywhere else in the province that you want. It's refreshing to see a government that's living up to its commitments. Thank you very much and thanks for attending this morning.

(applause)

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