

H & K Communications

72 Elvaston Avenue
Nepean, Ontario
K2G 3X9

Phone: (613) 829-1800
Fax: (613) 829-2449
E-mail: hturkow@rogers.com

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PRIME MINISTER'S SCRUM REGARDING CABINET SHUFFLE

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Phone (613) 829-1800 Fax (613) 829-6181 E-mail hturkow@home.com

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Bon après-midi. First of all just before I begin, let me apologize for dragging you across the road, but we wanted to give you a little better backdrop than scaffolding. So that's why we're here this morning.

Il y a un an la population canadienne a voté pour le vrai changement, et au cours de la dernière année, notre nouveau gouvernement a livré la marchandise en obtenant des vrais résultats pour les familles et les contribuables. Les résultats parlent d'eux-mêmes: de nouvelles normes afin d'assurer l'imputabilité politique ont été mises en place. Nous avons réduit les taxes et les impôts pour l'ensemble des contribuables. Nous avons déposé de nouveaux projets de loi visant à renforcer le système de justice, et nous avons adopté plusieurs mesures concrètes et réalistes visant à assainir et à protéger l'environnement.

Aujourd'hui au moment où nous entamons la deuxième année de notre mandat, notre gouvernement est propre, notre économie est vigoureuse et notre pays est uni. Le Canada joue un rôle de nouveau, un rôle de leadership sur la scène internationale. Mais il nous reste encore beaucoup de pain sur la planche. La population canadienne désire que nous continuions d'obtenir des vrais résultats, de continuer à renforcer notre grand pays et de continuer à tenir parole. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous concentrons déjà nos efforts sur l'élaboration du prochain budget. Grâce à notre budget de 2007, nous ferons du Canada un pays encore plus dynamique en assurant des résultats pour les dépenses fédérales, en diminuant encore davantage le fardeau fiscal des particuliers et des familles et en restaurant l'équilibre fiscal à notre fédération. Mais ce n'est qu'un début. En effet en 2007, nous continuerons

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également d'assurer des rues et des collectivités plus sûres, de faire en sorte que nos institutions politiques canadiennes soient plus démocratiques et fondées davantage sur l'imputabilité, et de défendre les intérêts et les valeurs du Canada sur la scène internationale. De plus, nous adopterons davantage de mesures sur le plan environnemental, des mesures qui s'ajouteront aux initiatives existantes, tel que notre engagement en matière de biocarburants et de notre plan de gestion des produits chimiques. Des mesures qui entraîneront des résultats sur l'amélioration de la qualité de l'air et à la lutte contre les changements climatiques. Ne doit y avoir aucun doute: nous allons mener le dossier environnemental à bon port. Il s'agit d'un engagement partagé par l'ensemble des membres de notre gouvernement, et qui est reflété grâce à la mise sur pied d'un comité permanent du cabinet sur l'environnement et la sécurité énergétique.

Depuis le début de notre mandat, nous avons mis en oeuvre notre programme, car nous connaissons les valeurs et les intérêts que nous défendons. Nos priorités sont claires et notre équipe est dynamique, uni et engagé. C'est la raison pour laquelle je suis impatient de travailler avec ma nouvelle équipe ministérielle qui comprend les nouveaux membres assermentés aujourd'hui à la résidence de la Gouverneure générale. Ensemble nous ferons du Canada un pays plus vigoureux et plus sécuritaire, un meilleur pays pour l'ensemble de la population canadienne, un pays qui répond aux besoins de tous et de toutes.

Once again, good afternoon. Last January Canadians voted for change, and over the past year, Canada's new government has been delivering change by getting things done for families and taxpayers. The results are clear: new higher standards for political accountability are in place,

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taxes have been cut across the board, action is being taken – excuse me – to strengthen the criminal justice system, and we have undertaken a number of practical, realistic initiatives to improve and protect the environment.

Today at the beginning of our second year in office, our government is clean, our economy is strong, our country is united. And once again, Canada is playing a leadership role on the world stage. But our work is far from done. Canadians want us to keep moving forward, to keep working to strengthen our great country, and to keep delivering on our commitments. That's why we're already hard at work on a new budget. Budget 2007 will make Canada stronger by keeping federal spending focused on results, by cutting taxes further for individuals and families and by restoring fiscal balance to our federation. But that's just the beginning. In year two, we will also continue to make our streets and communities safer, ensure Canada's political institutions are more democratic and more accountable, and stand up for Canada's interests and values on the world stage. As well, we will take more action on the environment, action that builds on initiatives like our biofuels commitment and our chemicals management plan, actions that will lead to results on clean air and climate change. Make no mistake, we are determined to drive this agenda to a conclusion. This is a commitment across our government and it is reflected in a new permanent cabinet committee dedicated to environment and energy security.

Since taking office, Canada's new government has successfully implemented its agenda because we know where we stand. Our priorities are clear and our team is strong, united and committed. That's why I'm so excited about my enhanced ministerial team, including new members who were just sworn into office at Rideau Hall. Together we will make

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Canada a stronger, safer and better country, a country that works for all of us. Thank you and I will take a few questions.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Good afternoon, bon après-midi. We'll start with Roger Smith, CTV.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, on the environment file, you have shifted Rona Ambrose out. Is this a sigh that your government, the Minister or your government was perceived as not doing a good a job as Canadians wanted on that file?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, we've clearly determined we need to do more on the environment. Rona did some... Minister Ambrose did some important work, as I mentioned. Several initiatives were begun. I think in particular of the biofuels, chemical management plan. There are other initiatives. Frankly I think a lot more was done by Minister Ambrose in one year than the previous government in 13, but we recognize that particularly when it comes to clean air and climate change, that Canadians expect a lot more. We've put an experienced minister in that portfolio. Minister Baird understands the challenges. He's ready to tackle them. At the same time, Minister Ambrose will play an important role in Intergovernmental Affairs, which was her portfolio before we took office. She's a specialist in that area, and also is going to handle western economic diversification, so she will have enough work commensurate with her abilities.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with...

REPORTER: As a follow-up...

DIMITRII SOUDAS: We'll just continue with Emmanuelle Latraverse, because we have quite a few. Emmanuelle Latraverse, Radio-Canada.

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JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, au début de votre allocution, vous avez fait référence qu'il y a un an la population a voté pour le changement. Aujourd'hui ce changement, c'est vous qui l'avez fait au sein de votre cabinet. Pourquoi justement avez-vous décidé de changer votre ministre de l'Environnement? Pourquoi est-ce que c'était nécessaire de nommer un nouveau ministre de l'Environnement et pourquoi est-ce que M. Baird réussirait là où Mme Ambrose a échoué?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Pour commencer, je devrais dire que ce changement est une mise au point pour notre gouvernement, pour notre cabinet, d'assurer après un an, après les résultats d'un an d'avoir les meilleurs ministres dans les meilleures portes-feuilles, pour eux et aussi de donner aux certains nouveaux une occasion de gagner de l'expérience. Comme je viens de dire, la ministre Ambrose a beaucoup fait dans l'environnement. Elle a commencé l'initiative sur les biocarburants et aussi une initiative bien importante sur les produits chimiques, et elle a commencé aussi nos efforts sur la qualité de l'air et la lutte contre le changement climatique. En même temps, nous reconnaissons que nous devons faire plus. Le ministre Baird est quelqu'un très...avec beaucoup d'expérience à la politique et il comprend les grands défis qui nous posent, pas seulement pour le gouvernement, mais pour le pays, sur l'environnement. Comme j'ai dit à plusieurs reprises, le Canada a un bilan, peut-être le pire bilan de n'importe quel pays du monde, de n'importe quel pays développé du monde. Nous avons beaucoup à faire. Ce n'est pas un dossier facile. Pour la ministre Ambrose, elle sera la ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales. C'était son portefeuille quand nous étions en opposition. Elle est une spécialiste aussi dans ce dossier.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Randall Palmer, Reuters.

REPORTER: Mr. Baird has developed quite a reputation for being able to perform in question period, usually as an attack (inaudible). Is that all that you need, somebody to point out the faults of the opposition, or do you also need somebody who's going to deliver substance? Can you give some idea of what sort of substance you're prepared to deliver on climate change itself?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, let me just say in defence of Minister Baird, obviously he has his own communications style. That said, I think Minister Baird would be the first to tell you, and I can certainly tell you that communications alone will not address the challenges that we face in terms of the environment and climate change in particular. Minister Baird, to his credit, took the number one priority of the government in the last year, which was the federal Accountability Act...excuse me. Minister Baird took the number one accountability of the government, which was the federal Accountability Act. He got that legislation drafted, and through the bureaucracy as the first piece of legislation as the House sat, he then steered it through both Houses of Parliament, both Houses in which we're in a minority, and particularly difficult situation in the Senate. He did that in a way that displayed skilful negotiation with the opposition while at the same time retaining the important priorities that the government wanted to see eventually adopted when the legislation was finalized. So he has a lot of experience and a proven track record at moving things to a conclusion through a minority Parliament.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Gilles Toupin, La Presse.

JOURNALISTE: Oui, M. Harper, votre ancien ministre de la Justice M. Toews avait une réputation de, comme vous dites en anglais, de "loose cannon", et il a été assimilé, disons, à une (inaudible) plutôt à droite de votre parti en ce qui concerne la loi et l'ordre. Le fait de le remplacer par M. Nicholson qui est beaucoup plus posé, si je peux le dire, est-ce que c'est un signal que vous envoyez à la population, et quel signal vous envoyez à la population?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ce sont vos descriptions. Ce n'est pas parce que tu a dis que j'ai dit. Ce n'est pas que j'ai dit, ce n'est pas ce que j'ai dit. Je dois noter que le ministre Toews a commencé le travail du gouvernement sur la justice criminelle. Il a produit dans un an un programme de la justice criminelle très développée, une dizaine de projets de loi. Il y a beaucoup de choses à faire pour faire adopter la majorité de ces choses, mais il a beaucoup fait. Il a développé un vrai expertise. La difficulté est la suivant: quand on décide de changer un ou une ministre ou deux, il n'y a aucune chose comme un ou deux changements. C'est nécessaire d'avoir d'autres changements comme conséquence, par conséquence d'une telle décision. Avec le départ du ministre Baird du Conseil du trésor, le gouvernement a besoin d'un politicien avec beaucoup d'expérience, un conservateur économique et quelqu'un avec une capacité pour le détail, pour le grand détail dans ce porte-feuille, et pour cette raison, j'ai déménagé M. Toews à ce porte-feuille. En même temps M. Nicholson a démontré beaucoup de compétence dans des fonctions très importantes comme chef parlementaire, et il a capacité de faire n'importe quelle porte-feuille. Il est avocat et naturel pour

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le ministre de la Justice. Aussi, il était secrétaire parlementaire de la Justice depuis longtemps dans l'ancien gouvernement Progressiste conservateur.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Hannah Boudreau, Global.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, what message does this fairly large shuffle send? Does it send a message? Is it fair to say that there was some fixin' needed, or is it also possibly because of an upcoming election as well?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I wouldn't describe it as a large shuffle. I'd say it's a medium-sized shuffle. What I just said in French, you find when you make one or two changes, by necessity you must make others. There's a certain minimum number of changes you kind of have to make if you start making any at all. We felt we had to make some changes to make sure we had the people in the portfolios that were most suited to them, as we face the possibility of an election. I wouldn't call it an election cabinet, because I'm not planning to call an election, and you know, who knows? There could be other changes if an election took place, but we certainly felt this was the time, if there were some adjustments to be made. I'd say it's a fine-tuning. We've moved senior ministers into a different set of portfolios, which we think for various reasons will be more suited to their abilities. At the same time, we've brought in now a second tier, the secretary of states, to give other members, to give some newer members some experience and to begin, quite frankly, some of the government's planning for the longer term, although you know, obviously, our focus right now is not principally on the longer term.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Yvan Cloutier, Radio-Canada.

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JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, sur cette question-là, vous vous étiez fait un point d'honneur il y a un an de créer un cabinet qui était petit par rapport à ce à qu'on était habitué au gouvernement fédéral. Là vous ajoutez ce matin, bon, une demi-douzaine de secrétaires d'état, dont un au Québec. Pourquoi est-ce que c'est nécessaire si ce n'est pour accroître votre visibilité en vu des élections qui s'en viennent?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je ne pense pas que la recreation...la création, la recreation des secrétaires d'état est nécessaire, mais je pense que c'est un avantage pour le long terme de donner à certains nouveaux de l'expérience dans le cabinet. Le cabinet...je dois utiliser les termes corrects. Le cabinet reste la même grandeur. Les secrétaires d'état font partie de la ministère, mais ils ne font pas partie du cabinet. Le cabinet reste le même chiffre. Les secrétaires parlementaires ont des responsabilités ministérielles et je dois ajouter que les coûts additionnels de ces secrétaires d'état sont minimal et nous n'avons pas l'intention d'augmenter les dépenses; ces dépenses vont être trouvées dans les départements actuels, les budgets actuels.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Brian Lilley, CFRB.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, you mentioned in your remarks a new cabinet committee focused on the environment and energy security, and I'm wondering if you can tell us what that will be looking at, in specifics. Are we looking at an expansion of biofuels, or are we looking at energy security focused on the oil patch and integration with the American market; could you be more specific?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: This has been a...this... a smaller working group on environment and energy was created with the

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introduction of the clean air act, principally, not exclusively but principally to work on the implementation of that. There are, as you know, ongoing and extensive consultations with industrial sectors and also with government departments on the implementation. That will be the principal focus in the near term of that cabinet committee to complete those discussions and set targets across industry. So that will be its principle role, but obviously broader measures affecting the environment, and what you find with environmental measures is they almost invariably overlap significantly other departments of government, so that committee will deal also with those broader issues.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We have time for one last question, une dernière question, Mike Blanchfield, CanWest. Right there.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, as you look back on year one, nobody's perfect, but you had five priorities then. The environment wasn't one of them. When you look back on it, would you have done anything differently and what are you going to do in year two to address a perception that maybe you didn't place enough emphasis on that, whether that perception is there whether rightly or wrongly. How do you...?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you know, I...I say I don't get into enumerating my errors or second-guessing myself. I have all of you to do that for me, so, and you all specialize in it and do such a tremendous job I don't need to comment on that. But look, the five priorities we set last year were five priorities clearly specified in the election campaign itself, and obviously that was the focus and the focus of our efforts in year one. We accomplished many things in those priorities. Those priorities haven't completely disappeared. I mean, obviously some of them are changing. Our initial promise to deal with initial GST cut is, you know, obviously morphed

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into the broader economic and tax agenda. Our promise to pass a federal Accountability Act is now done. There are some implementation phases that have to be done on that, but more importantly now in terms of accountability is the democratic and Senate reform agendas that the government has embarked on, which I think are very important for the long term. In terms of environment, I said in the fall that environment had become a priority of the government. It was a longer-term priority like our economic plan. It's not something where we are expecting or promising quick fixes in a month or even a year, but this country has a lot of work to do. If you look at, you know, indicators, not just greenhouse gases, air pollution, other indicators, Canada ranks at the bottom of the developed world. Through quite frankly, and there's no other way of putting it, 13 years where there were absolutely no environmental initiatives undertaken of any kind. That's what we have, and we have a lot of work to do, and by necessity I think the public's been clear to us. They want that to be a priority. I think it should be a priority, priority for my children and grandchildren as much as anyone else's, so that is going to occupy another...occupy a lot of our time. It's going to be an important priority moving forward.

You know, I also have to say as I said in some of the year-end interviews, I have to repeat what I said there: we now have, notwithstanding a minority situation, we now have I think the luxury as a country to start to think about longer-term priorities. We no longer have a government...a year ago everyone was saying the government was getting nothing done, it had no clear agenda, it was immersed in scandal, the unity of the country was in question, the government was widely perceived as incompetent. All of those things have changed. The government is getting

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things done. This government is not in scandal, immersed in scandal, the federation has its tensions, but no one is suggesting the country's on the verge of a major unity crisis, so I think the country and the government, notwithstanding a minority situation, have the luxury of focusing on two bigger longer...well, really, three bigger longer term issues, and those are serious democratic reform, the economic position of Canada in the world, making sure we remain prosperous and stay competitive in an increasingly competitive global environment, and tackling long-term environmental issues that have been badly neglected for a very long time. Most Canadians simply don't understand how far Canada is behind on major environmental indicators, compared to other developed countries. Not the developing world; compared to other developed countries, we are behind.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much everybody, merci beaucoup.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ok, thanks everyone.

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