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SOURCE: PCO

DATE: MARCH 13, 2007

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE:1303DOC1

LOCATION/LIEU: VANCOUVER, BC

TIME/ HEURE: 10:15 (PDT)

LENGTH/DURÉE: 10:12 MINUTES

PRIME MINISTER'S SCRUM IN VANCOUVER

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Thank you everyone. We'll take a couple of questions.

DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary): We'll start with Alan Dowd, Reuters. Can you just move to the mic if possible please?

REPORTER: (Inaudible) basically said a lot of your announcements are largely a con game. What you've done is you've taken money that was previously put forward by the government, pulled it back in the last budget and are now re-announcing it with a new name. Is...are you just basically re-announcing something that had been announced before?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: No, this is the Eco-Trust fund. The national Eco-Trust fund for clean air and climate change is all new money. It's a billion and a half dollars and we are working cooperatively to help fund provincial programs, some of which had been recently announced, to (inaudible) the reduction, concrete reductions of greenhouse gases and air pollution. Mr. Dion didn't get it done. This government is getting on with the job.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Nous allons continuer avec Frédéric Arnould, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, M. Dion est en ville aujourd'hui et partout où il passe, il répète que lui, il veut pas d'élections. Il dit que c'est vous qui distribuez des milliards pour montrer que vous êtes déjà en campagne électorale. Vous, vous dites le contraire. Qui dit la vérité, vous ou M. Dion?

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TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: C'est clair que le gouvernement est en train de gouverner, est en train de faire des annonces pour la bénéfice des Canadiens, surtout pendant les deux semaines passées, pendant le mois passé j'ai annoncé Éco-fiducie Canada, un fonds national de nouveaux fonds de 1,5 milliards \$ pour améliorer notre gouvernement...notre environnement en collaboration avec nos provinces. C'est la philosophie, la philosophie du fédéralisme d'ouverture du gouvernement conservateur. Moi, je préfère évidemment que le parlement adopte nos initiatives. Ils seront dans le budget et je préfère continuer à gouverner. C'est pour l'opposition de décider l'opposition. Mais c'est clair que ce gouvernement va appuyer notre budget. Nous ne voulons pas notre défaite et une élection.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Mike Chisolm, Global.

REPORTER: Mr. Harper, is it realistic to think that we can actually achieve any substantial greenhouse gas reductions by using hydrogen fuel cells that are simply too expensive for most commuters, and particularly soccer moms?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, it may not be realistic today to expect widespread application of hydrogen fuel cells, but obviously the goal of the initiative both our governments are taking and what industry is working on is to make technology like that more affordable in the future. What is clear to our government and I think to most observers is that the only way we're going to make substantial reductions in emissions over time is through the commercial...adaptation and commercialization of new technology. This is obviously one of the most promising new technologies and just helps that it's one centred here in the lower mainland of British Columbia.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Julie Landry, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: Ma question va se ressembler à celle qui vient d'être posée. Ça coûte très chère, la technologie. Est-ce que vous prévoyez investir pour permettre aux gens de se payer cette technologie quand elle sera sur place?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Le gouvernement a annoncé évidemment aujourd'hui et pendant le mois passé des fonds pour Écofiducie Canada pour le développement de la nouvelle technologie, pour la réduction des gaz à effet de serre, et la pollution aérienne. En même temps il y a une possibilité d'autres annonces sur des bénéfiques, sur des incitatives pour des consommateurs, mais c'est une...évidemment c'est un programme en développement.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Natalie Clancy, CBC Television.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, can you walk us through your vision of what the ride would be like, then, from Vancouver to Whistler?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I...(LAUGHTER)

REPORTER: (Inaudible) explain it in...because I hear "Hydrogen Highway"; paint me a picture.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, why don't I actually let the Premier do that since it's actually the...(LAUGHTER) It's actually...I...I could do that, but it's actually the Premier's project, so I'll let him do it.

GORDON CAMPBELL (Premier of British Columbia): Well, actually the picture is actually pretty simple. You get in a car, which is powered by fuel cells, and you drive it up to Whistler. There are hydrogen

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facilities along the road that actually allow you to fill your car up with hydrogen as opposed to what you regularly fill it up with, and that actually is a clean technology. The hydrogen comes together with oxygen, creates an electrical current, it runs the battery, it runs the car and you get to Whistler. That's how it works. It'll be just like getting in a car and driving with hydrogen behind you. (APPLAUSE)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll...

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I did say earlier...I did say earlier today I would have been interested in jumping in that demonstration model and driving it up to Whistler, but several people in my entourage discouraged that.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Ian Bailey from the Vancouver Province. Ian?

GORDON CAMPBELL: Sorry, can I just...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, we're not announcing that today. Do you have something...?

GORDON CAMPBELL: Those, you know, we will have those vehicles available for use, but they won't...I don't imagine they're going to be in the mass market by 2010. I mean, I think we have to be realistic about where we are with this technology. They're not going to be in the mass market by 2010, but we will have a demonstration project that will work, and with luck, we will have a demonstration that will work, a project that will work from Whistler all the way to California.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Ian Bailey, Vancouver Province?

REPORTER: Prime Minister, on a regional issue, there's some concern about flooding in the Fraser Valley. I guess some communities

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are looking for more resources to help heighten their dikes. Are you concerned, aware about this? Can they look forward to more federal support for this?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I'm certainly aware there is a potential problem. Our officials have been in touch with officials of the government of British Columbia. They are monitoring it. I know Minister Day has been in touch with his provincial counterpart and will be travelling out here I think later this week to do some further consultation. So we're monitoring the situation. Obviously if things become serious enough, there is always federal disaster relief program in effect to deal with difficult situations.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Morris Bridge, Vancouver Sun?

REPORTER: Prime Minister, we're in the middle of reorganizing our local transit body, and a lot of its funding has been coming from the gas tax, which the federal government's been giving for the past two years. Will your government continue that program and make it permanent after its five-year mandate runs out?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I'm not announcing that today. I've been asked about several things today in terms of tax incentives and other tax measures we may take. I'm not in a position to announce anything today other than the new Eco-Trust monies for British Columbia. I will just say that we have budget on March the 19th, and I anticipate the Minister of Finance may have additional announcements then, but I wouldn't want to speculate on what those might be.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Greg Rasmusen from the CBC radio, Greg Rasmusen, CBC radio. If you can just...

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REPORTER: (Inaudible) has introduced some hard targets and hard numbers for greenhouse gas reductions, 33 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. Here in BC, similar targets, 33 percent reduction in greenhouse gases. Why can't Canada commit to hard numbers by 2020?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, the government will be announcing its plan for the reduction of greenhouse gases and air pollution within the next month. That will be a compulsory regulatory environment for industry across this country. I'll just say you'll have to stay tuned for the details then. The government is going to be very careful to establish a program in a way that the targets are achievable. We believe it's important to make environmental progress. We believe it's critical. We also believe that the key to that is long-term technological innovation. That's the way to do it. What the government will not consider is short-term damage to the economy or shutting down the economy in the short run to meet targets. So the targets we establish will allow us to adapt technology and be a world leader in making long-term gains in emissions reductions.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Jim Goddard, 1130 AM.

REPORTER: Toronto just recently received major federal funding to improve their rapid transit. Our rapid transit line out to the Northeast sector has been pushed back several times due to a lack of funding. Can we expect to see similar funding for the lower mainland's rapid transit needs?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I should say that the announcement I made in Toronto last week in terms of the public transit, various public transit infrastructure announcements were all done within the per capita national infrastructure funds that were created in the last budget.

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British Columbia is eligible for those funds and for any additional announcements we may make in the upcoming budget. The priorities in terms of particular projects that are funded are worked out in consultation with the provincial government.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: And we have time for one last question, Karen Cho, Fairchild.

REPORTER: Prime Minister...

DIMITRI SOUDAS: (Inaudible) closer to the mic please?

REPORTER: This question is Chinese Canadians, some groups are concerned about Japanese war crimes in World War Two, saying that they might send out a request that the Parliament should pass the bill to ask for a formal apology from the Japanese Prime Minister, which I think the Australian Prime Minister John Howard did. Will the government of Canada support this?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, it's the first time it's been raised with me. We'd have to have a discussion. It think ultimately the target of the Chinese Canadian community is obviously not the government of Canada, it's the government of Japan, and you know, as I say, I'll just take it under advisement.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much, merci beaucoup.

UNIDENTIFIED: (Inaudible) Prime Minister. That's great. (APPLAUSE)

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