



PM Harper's speech at the Museum of Civilization

March 23, 2006 - 12h30 - Gatineau, QC - 18:57 minutes

STEPHEN HARPER (premier ministre du Canada): Merci. Thank you, John, for that introduction, et merci, tout le monde. Je vous remercie de votre accueil chaleureux.

Before beginning my remarks today, I'd like to make a statement about the successful rescue of the Canadian and British hostages in Iraq.

Il est maintenant confirmé que les Canadiens James Loney et Harmeet Singh Sooden, capturés et tenus en otages en Iraq, en compagnie du britannique Norman Kember, depuis des mois sont désormais trois hommes libres.

(applaudissements)

Ils ont été l'objet d'une délicate opération de sauvetage qui a permis de les soustraire sains et saufs de leurs ravisseurs. Cette nouvelle est un immense soulagement pour tous les Canadiens, à commencer par les

proches de Monsieur Loney et Sooden.

J'ai eu la chance de parler de vive voix à ces deux messieurs. Je leur ai exprimé au nom de tous les Canadiens ma grande joie de les savoir enfin libres et en sécurité. C'était pour eux une épreuve extrêmement difficile et pour les citer, ils sont contents d'être en vie.

Bien que nous soyons tous contents et reconnaissants que Monsieur Loney et Monsieur Sooden et Monsieur Kember soient sains et saufs, j'aimerais offrir mes condoléances au nom de tous les Canadiens à la famille de Monsieur Tom Fox. La dépouille de Monsieur Fox, un citoyen américain, était découverte le 10 mars dernier. J'aimerais aussi souligner et témoigner de ma gratitude pour le rôle exceptionnel qu'ont joué nos alliés britanniques et américains dans cette opération de sauvetage réussi.

J'ai parlé plus tôt aujourd'hui avec le premier ministre Tony Blair et j'ai également demandé à l'ambassadeur Wilkins de transmettre au président Bush toute la gratitude des Canadiens pour leurs efforts dans cette opération réussie.

Enfin, et surtout j'aimerais remercier les membres de plusieurs agences et ministères du gouvernement du Canada qui ont travaillé sur ce dossier

délicat avec leurs homologues britanniques, américains et irakiens qui ont fait leur part dans le succès de l'opération. Vous avez fait un excellent travail et Monsieur Loney et Monsieur Sooden m'ont demandé spécifiquement de vous remercier pour l'assistance que vous avez fournie à eux et à leurs familles.

And I'll just repeat that. The confirmation that Canadians James Loney and Harmeet Singh Sooden and British national Norman Kember have been rescued from their captors unharmed is wonderful news. Wonderful news for their families and for all Canadians.

(applause)

I have spoken to these Canadians personally and conveyed on behalf of all of us our happiness at their safe release. As you can imagine, they have been through quite a lot, and to quote them, they are just happy to be alive.

While we're all happy and thankful for the rescue of Mr. Loney, Mr. Sooden and Mr. Kember, I and they would like to reiterate on behalf of all Canadians our condolences to the families of Mr. Tom Fox, the American national, whose body was found on March the 10th.

I'd also like to recognize the outstanding role that was played by our

British and American allies in securing the release of these hostages. In particular, I spoke to Prime Minister Blair this morning and I've asked Ambassador Wilkins to convey our gratitude to President Bush for their efforts in this successful operation.

Finally, and not lastly, I'd like to thank the numerous departments and agencies of the government of Canada who worked with the British and Americans and Iraqis on this sensitive file. You did excellent work and Mr. Loney and Mr. Sooden asked me specifically to thank Canadian officials for the assistance that was provided to themselves and to their families.

(applause)

Now, friends, on a day when the good work of federal government officials is on display for all to see, it's appropriate that we are here today. I requested this gathering because I want to personally convey my support and our new government's support for the Public Service of Canada. As Conservatives, we believe in public service, both in the ideal and in the institution. For while we do as Conservatives celebrate the critical role that the private sector and profit-oriented business plays in the generation of wealth, we also understand that our success as a nation depends on the critical role that must be played by government and especially by a national government that reflects the best practices and the highest ideals

of public service.

We need an effective federal government that is capable of getting things done for ordinary working Canadians and their families, un gouvernement fédéral qui travaille de concert avec les provinces, a federal government that advances and defends Canada's interests on the world stage.

Now, as you all know, I recently had the opportunity to see firsthand the work being performed on our behalf and on behalf of all humanity by Canadian public servants in Afghanistan, by our defence forces combating terror and clearing mines and explosives, par nos agents de développement qui aident et qui enseignent, by our diplomats coordinating these efforts on the ground and around the world.

Now, these are heroic examples of public service under extreme conditions, but they underscore why being a public servant is not merely an honourable profession but also vitally important to the well-being of our country. Effective government requires effective public servants, which is why I am so proud to stand today in front of such a group, for as I look around the room, and as I compare the challenges that I face to those that face, for example, President Karzai, I realize how fortunate we are in this country to possess a modern, multi-faceted public service staffed by professionals, dedicated and highly skilled people such as yourselves.

Year after year, you are called upon to administer and to implement the far-reaching laws and policies of the government of Canada in a fair, impartial, and wise manner and to do so for the benefit of everyone.

Un simple coup d'oeil permet de constater l'énorme diversité de la fonction publique fédérale du Canada ainsi que l'étendue de votre expérience et de votre talent. Vous êtes les douaniers qui gardent nos frontières contre ceux qui mettraient nos collectivités en danger en apportant des armes et des drogues illégales. Vous êtes les infirmières de la santé publique qui travaillent assidûment tous les jours, 24 heures par jour, pour améliorer la santé des collectivités canadiennes souvent dans des endroits éloignés. Vous êtes le personnel chargé de la comptabilité, des finances et de la vérification qui se penchent sur les comptes, les factures et les transactions à chaque jour afin de garantir que les précieux impôts des contribuables sont dépensés judicieusement. Et vous êtes les scientifiques et les inspecteurs agricoles qui protègent l'approvisionnement alimentaire de la nation.

These are all critically important functions and in short, you are just part of a dedicated and principled group of public servants, some 17,000 strong, who serve this country in ways to numerous dimension but ways that are all critical for the importance of Canadians' well-being.

Now, with this in mind, I want to take this opportunity to offer all of you here today and those that you represent back in the workplace the most heartfelt thanks of my government and of a grateful nation for your hard work, your dedication and your professionalism.

However, the excellent public service we see today did not appear just out of thin air and cannot be taken for granted. It was built up over the generations, built up over a long period of time by good policies, good practices and good people and a number of difficult challenges had to be addressed along the way.

For example, historians tell us that early on in our history, when Canada was still in its infancy, all was not well with our fledgling civil service, as it was then called. Political appointments and cronyism had eroded staff morale and damaged the public's perception of the institution. Many suspected it had become corrupt and a haven for patronage.

Conscients que le système ne fonctionnait pas aussi bien qu'il aurait dû, les parlementaires ont effectué un certain nombre de réformes dont la création en 1908 de la Commission du service civil pour superviser et réglementer les nominations et les promotions et s'assurer qu'elles étaient fondées sur le mérite et l'adoption en 1918 de la Loi sur le service civil pour clarifier son mandat et les procédures qu'il devait suivre.

Now, together these two measures, the Civil Service Commission and the Civil Service Act, laid the foundations for the highly professional, non-partisan organization that is today's public service. More recently, Parliament passed the Public Service Modernization Act and the new Public Service Employment Act, both of which have a great deal to say about how authority is delegated within the public service and how we protect the merit principle in hiring and promotion.

Now, while these have all been important steps, we still clearly face challenges today in ensuring the highest standards of integrity, effectiveness and accountability in our public service.

You are all aware, I'm not telling you anything you don't know, you are all aware that the public image of the government of Canada has been damaged in recent years by a number of high profile revelations of waste and abuse, the most prominent of which was the sponsorship scandal. Not surprisingly, Canadians were very upset by these revelations and they have told us – the politicians, that is – they told us that they want the system fixed and I have had no difficulty in telling them that public servants have been no less upset and also want the system fixed.

Let me be clear about this. Neither I nor my government have ever or will ever blame public servants for what happened. There have been some

who have tried to suggest that the responsibility falls on your shoulders.

As a consequence, they responded by imposing an ever-expanding number of rules and regulations to restrict your discretion in the exercise of your functions, to make and to execute, to make it more difficult for you to make and execute the decisions you are paid to undertake.

To my mind, this approach could not be more wrong. You didn't cross the line. Your political masters did. And these are not effective measures.

This government will not be imposing more regulations. If anything, we will look to repeal the ones that inhibit your effectiveness.

What we will do, through legislation and related actions at the top, is to set out the principles and policies necessary to strengthen good governance, to enhance effectiveness, to reward integrity, to give responsibility and to require accountability.

Nous pourrions donc donner aux Canadiens et aux Canadiennes le gouvernement propre et honnête qu'ils attendent et méritent. C'est exactement ce que nous ferons en adoptant très bientôt la Loi fédérale sur l'imputabilité.

That is what we intend to do and we intend to do it by making the Federal Accountability Act, along with a companion action plan, the first priority of

our new government when Parliament returns.

Basically, what we hope to do is replace the so-called culture of entitlement of the previous regime with a new culture of accountability and to change the way business is done in this town forever. This act will deliver positive change for federal public servants. It will improve your lives by improving the fairness of the system. For example, we don't think it's right that political staffers can be parachuted into top jobs, in effect pushing their way in front of you to take the jobs for which you have prepared yourselves for years. That's not fair and we're going to put a stop to it. From now on, promotions will be based on your qualifications and your performance, not on your political connexions.

We will take principles of merit beyond core public service jobs and apply them to the thousands of cabinet and ministerial appointments that are made each year.

C'est pourquoi dès le premier jour, nous avons insisté pour que toutes les nominations soient fondées sur le mérite et c'est pourquoi nous allons officialiser cela en mettant en place une commission des nominations publiques pour établir des critères fondés sur le mérite pour toute nomination à la tête des conseils, des commissions et d'organismes fédéraux et s'assurer à ce que les concours pour les postes soient

largement publicisés et menés de manière équitable.

As you know, we have already taken steps to return diplomatic appointments to non-political professionals wherever possible. Our public appointments commission will not only ensure that qualified people are appointed based on a fair process but that politically appointed positions are eliminated wherever they are unnecessary.

We all know that no organization as large as the federal public service will ever be perfect or devoid of bad actions. Through the Federal Accountability Act, we want to ensure that those public servants who wish to report unethical or illegal behaviour in the future, behaviour they witness, can do so without suffering retribution.

And so the Act will ensure that all Canadians who report government wrongdoing are protected, not just public servants; we'll remove the government's ability to exempt crown corporations and other bodies from the Act; and we will ensure that whistle blowers have access to the courts and that they are provided with adequate legal counsel.

Les éléments de la Loi fédérale sur l'imputabilité que je viens de mentionné auront un impact positif et direct sur la fonction publique mais je sais que plusieurs autres partis sont aussi d'intérêt. Par exemple, le

renforcement des pouvoirs des agents indépendants du Parlement, y compris la vérificatrice générale et le fait que leur nomination soit basée à l'avenir sur un consensus des partis politiques; l'examen et la modification des règles de passation de marché afin que le processus d'approvisionnement du gouvernement soit libre d'ingérence politique; la limite des dons aux partis politiques fédéraux et à leurs candidats de 1 000 dollars par an et l'interdiction des contributions des sociétés et des syndicats.

Measures. It will include measures to strengthen access to information, along with a large number of additional proposals which will be provided to Parliamentarians in the form of a draft bill for their further input and the elimination of the so-called Venetian blind trust. In future, ministers will either have to put their business interests in genuine trust or divest their assets outside of their families.

As I said earlier, our government, my government values both private wealth creation and public service. Both of these are noble callings, but the mixing of the two is not.

We are determined to end the revolving door syndrome that has been so often seen in the past involving ministers' offices, the senior public service and the lobbying industry. We will ban those in these positions from

lobbying the federal government for five years after they leave office. We will clarify and strengthen the Lobbyist Registration Act and the powers of the registrar and we will legislate a clear conflict of interest code.

As you can see, these changes and many others contained in the Act, will bring about some dramatic changes in how federal politics and government work in this country. But for this to work, we will need your help and your active cooperation since you are the experts when it comes to the day-to-day realities and operations of the federal government.

Canada as a country is strong, united, independent and free. That legacy was built in no small part by generations of dedicated and loyal public servants. My government wants federal institutions that are and that are widely perceived to be effective, clean and accountable. This means that I will be relying on you, Canada's federal public servants, to help us provide services at home and leadership around the world.

Mon gouvernement et moi, nous sommes impatients de travailler avec vous en vue d'offrir aux Canadiens et aux Canadiennes l'administration saine, efficace et imputable qu'ils attendent et méritent.

Thank you for your time. Merci beaucoup. Good luck as you go back to work, et à la prochaine.

(applause)

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