



**PM Harper's final press conference in Mexico**

March 31, 2006 - 12h00 - Cancun, Mexico - 25 minutes

MODÉRATEUR: Joël-Denis Bellavance, La Presse.

JOURNALISTE: (Inaudible)

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Premier ministre du Canada): J'ai rencontré, c'est pas la première fois que j'ai rencontré le président Bush, mais je peux dire que j'ai...mon impression est plus forte que jamais. M. Bush est un homme très direct qui peut toujours faire l'emphase sur les actions (inaudible) et j'apprécie ça. Nous sommes pas des mêmes personnalités, mais je pense que nous partageons (inaudible). Pour...je pense que...je peux dire que sur des questions du Canada et sur (inaudible)...

MODÉRATEUR: M. le Premier ministre, juste...si je peux vous interrompre, parce qu'il y a un problème d'audio, pour qu'on puisse établir la ligne. There is no audio. Ok then.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: (Inaudible) veut faire.

MODERATOR: Ok, we can (inaudible).

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ok, est-ce que je dois, je dois répéter ou non? Répéter? Ok. Encore une fois, je dois...maintenant je dois me souvenir. (RIRES) Je peux dire que ce n'est pas la première fois que j'ai rencontré Président Bush, mais mon impression est plus forte que jamais. M. Bush est un homme direct, un homme qui préfère des actions et des résultats, et j'apprécie ces qualités. Pour les préoccupations du Canada, le président nous a écouté, pas seulement à moi, mais aussi aux hommes et femmes d'affaires du Canada qui lui a parlé sur des même sujets. Il a écouté. Je pense qu'il comprend nos préoccupations. Je pense qu'il a beaucoup de sympathie. Dans plusieurs de ces dossiers, le président n'a pas...le président des États-Unis n'a pas le même pouvoir, le même contrôle du parlement qu'un premier ministre a, et ça crée des difficultés de temps en temps, mais je pense que le président est sincère dans son désir de faire du progrès dans nos relations et il comprend que nos relations ont eu des difficultés pendant des années passées et je pense qu'il reconnaît sa partie de la responsabilité pour cette situation.

JOURNALISTE: En sous-question, est-ce que vous sentez que vous avez fait des progrès dans le dossier du bois d'œuvre et dans le dossier du

passport par rapport à ce que la situation était avant votre arrivée et aujourd'hui? Sentez-vous que vous avez fait du progrès?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ok, je pense que ces deux dossiers sont très différents. Sur le dossier de passeports, le Congrès a pris une décision. Il a pris une décision pendant la période de l'ancien gouvernement, et nous sommes...nous sommes maintenant, nous sommes "stuck" avec cette décision. Évidemment nous avons exprimé encore, les hommes et les femmes d'affaires et moi, nous avons exprimé nos préoccupations très sévères que ça va effectuer le mouvement des marchandises, des voyageurs. Au même temps, le président a une responsabilité d'enforcer la loi et de trouver des solutions. Il comprend le problème et comme j'ai dit, nous donnons des...nous avons donné un mandat au ministre Day et le secrétaire Chertoff de trouver une résolution aussi vite que possible. Ce n'est pas une chose facile, mais c'est une chose importante, et je pense que si le Canada exprime son désir toujours de coopérer avec les...avec les préoccupations de sécurité des États-Unis, avec cette attitude, si nous avons de flexibilité au part des Américains plus tard, nous pouvons créer cette flexibilité si c'est nécessaire à l'avenir avec l'attitude correct.

Pour le dossier du bois d'œuvre, vous avez tous entendu les mots, les

propos du président. Il a exprimé publiquement et privément à moi et mes officiers, nos hommes et femmes d'affaires son désir, sa détermination en effet de trouver une résolution. En même temps, je comprends que c'est un dossier très difficile. Je ne veux pas, avec l'histoire de ce dossier, je ne veux pas assumer que nous allons trouver une telle solution. J'ai rappelé au Président Bush que nous avons encore nos options légales. Nous avons encore notre...nos plans d'appuyer notre industrie si ce dispute continue. Et je peux que...je dis que pendant les plusieurs prochaines semaines, prochaine semaine, nous avons demandé à nos officiers de faire des notes sur des options et de voir si nous sommes vraiment, vraiment prêt d'avoir des négociations qui peuvent réussir.

MODERATOR: Paul Wells, MacLeans.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, the Security and Prosperity Partnership took some progress today and yesterday towards becoming a more permanent structure, and President Fox spoke at some length about institutionalizing its mechanisms. You've got a competitive (inaudible) council, you will have embryonic secretariats in the three countries, and annual meetings, and it's all getting very fancy. There's a classic problem: how do countries cooperate more closely without producing heavy bureaucracies constraining the liberty of legislatures and of businesses? Is that a

concern for you and the other leaders and how do you balance a closer cooperation with a need for liberty of manoeuvre?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, let me just...first of all let me just say, Paul, that you're right. President Fox primarily has proposed some degree of institutionalization of this. I've said that Canada is interested in that. I think the US is also interested, maybe a little more reluctant. Both of us want to make sure that any kind of structure we create is helpful and does not become a bureaucracy. But the dynamic in North America is this: it's not a case of the leaders of the country seeking to impose this on the society, on the economy. What it is a case of is the business community in particular increasingly wanting us to cooperate more fully and to address a lot of – what can I say? – just structural inadequacies in NAFTA. NAFTA is nothing more than a baseline trade treaty, but it has provoked an increasing integration of our economies at all levels, and I do believe we have to have some institutional structures to reflect that and to deal with those complexities and to make sure that we're addressing the growing concerns of our business communities as that goes forward. My...what I expressed to both presidents was that, you know, I certainly don't see this impacting on national sovereignty, but I think it's incumbent upon all of us as leaders, as executive leaders to

impress upon our legislatures, to impress upon the political world the fact that we are integrated, that policies of isolation have no place, are entirely counterproductive, and we've got to begin to think continentally when we think about our economy, because for most aspects of our economy, we are now truly continental in nature.

MODERATOR: Jacques Bourbeau, Global.

REPORTER: Yes Sir, President Bush was pretty categorical about it. He's going to proceed, or the Americans are going to proceed with their requirement that there be more stringent documents that are required to cross the borders. I'm wondering what our game plan is, what we're going to be requiring Canadians or providing to Canadians so that they will be able to cross the border into the US?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all in terms of President Bush's determination, I go back. This is a law passed by Congress some time ago. It's going to require travel to and from the United States, not just to but from the United States to have basically passport-like documents. We have...I know our government and our predecessors have been engaged on two fronts. One has been a series of efforts through Congress, through governors and cross-border officials to try and emphasize the difficulties that we think that's going to create, but I think

what we've got to start to put emphasis on is how we're actually going to resolve this problem, because we're running out of time. It is an American law. I don't think there's any prospect of Congress changing that law between now and the deadlines; at least certainly not unless we've all done our absolute best steps to comply. There have been discussions on compliance measures. President Bush expressed to me his concern that on his own side there has not been clarity about what will ultimately be required to resolve this situation. He's promised to give us that clarity and that's why we've made sure that, you know, as close to the top as we can we've delegated our respective minister and secretary to get on top of this and get going with a resolution.

REPORTER: (Inaudible)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: You know, I think you're better to put that question to officials. Look, we're looking for...and I know what the President's looking for, a passport-like document that's, you know, up to date with the electronic age. What we both need, I think what we ultimately need is a border where, you know, obviously for American concerns and even our own concerns, it's going to be more difficult for security threats to pass over the border, but at the same time, if we do this right, actually easier, easier than it's been in the past for businesses and

for travellers and for others to go across the border. So that's the ultimate objective, but we're all very concerned. I won't kid you. We're very concerned at how short the timelines are here.

MODÉRATEUR: Yves Malo, TVA.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, est-ce qu'il faut comprendre qu'à compter du premier janvier prochain, les Canadiens doivent s'attendre à avoir plus de difficulté à passer la frontière s'ils ont pas un passeport?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je peux dire seulement que les lois du Congrès veulent dire que nous devons avoir un nouveau document, un passeport ou un passeport électronique, un équivalent d'un passeport pour assurer le respect des lois du Congrès. Évidemment comme je viens de dire en anglais, nous sommes très préoccupés des difficultés des...de la proximité du date limite de ce projet. C'est la raison pour laquelle j'ai demandé au ministre Day et le président a demandé au secrétaire Chertoff de trouver une solution aussi vite que possible. Évidemment ça s'est passé pendant l'ancien régime canadien. Peut-être nous aurions dû reconnaître ces problèmes avant ce moment. Mais nous avons cette situation maintenant. C'est mon avis que le Congrès ne va pas changer son idée ici jusqu'à ce date limite, et nous devons trouver, nous devons travailler aussi vite que possible pour trouver une solution.



JOURNALISTE: Et pour harmoniser les politiques, est-ce que vous allez demander la même chose aux Américains qui veulent entrer au Canada?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Non, ce n'est pas mon intention de...ce n'est pas mon intention ou l'intention de mon gouvernement de créer d'autres barrières. Mais je peux comprendre la perspective des Américains que si nous pouvons développer un nouveau document électronique, un document moderne, nous pouvons peut-être respecter les besoins de la sécurité des États-Unis et au même temps avoir un système où nos transactions sont plus faciles, mais évidemment, la difficulté est la date limite.

MODERATOR: Susan Delacourt, Toronto Star.

REPORTER: I'm wondering if you can just elaborate on...I'm right here.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: You're sitting down.

REPORTER: It doesn't make much difference when I stand up.

(LAUGHTER)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well all notice you, Susan, that's the difference.

REPORTER: I'm wondering, when President Bush says that you're direct with him and that you were straightforward, can you give us a couple of

examples of when you were? And...well, I'll wait and ask a follow-up.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, the answer's no. I don't discuss private conversations, but some of you...some of you may know that I... who know me well may know that sometimes I express myself, believe it or not only directly, but colourfully and not suited for public television, so we made our points very clearly on several different issues.

REPORTER: Can I take that as confirmation that you swore at President Bush? (LAUGHTER) But the follow-up is...(LAUGHING) You said before you came here that you were going to focus on two or three things in the end. What were those two or three things?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Two or three things I focused on...I mean, the big picture items were obviously the things you've talked about, you've asked about – softwood lumber and the passport, the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative as they call it in the United States, the passport issue. We talked about a number of other, you know, mutual problems, but those were the two we spent most of our time on. I tried to also spend some time on things we could do together and common ground we share. We talked about our shared interests in a lot of the global issues, particularly where we're working collaboratively in Afghanistan, in Sudan, where we do want to make some progress in the

next few months, and in Haiti. We also talked about the desire of both of our countries to tackle not just energy security but the challenges that the energy industry is presenting to our environment. As I think I've told some of you earlier, we've inherited a situation where the previous government left us with bold and expensive environmental plans, but not much in the way of methods to achieve them, so we think the United States share some of these concerns. We're in an integrated energy market, so we talked about some significant initiatives in that area that we're going to work on over the next few months. So those, I say, were the big areas of concentration, but we had quite a bit of time, we discussed quite a few things.

MODERATOR: Last question, Brian (inaudible), Globe and Mail.

REPORTER: Hi. I'm just wondering, is it your sense, Mr. Prime Minister, that the fight against the ID card is pretty much dead and buried, because there's some folks that think that business in the United States is only just sort of waking up to this, particularly business in the northern half of the country, and that if you sort of piggy-backed onto that lobby, that there might be some way to sort of ameliorate the concerns?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you know, I'm not going to discourage our business community or our provincial governments or our

own officials from continuing to express concerns about this. But that said, you know, as I say, the president and ourselves, we face a time limit, a legal time limit set by Congress. I don't see any obvious prospect that that legal requirement is going to change, whether we like it or not or even whether American business ultimately doesn't like it. And while we can... we can continue actions in some elements of our society and economy, can continue actions to make sure we express our concerns and that those concerns are raised in the United States as well. I think at this point we do ourselves a disservice by suggesting anything other than that we understand the security concerns behind these requirements, and that we are anxious to work quickly and productively to resolve them. I don't want to send the wrong message in this,. As I said earlier in French, I think if the Americans are ultimately to find maybe even for domestic reasons they need more flexibility, that willingness will only come about if we've made all of our best efforts to comply with the situation we find ourselves in.

REPORTER: Ok, and just to follow up really quickly on that, and I'm wondering if you can, during your appearance earlier, I think you said that there could be economic consequences for Canadians if we don't meet the deadline, and I'm not sure Canadians understand what they would be,

and I wonder if you could elaborate for us.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I mean I think we all know what the consequences are, and that's just a lot more difficulty getting across the border, people finding they don't have the documentation, whether it's for business or whether it's for ordinary travel, that they're going to find they do in fact need in the future, and I'm not sure Canadians are fully aware that these requirements are coming. That said, as I say, I accept the President's optimistic view that if we apply ourselves to this, we might actually find a modern system of identification that not only allows us to address the security concerns but also makes...particularly commerce a lot easier than it's been in the past, and you know, as I say, our Canadian business leaders expressed the same concerns you're expressing. They also expressed some innovative ways we could address it that could be very helpful in the long term and actually make the situation better.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, merci.

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