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SOURCE: PCO

DATE: JANUARY 26, 2007

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE: 2601DOC1

LOCATION/LIEU: PARLIAMENT HILL

TIME/ HEURE: 12:36

LENGTH/DURÉE: 19 MINUTES

PRIME MINISTER'S SCRUM

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DIMITRI SOUDAS (Prime Minister's Press Secretary):
We'll be starting shortly, just to lower the (inaudible) and we'll start with Andrew Mayeda from CanWest. In just a couple of seconds. So Andrew Mayeda, CanWest.

REPORTER: Yes, Prime Minister, just wondering how you think the...your position on the Arar situation will affect relations with the United States sort of broadly speaking?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, obviously this government has made a point of trying to establish better relations with the United States government, and I think we've seen the fruits of that. At the same time, this government reserves the right to disagree with the Americans when we have something substantial to disagree about. And we're very clear, we don't believe that Mr. Arar should be on any watch list. We've articulated that at all levels of the government up to and including the President, and we will continue to do so.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Yvan Cloutier, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: M. le Premier ministre, comment interpréter l'attitude des Américains autrement qu'en croyant qu'ils agissent de mauvaise foi parce qu'ils veulent éviter justement de devoir payer comme le gouvernement canadien le fait en ce moment.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ce n'est pas pour moi d'expliquer la position des autres. Évidemment nous sommes en désaccord avec la position du gouvernement des États-Unis. Nous allons continuer à exprimer notre position et notre désaccord. En même temps, M. Arar, comme

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vous savez, il y a des recours juridiques aux États-Unis, et je pense que ces poursuites vont continuer.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Jacques Bourbeau, Global Television.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, when it comes to the information sharing agreements that we have with American security agencies, does the Arar case raise questions about whether we can trust the Americans to use that information in a responsible, appropriate manner?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, obviously it has raised concerns, but to be fair to the Americans, we're issuing an official government apology today because our own government, meaning the government of Canada, the previous government, did not use the information appropriately itself. All I can tell you is that in this case in terms of our ongoing disagreement with the United States, it's not a matter of not sharing information. We believe information has been fully shared on both sides. We simply have reached a disagreement about the significance of the information in front of us. We're obviously acting principally on the considered opinion of a Canadian judicial enquiry, which went to great lengths to examine the veracity of this information. Our own security has done the same, and we think the evidence is absolutely clear and the United States should, in good faith, remove Mr. Arar from their list.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Emmanuelle Latraverse, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, vous avez exprimé, donc, votre désaccord avec la position américaine dans ce dossier-là. Face au fait que les Américains refusent de bouger, avec le fait que vous venez de dire que

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le gouvernement du Canada va appuyer M. Arar, est-ce que le gouvernement du Canada va être prêt à l'appuyer dans ses démarches juridiques aux États-Unis dans ses poursuites là-bas justement pour que justice soit faite de l'autre côté de la frontière?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je pense que des recours juridiques sont pour des personnes; ce n'est pas pour le gouvernement. Le gouvernement va continuer à faire la pression par des façons traditionnelles.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We'll continue with Randall Palmer, Randall Palmer with Reuters. Randall Palmer, Reuters.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, if I could switch topics to campaign promises, you promised to work with the provinces to...on a health...patient wait times guarantee, and also to give Saskatchewan, allow Saskatchewan to keep 100 percent of its revenues. On healthcare you've got a few pilot projects, but no broad agreement. On the other, you seem to be willing to consider at least something less than 100 percent. Are campaign promises something that are somehow less important than promises made other times, or...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: No, these are important promises that we stand by. The government has always been clear: wait times are not going to be fixed overnight. It took us a very long time, frankly the last 13 years, to develop the wait time problem that we have in this country. What Canadians learned from the previous government is there is no such thing as a quick fix for a generation. This government is committed to making progress and bringing in wait times guarantee. We have implemented a number of pilot projects of our own. We have seen a number of provinces, most notably but not exclusively the province of Quebec move forward very

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aggressively on wait times, and we will continue to make progress on that. We acknowledge that we have not yet...we have not yet fully achieved the end object. I say, it's not going to be quick, but we're making progress and we will make more progress and we will make some additional progress in the short term. On the question of a new equalization formula, you know full well the government expressed its preferences in a campaign. We spent the last year as part of our efforts to come up with a fiscal balance package. We spent our last year listening to the provinces on this. They expressed different opinions. The government will make its final position on this known in the next budget.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Vincent Marissal, La Presse.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, sur l'Afghanistan, tous les partis d'opposition sont unis sur une chose: ils demandent des clarifications éventuellement, même devant le comité des Affaires étrangères, sur la mission canadienne. Selon vous, est-ce que cette mission a besoin d'être qualifiée ou si elle est parfaitement comprise et parfaitement claire?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je pense que nos agents de développement, nos diplomates et surtout nos troupes, nos militaires, ils sont clairs. Ils sont clairs de leur mission. C'est l'opposition qui n'est pas claire. Je suis heureux de voir qu'hier que la nouvelle position de M. Duceppe, la nouvelle, nouvelle position, qu'il est pour la mission en Afghanistan. C'est important que nous respectons nos engagements envers les Nations Unies et aussi la population civile, et le gouvernement de l'Afghanistan. On a besoin de plus de développement. Nous sommes tous d'accord. En même temps, les Afghans dans le Sud de l'Afghanistan sont clairs aussi: on a besoin de la sécurité pour avoir le développement et le gouvernement va procéder sur ces deux chemins.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Roger Smith, CTV.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, I think we'd all like to know the amount of the settlement if you'd like to share it with us...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Sure.

REPORTER: But that's a way of sneaking in an extra question, because what I'd like to ask you is we heard Ambassador Wilkins give Mr. Day a slap on the wrist this week. The Americans are now saying they have information that Canada has not seen. What is your answer to Mr. Wilkins and where will you take it from here with Washington?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ok, first of all...well, let me answer the latter question first. I answered it in my statement, but I'll say it again. We believe, we think the evidence is clear that Mr. Arar has been treated unjustly. He should not be on a watch list. I personally believe that if there was evidence suggesting that any of these suspicions against Mr. Arar were justified, that that case would have been made a long time before today, and I can tell you it certainly in our judgement has not been made. We will continue to express our view. I'm aware of the ambassador's comments, but Mr. Day, Minister Day is speaking for the government of Canada. He's speaking for me and he's speaking for, I think, the vast majority of Canadians. And we will continue to express that view at all levels of the government as we have, as you know in a number of other cases with a number of other foreign governments. In the issue of the settlement amount, most of the details of the settlement are confidential due to agreement, but the settlement amount is contained, I think, in the press release. It's \$10.5 million plus legal fees. I know to some Canadians that will sound like an awful lot of money, but I can tell you that the reality is given the findings of the O'Connor Commission and

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the unjust treatment that Mr. Arar received, that that figure is within this government's realistic assessment of what Mr. Arar would have won in a lawsuit. And that is the basis on which we concluded this settlement.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Peter O'Neil, Peter O'Neil, Vancouver Sun. Peter O'Neil, Vancouver Sun.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, what's your reaction to the Pickton trial and in particular the position of some MPs on the standing committee that our prostitution laws actually leads to violence against street prostitutes and perhaps we should look at decriminalization?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, in terms of the events that are on trial in the Pickton trial, I think all Canadians experienced just unbelievable horror and outrage at the acts that have been committed. And I don't think there's a person in this country cannot react with extreme revulsion to the events that are on trial there. Obviously, that said, I'm not going to comment on the allegations themselves. A person is on trial, they're, you're know, entitled to due process of law. But we're obviously all concerned about that. In terms of legalization of prostitution, I can just tell you that obviously that's something that this government doesn't favour. I think that's a separate debate, and I hope that ultimately the authorities are successful at prosecuting and getting convictions for the individual who was responsible, but obviously we will await the outcome of this trial and other investigations.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Martin Stringer, CPAC.

REPORTER: There's now an official apology on the table from the government of Canada. There's also an amount of compensation...

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I should say, it's not on the table, to correct the preamble. This is part of a negotiated settlement. The settlement is final.

REPORTER: Ok. That being said, and that being the outstanding matter, Mr. Arar – and he's going to speak to us in a little while – has always said the third element was always finding those who were responsible within the RCMP. There's never been any disciplinary action. People have retired, people have been promoted. There's never been any outcome to the leaks which occurred after he returned. What's you're feeling about that and what can you do about that?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, obviously I would share all Canadians' concern about that. All I can tell you is this government has requested there be accountability. Accountability, however, obviously does have to operate within the norms and within the practices of the rules of the public service, and many of these events, as you know, occurred some time ago, long before our government took office. To the extent we can enforce accountability, we will. Obviously our...what we can do more meaningfully is try and make sure that these things don't occur in the future.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Beatrice Politi, CHUM television.

REPORTER: You've said that Canada will stand up for Mr. Arar, that that's what Minister Day was doing the other day. We've heard what Ambassador Wilkins thinks about it, but I want to be clear. What exactly does it mean that Canada is going to stand up for them? What else are you going to do? What actions can you take?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, Canada will, as in all of these things, we will continue to express our concerns at all levels of the

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US government. We will continue to cooperate on security and share information and provide the evidence we can provide. As you know, this is also subject to some legal action in the United States, so it will have its own course to some degree. But we will not drop the issue. Suggestion from, I think, an official of the United States government that we should drop the matter; we will not drop the matter. Just as I've said in the past with some other countries in some other cases, we will not drop the matter just because there's a disagreement and they don't like hearing our position. We think the position here is based on solid evidence, and frankly as I say, the finding of a national judicial enquiry, and it deserves to be taken seriously.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: P.R. Judice, Bloomberg.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, in the notice of intent that you published along with the clean air act in October, you said that you planned to outline short-term targets for final emitters by spring of 2007, if I'm not mistaken. Can you tell us if that is still your intention, and if those will include specific targets for industry such as oil and gas?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I can tell you that that is still our target, still our objective, to announce short-term targets in the framework of a compliance agenda this spring. And we're at this point on track to do that.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: David Batas...

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Thank you for reading the notice of intent, by the way.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: David Batastelli, OMNI Television.

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REPORTER: Prime Minister, does today's announcement open the door for apologies or compensation for Mr. El-Maati, Mr. Almalki and Mr. Nureddin? Are they deserving of similar remedies?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Those cases are being referred to a separate enquiry, and obviously a judgement on that matter would only occur once that enquiry has reported.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Joël-Denis Bellavance, La Presse.

JOURNALISTE: Oui, M. Harper, c'était sur la même question. Qu'est-ce qui va arriver aux trois autres individus qui font l'objet d'une enquête actuellement par un autre juge? Est-ce qu'ils auraient droit aussi à une compensation financière au même titre que M. Arar?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Ces cas vont être aussi sous une enquête, une enquête un peu moins formelle que l'enquête du commissaire O'Connor. C'est sa recommandation pour un genre différent de l'enquête, mais ça va commencer et nous suivrons des conclusions de cette enquête.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Mike Blanchfield, CanWest.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, what did you think of Senator Patrick Leahy's recent remarks on the Arar affair, and are you...do you support his desire to learn more about this and call US officials to account, and would your government play any role in that?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I...you know, I... I guess I was told about the remarks broadly. I didn't see specifically what the Senator said. You know, obviously to the extent he expressed agreement with the government of Canada, we're encouraged by that, but as I say, fundamentally I'll let the debate in the United States go on. We're here to

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express the position of the government of Canada, and we don't intend to either change or drop our position.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Patrice Roy, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: M. Harper, vous, votre gouvernement négocie un gros contrat avec Boeing actuellement. Est-ce que vous êtes prêt à vous engagez maintenant à ne pas signer si le Québec ne reçoit pas une part importante? Certains ont parlé de 40 pour cent minimalement. Est-ce que dans votre esprit le Québec doit recevoir une grosse part du contrat?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Il y a trois choses. Premièrement, pour ces contrats notre objectif est de rebâtir le militaire et Forces canadiennes. C'est notre objectif. Deuxièmement, c'est important que notre objectif, quand nous dépensons de l'argent est de recevoir et de dépenser des dollars des contribuables de la meilleure façon pour...et de recevoir les résultats pour ces dollars. Troisièmement, j'ai dit à mon cabinet que nous voulons signer un contrat développé sur le mérite. Ça va réfléchir la nécessité d'avoir les bénéfices au Canada, et évidemment ces bénéfices vont être différents dans chaque contrat. Ça dépend de la compagnie contractée et de ses relations avec des autres dans l'industrie, mais ce gouvernement et nos ministres n'ont aucune intention d'ingérer dans la distribution régionale des contrats.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: And we have time for one last question, Steve Marr, Chronicle-Herald.

REPORTER: Mr. Harper, a bit more than a year ago in your victory speech, you promised to give Atlantic Canada more control over its resources. I wonder if there's anything you can point to in the last year that you've done toward that end?

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, as you know, this government fought hard for the Atlantic Accords. They were signed and adopted. We've retained them and this government will be moving forward with our proposals for the fiscal imbalance in the upcoming budget, which we expect will have benefits to Atlantic Canadians and other Canadians. There are also a number of other smaller issues that have been under discussion with various Atlantic provinces.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much everybody.
Merci.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je peux...peut-être je peux ajouter pour le montant, parce qu'on a demandé en français et je n'a pas occasion de répondre. Le montant est 10,5 millions \$ pour M. Arar, plus de frais légaux. J'apprécie que pour beaucoup de Canadiens, c'est un, à leur avis, j'assume que ça sera un grand montant. Je peux dire seulement que ce chiffre est arrivé à cause de notre analyse des...notre analyse de la possibilité de M. Arar dans les cours. Il a des poursuites juridiques contre le gouvernement du Canada, et il était clair selon le commissaire O'Connor que le gouvernement du Canada, l'ancien gouvernement est responsable et c'est notre évaluation du montant que M. O'Connor [sic] gagnerait dans une poursuite. Thanks.

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