



## Harper goes to Quebec to announce green fund



**Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Quebec Premier Jean Charest as they announce a new federal government environmental program Monday, Feb. 12, 2007 in Sherbrooke, Que. (CP / Paul Chiasson)**

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Prime Minister Stephen Harper used the home constituency of Quebec Premier Jean Charest to announce a \$1.5-billion fund to help provinces fight pollution and greenhouse gases.

Harper said Monday in Sherbrooke that Quebec's share of the new Canada Eco-Trust and Clean Air Fund will be about \$350 million.

The prime minister said delivery of the money will depend on the upcoming budget being passed. He added that it will be "part of the actions taken on the fiscal imbalance."

No details were announced on what share of the money other provinces and territories will be receiving.

Liberal environment critic David McGuinty attacked the announcement.

"Once again this government is re-announcing funding that was already in place, and hoping that Canadians will give them credit for Liberal programs," he said in a news release.

"If the government were actually serious about more than just buying votes they would never have cut the funding for federal-provincial climate change in the first place."

While the Conservatives might be trying to curry favour with Quebec voters for themselves, some think Harper might be trying to help out Charest too.

The premier is believed to be ready to call an election for March 26. Charest is a former Progressive Conservative leader and federalist ally of Harper.

Asked how the announcement might fit into that timetable, Harper said to laughter, "I wouldn't know anything about that."

Charest added: "Well thank you for answering for me."

When asked how far he's willing to go to help Charest win the next provincial election, Harper said it's "strictly up to the people of Quebec to decide who they want to pick as their government."

"You not going to be surprised to hear that as the Prime Minister of Canada, I think it's helpful to Quebec and to the entire country if our efforts are focused on working together and dealing with the real challenges that confront the country, rather than spending all our energies fighting over a referendum."

"But obviously the people of Quebec have to make those decisions."

Despite the presumed boost for the Charest government, Bloc Quebecois Leader Gilles Duceppe welcomed the money. "It means a minority government is maybe more sensible on questions like this."

Harper won 10 seats in Quebec in the 2006 federal election. However, the Conservatives would like to make gains in places like Sherbrooke, which sent Charest to Ottawa as a federal Tory. Currently it's a Bloc riding.

While Harper has said he doesn't want an election, his party is paying for negative ads targeting Liberal Leader Stephane Dion. New ads in French are to start Tuesday in Quebec.

The prime minister also delivered a speech in Trois Rivieres on Monday night. He praised his government's record after one year in office.

The policy of open federalism followed by his government has paid off for Quebec, he said.

Trois Rivieres was a Progressive Conservative riding in the Brian Mulroney years, but the Bloc has held it since 1993. The Conservatives finished second there in 2006.

### Fund details

Harper said the government has already had preliminary discussions with the provinces about the fund.

"I believe that the majority of provinces have major projects planned, and all governments are trying to establish major projects to reduce GHGs (greenhouse gas emissions)," he said.

"I have spoken with several premiers already about the framework over the past week, and my officials are in the process of speaking with the rest. We're confident that every province and territory will have major projects that will qualify."

As for Ottawa's plan to fight climate change, Harper said the Conservative government will be announcing specific emissions reduction targets for the short term "in the coming weeks."

"At the present time we're discussing our plan to regulate industry with the private sector, and we'll be in a position to announce those targets," he said.

Quebec has long been asking Ottawa for \$328 million to implement environmental programs, but the demand wasn't met under Paul Martin's former Liberal government.

Harper's Tories, until now, also rebuffed Charest's call for the money.

"Our position has been that we've funded the (Quebec) government through transfers, including major transfers through a transportation trust that we established last year," explained the prime minister. It was a "difference of opinion" between the Ottawa and Quebec that Harper said was resolved with the new fund.

Charest said to be fair to Martin's Liberal government, the "previous situation was in flux.

"There was no national program. This is now a national program -- everyone is treated equally and fairly," he said.

### **Kyoto**

Kyoto calls for greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced to about five per cent below 1990 levels by 2012, but each signatory country has its own reduction target. Canada's is six per cent.

Despite the Conservative government's repeated assertion that it would be impossible for Canada to meet that target, Quebec has pledged to do so.

When asked why Quebec could hope to reach the targets when Ottawa says the rest of the country cannot, Charest said Quebec has a "real advantage" in that it chose to invest years ago in "clean and renewable" hydro electricity.

"We produce, on a per capita basis, half of the greenhouse gases than the Canadian average, so of course that advantage works for us," said Charest.

The premier also said Quebec will become the biggest producer of wind power in North America by 2015.

"So we can meet the objectives of Kyoto. It's not going to be easy, by they way, we don't underestimate the effort it will require on our side for a second. But we're committed to it and we're going to move ahead."

Quebec Environment Minister Claude Bechard said in the past that the province could reach the targets by increasing public transit use and reducing gas consumption.

The province unveiled its climate change plan in June 2006, vowing to reduce its emissions by 10 million tonnes of CO2 equivalents by 2012.

In a news release, the Prime Minister's Office says the Government of Quebec will use the Canada EcoTrust funding to move forward on several provincial projects which may include:

- Investments to improve access to new technologies for the trucking sector;
- A program to develop renewable energy sources in rural regions;
- A pilot plant for production of cellulosic ethanol;
- Promotion of geothermal heat pumps in the residential sector;
- Support for technological research and innovation for the reduction and sequestration of greenhouse gases;
- Support for the capture of biogas from landfill sites; and
- Support for waste treatment and energy recovery from agricultural biomass.

Harper said Monday's announcement is just one example of several initiatives the federal government and Quebec have worked on closely together on, pointing to others such as the government's approval of the province to play a role in UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), the consultation with Quebec to resolve the softwood lumber dispute, and several infrastructure announcements.

*With a report from CTV's Rosemary Thompson*