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An Important Message from Michael on the Environment

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Ottawa: I felt that it is important to write a special message on an issue that is important to me and to all of us – the air we breathe.

Recently, I was reading a stack of press clippings on the environment and the coverage was not very positive. Critics were quoted as saying that the government's environmental plan "could just ...be a great waste of money," and that it lacked specifics and was "weak, vague, and pathetic." The articles were not about any environmental plan we released, nor were they from 2006. They were from 1990 written in response to the release of Prime Minister Mulroney's Green Plan.

Prime Minister Mulroney received a lot of criticism and not a lot of credit for his Green Plan, yet he did more for the environment in this country than any other Prime Minister before him. This past spring he was awarded the title of Canada's Greenest Prime Minister by some of the very groups that had criticised him in the past.

Like the early days of Mulroney's Green Plan, there has been a lot of misinformation about our plans to clean up the environment. I'd like to take this opportunity to correct some misconceptions and explain our plan to you. Our Clean Air Act is a sweeping and comprehensive piece of legislation that takes a fundamentally different - and better – approach from that of the previous government.

The first difference: We are taking action to reduce both air pollution and greenhouse gases. The previous government's plan focused only on greenhouse gases and completely ignored air pollution ... or what we more often call smog. As you all know smog is one of the biggest threats to our environment and it is simply unacceptable that we have to tell citizens not to go outside on a summer afternoon because of the poor air quality. Any credible environmental agenda must address this issue and that is exactly what the Clean Air Act will do.

The second difference: We will put in place mandatory regulation requiring mandatory reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gases. The previous government's plan was based on voluntary compliance and voluntary reductions to greenhouse gases and greenhouse gases only. Our plan is mandatory; theirs was voluntary.

The third difference: Our plan will regulate all sectors of the Canadian economy. The auto sector, manufacturing, the chemical industry, the oil and gas sector - all sectors will face tough, mandatory regulations – even weed-whackers, leaf-blowers and lawnmowers!

The regulation of things like lawnmowers may seem trivial, but the fact is that your lawnmower can produce as many smog-causing pollutants in one hour as a car on the 5-hour drive from Toronto to Ottawa.

Let me tell you a few other things about our environmental plan.

Attention has been focused on our long term target to reduce greenhouse gases between 45-65% by 2050. However, our plan is not simply about long-term targets in 2050; it also includes short term targets to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gases coming into force by the end of 2010, in 4 short years. Companies will have to move quickly to make the necessary changes to ensure full compliance. Companies that fail to comply with these new regulations and targets will pay fines into an environmental damages fund and used to invest in research and development for environmental technologies.

I also want to clarify our Government's position on the Kyoto Protocol. We remain as signatories, we believe in the science of climate change, we are committed to the objectives of the protocol, and we will work constructively to expand its global reach.

Under the previous government emissions rose – 35 % above Canada's Kyoto targets. Now, our government is faced with the impossible task of reducing current emissions by 35% by 2012. This is not possible without putting the Canadian economy into tailspin. We refuse to use billions of taxpayer dollars to purchase international climate change credits as a means of meeting that target or to spend billions of taxpayer dollars to subsidize industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and smog. Instead, we will require industry to bear the cost of compliance, not Canadian taxpayers.

Our Government's approach will achieve real results for our environment and for Canadians. I firmly believe that our individual actions are the constituent parts of progress. Together we will build a stronger, cleaner, more prosperous Canada.

I always welcome your comments or questions Michael Chong, M.P. Wellington-Halton Hills 1-866-878-5556 chongm@parl.gc.ca