

## Canada to seek continent-wide approach to climate change



The “environment is now an economic portfolio,” newly-appointed Environment Minister Jim Prentice said Thursday, explaining why energy security, the economy and environment had been put in one file. A cabinet committee is to be chaired by former environment minister and newly-minted Transport Minister John Baird, pictured in May 2008.(AFP/File/Toru Yamanaka)

By Michel Comte

OTTAWA (AFP) - Canada’s Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Thursday called for a North America-wide plan to curb CO2 emissions linked to warming, while jumbling his new cabinet’s economic and environmental duties.

“We want to work with the Americans on regulatory systems relating to greenhouse gas emissions in order that we can work toward the same goals,” said Harper.

“We want to work with the next US administration and we hope that there will be a continental approach in the future,” he told reporters.

Earlier, Harper appointed his former industry minister Jim Prentice as environment minister in a post-election cabinet shuffle.

In his first scrum with reporters as environment minister, Prentice said the “environment is now an economic portfolio,” explaining that his new responsibility is to

balance energy security, the economy and environment.

“One of the most difficult challenges that we face is the responsibility to be stewards of the environment and at the same time protect our economy and advance our economic interests,” he said.

Climate change has been a contentious issue in US politics since President George W. Bush took office nearly eight years ago. Bush remains the only leader of a major industrialized nation to have refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the most far-reaching international treaty on climate change.

Unlike Bush, presidential hopeful Republican John McCain has demanded binding cuts to emissions of warming gases while his rival Democrat Barack Obama has said he wants to invest 150 billion dollars over 10 years in alternative energy like wind and solar power.

Harper’s Conservatives meanwhile were harshly criticized for failing to meet Canada’s obligations under the Kyoto Protocol to cut greenhouse gas emissions six percent below 1990 levels by 2012.

Former environment minister John Baird had maintained that the target negotiated by a previous Liberal administration was unattainable, and unveiled a plan last year to instead cut emissions by 20 percent based on 2006 levels, by 2020.

In the recent October 14 election, the Conservatives stuck to this plan and trounced the opposition Liberals who campaigned for the introduction of a carbon tax.

Prentice, as part of his ministerial duties, also joined a cabinet committee on the environment and energy security with several key economic ministers, such as National Revenue Minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn and Natural Resources Minister Lisa Raitt.

The committee is to be chaired by Baird, now transport minister.

A self-described conservationist and passionate outdoorsman, Prentice said the committee’s task of safeguarding the environment and cutting Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions, among others, was “rendered more difficult by an economic slowdown.”

“Dealing with the important issues of energy security, the environment, and the economy are, I think, some of the most challenging issues that we face,” he said.

“I think that, as more and more countries are coming to realize, we cannot separate environmental and economic policy,” said Harper. “We have to consider these things in balance.”

“We have, obviously, an important environmental program, but we also have important decisions to be taken on various aspects of our policies like the framework for greenhouse gas emissions that have enormous consequences for progress and economic growth.”

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