

Speech by Jim Harris, Leader of the Green Party of Canada

Defending our Canada

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Check against delivery

Speaking to the esteemed Empire Club and Canadian Club is a rite of political passage. There is a long tradition of critical announcements that shape Canadian policy, shape Canada and shape our future.

The Green Party is working to help shape a sustainable future. We are working to defend our Canada.

The front page of yesterday's *Globe and Mail* had the Green Party at 6%. And while some people may not think that 6% is a big number, the NDP with 6.9% of the vote in 1993 won 9 seats. We are on track in this election to elect our first Green MP and change forever Canadian politics.

But the 6% of Canadians, the 800,000 Canadians who have already decided to vote for the Green Party is just the tip of the iceberg. Because in no election in Canada's history have we been so disillusioned, disenchanted with all the old-line traditional parties. Research from Decima this past summer showed that 34% of all Canadians are now considering voting for the Green Party in addition to those who have already made up their minds. And when you do the math that means another 4.6 million actual voters are currently thinking about voting Green on January 23.

Today when talking about defending Canada, we want to talk about health. The Green Party is all about promoting health: healthy people, healthy communities, a healthy economy, in a healthy democracy, in a healthy Canada, on a healthy planet. Health is central to our message. And to put it bluntly, we can't have healthy people on a sick planet.

We are so blessed here in Canada. We live in what I think is the greatest country in the world. We have such beauty, such magnificence in this land, and something we take so for granted—fresh water, the essence of all life on earth. If you were to take all the world's water and it were to be represented in a single gallon jug, all the fresh water in the world would be the last drop in that gallon. And we here in Canada have more fresh water than any other country in the world! And what do we choose to do with this precious resource, this basis of all life? In Toronto we dump our sewage into it. We consider that this is an 18th century practice, and we are now in a 21st century reality.

And the Green Party is talking about healthy communities, about healthy ecosystems and we are going to have to have some profound changes in the way our society works. In this campaign I'm so proud to say that the Green Party is the first party ever to call for enshrining in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms the right of every Canadian to have access to clean air, to clean water, to uncontaminated soil. So that when our government either through lack of legislation, or lack of enforcing existing legislation, fail to live up to their responsibility average Canadians can use the courts to *force* governments to act responsibly.

Defending Against Childhood Asthma

And I look at the fact that today, it makes me want to cry, that one in every five children has childhood asthma, when 30 years ago it was less than one in 50. *One in every five children has childhood asthma.* Why are we using our own children as the canaries in the coal mine to tell us that we must change? Are we going to wait until one in every 4 children has asthma before the old-line parties will act? Are we going to wait until one in every 3 children has problems breathing? When every other child has asthma, will we then act? Or will we wait until every child has asthma?

The Green Party is the only party in this election that is talking about this issue. And by the five network executives making the decision to exclude our voice from the televised leaders debate they were in fact acting as censors, guaranteeing that this issue would not be raised during this election because all the old-line parties are complicit. They have all been in power while we have seen asthma rates rise from one in fifty to one in five. The NDP has been in power in four provinces, the Conservatives and Liberals federally and provincially, and the Pequistes and Bloquistes in Quebec and Ottawa. So only the Green Party is talking about this issue.

And why does one in every five children have childhood asthma? It's simple. Because every year 4.3 billion, yes billion, kilograms of respiratory toxins are injected into *our* air every year! And the Green Party is the only party saying, *enough is enough.* It's time to clear the air.

You know we here in Toronto have experienced more smog days in the last year than any other year on record. And the Ontario Medical Association came out in 2005 and said that 5,800 people will die a year prematurely in Ontario because of smog related illness. It's going to cause 17,000 emergency room visits annually in what are already overcrowded ERs. And it's going to cost Ontario taxpayers \$7.8 billion a year due to respiratory illness.

You know if this were anything else it would be a crisis of national proportions but because the denigration of our air is slow and relentless as opposed to catching newspaper headlines, it goes ignored. But I have a friend who has a mechanic and he has a strange saying. He says, "You can pay

me now or you can pay me later.” Meaning you can choose to service your car preventatively and maintain it and change the oil every 8,000 kilometers, or you can not change the oil for 50,000 kilometres and have the engine seize up. You can pay me now, or you can pay me later. We don’t have a choice as to whether we’re going to pay the cost of this environmental damage. The only choice we have is whether we going to pay it now in which case the price will be far smaller – or are we going to pay it down the road when the price is far larger?

And the Green Party is calling out and I’m happy to say that our voices are being joined by people all around the world and from quarters that you would not expect. Swiss Re, the second largest re-insurance firm globally, has been saying that payouts due to catastrophic weather events have been doubling every decade. And this isn’t a group of environmentalists – this is hard core business people, the insurance company that insures insurance companies – saying the dominant, the pre-eminent challenge for business in the 21st century is going to be addressing global climate change.

This should be front and centre in this debate, in this election, but we are not hearing the old-line parties talk about it. In fact, Mr. Harper says he would rip up Kyoto. Mr. Martin says he supports Kyoto, and, I ask you, which is actually worse? With the Conservatives, with Mr. Harper, with Mr. Bush, at least you know where you stand. But with Mr. Martin, who says he supports Kyoto, I am deeply worried because it lulls Canadians into a false sense of security that the government is aware we have a very serious problem, is acting. But when you look at the record, CO₂ emissions under the Liberals for 12 years have gone up by more than 24%, not fallen by 6%.

And so there have been a lot of talk in this election about accountability. But we talk about a different kind of accountability. Who is accountable to future generations? Who is accountable to the one if five children who can’t breath properly? Who is acting responsibly? And the answer is: none of the old-line traditional parties.

And so we have to decide, are we going to make the break now or later with the old-line parties? There is no more right-left dimension for the Green Party. We are neither right, we are neither left. We are out in front. The only dimension that is important for us is that we preserve the future. The Green Party will not mortgage our children’s legacy. This is the only dimension that matters in politics anymore.

And, you know, some people say that the Green Party might only be concerned about environmental issues, so let’s look at this issue of childhood asthma. Is it a human right’s issue? Is it a health care issue? Is it an economic issue, because of the almost \$8 billion it will cost Ontario taxpayers every year? Is it a pollution issue? Is it an issue of electricity planning, because we burn coal to create electricity because we’re the most energy-inefficient country globally? We consume more energy per

person that any other people on the planet. Is it a matter of bad electricity planning? Is it a transportation issue, because smog is caused by idling cars, and coal fire generation? Is it a transportation planning issue? Is it an issue of political will? Or is it an environmental issue? Or is it a charter of rights issue? The answer is “yes” to all of the above.

And the Green Party is the only party that integrates all of these issues. The Green Party is fiscally responsible, socially progressive, and committed to environmental sustainability. We look at all public policies through what we call this triple bottom lens. And I'll give you one example: In the past year, the federal Liberal government has subsidized oil and gas companies to the tune of \$1.4 billion of our hard-earned taxpayers' money. And that is at a time that these companies are making the highest profit in their existence. So we don't consider it a fiscally responsible use of precious taxpayers' dollars to subsidize the most profitable companies in Canada.

At the same time, because we believe in balanced budgets, every dollar we spend in one area is a dollar we can't spend in another and so this \$1.4 billion steals money from social priorities like education, health care, addressing childhood poverty. It is absolutely alarming that 1.2 million children today in a country as rich as ours live in poverty. That 4 million Canadians don't know that they'll be able to eat at the end of the month because they won't be able to make ends meet.

The oil and gas companies are not poor. They should not be receiving a single penny of taxpayers' subsidies and this is how, in fact, we can say that the Green Party is more fiscally responsible than the Conservative party who would continue those subsidies, because, of course, its core of support is Albertan-based oil companies.

And you might think that it's paradoxical that our second highest support is in province Alberta. But in oil towns we've had some of our best results in Alberta, because oil and gas workers know that the oil and gas industry has to change. They see the waste; they see the need for efficiency; and they are concerned about their children's future. And so paradoxically, some of the highest support for the Green Party in Alberta is in oil patch. That is people coming over and standing up, standing up for the future of their children. Note that British Petroleum has renamed itself in its advertising, beyond petroleum. And the chairman proudly admits that £150 million a year has been saved by BP in meeting its Kyoto targets eight years in advance and when you do the math, that's almost \$2 billion Canadian.

I've found in my work in dealing with CEOs that whenever you ask, “Are you interested in a strategy that could drop \$2 billion directly to the bottom line?” they always answer, “Yes.” And so what is good for our environment is in fact the best thing possible, available, for business. And there are huge business opportunities, but we need to defend Canada's economy.

We are so excited, for instance, that Denmark began a strategic focus on wind power 20 years ago. And in the intervening 20 years they've created 20,000 jobs. We call these job **green collar jobs**. You've heard of white collar, you've heard of blue collar. Well, green collar jobs are sustainable *economically* and they're sustainable *ecologically*. If you look at wind power over the last decade it has been growing by 32% a year, compounded annually. Show me any other industry with those kind of growth figures. Staggering.

You know that famous political commentator, Wayne Gretzky, used to always say, "I never go where the puck is, I go to where it's going to be." And that seems to be the question for us in the Green Party. We all know where the puck is. Just look at the government subsidies to oil and gas. But in the future is wind going to play a bigger role globally in electricity provisioning.

And you know we were so excited when Jean Charest in Quebec announced a \$1.9 billion wind-power program, the largest in fact in Canada's and the world's history. But the excitement wore off when we realized that 70 cents of every dollar is leaving Canada to American, to German, to Danish firms. Why? Because we haven't developed a robust-enough wind turbine industry in Canada right here, right now, to create green collar jobs to be able to service the largest single wind contract in the world's history!

So are we going where the puck is, or where it's been?

Defending Canada for us would mean stopping the subsidies of \$100 million to Ford, and \$200 million to GM, the two cars companies with the highest CO₂ emissions in the world. And Mr. Harper in the debates several nights ago said, he would give further tax breaks to those companies. But do you know that even a third of a billion dollars of our hard-earned taxpayers' money didn't protect a single job when GM announced 30,000 layoffs in November 2005. And just wait. In the next two weeks I expect Ford to announce 20,000 layoffs from its operations.

And, you know, when GM rationalized its operations it did not cut a single job from its plants producing gas-guzzling SUVs or trucks. In other words they'll take a third of a billion dollars of Canadian taxpayers money and bet it all on a gas-guzzling strategy.

Now, how is the Green Party different from every old-line party? The NDP, for instance, supported these massive subsidies. Why? Because of CAW jobs. Actually I think the worst day for the campaign for Mr. Layton was when Buzz Hargrove hugged Mr. Martin. Wow. We haven't had a day that bad in this campaign.

But, you know, we would not be pursuing that strategy. We would not be giving one cent of taxpayers' money as subsidies to Ford and GM, who have bet on this gas-guzzling strategy. We ask: "*Why is there*

not a single hybrid carmaker in Canada right now producing hybrids right here, right now?" And you know, here's where the intersection of business interests and health issues and our environment all come together.

We have 25,000 taxis on Canadian roads. Each taxi drives 10 times the distance of a normal vehicle per year. If each one of those taxis was a hybrid, we would not only be reducing by 350 million litres every single year the amount of gasoline, taxi cab drivers would be putting in their pockets between \$1,200 and \$1,500 every month. So that conversion would cost nothing. In fact you could get a brand new hybrid for free on lease payments and pocket the difference.

And so what is it? Why are we not moving down this path? Remember that taxis are on all day so that they are idling, producing smog in our cities for our children to breathe to get childhood asthma and impose \$8 billion of health care costs on Ontario taxpayers. So the taxi cab industry if all 25,000 were hybrids would save \$5 billion over a decade. Now we've been told that Kyoto would cost Canada \$10 billion. Nothing could be further from the truth. Here is one tiny, tiny little industry that all on its own would save \$5 billion over a decade and reduce health care costs and address the issue of childhood asthma.

The Green Party is presenting practical, proven solutions that make economic sense as well as environmental sense. You know that most important issue for Canadians is our health care system. And I'm proud to say that the Green Party is the only party talking about *health*, not just *health care*. In the last election and we'll see in this election, the old-line parties will be arguing over how much more they'll spend on our health care system. And not to say that's a bad thing. We think, we agree with that. That's a good thing. As Martha Stewart says, *that's a good thing*.

Defending Health Not Just Health Care

But the Green Party is the only party talking about health, not just health care.

My father died of cancer. My mother in law is fighting her second cancer. In fact we all know someone – in our family, a friend who has died of cancer, is currently fighting cancer, or thankfully who has survived cancer. But the bad news is that cancers are predicted to double in Canada, over the next 30 years according to cancer societies. Six million Canadians are going to get cancer and three million of us will die of it.

The Green Party is the only party saying: "Hey, we know what is causing cancer." Fifty percent of cancers are preventable according to cancer societies and Harvard studies. Wouldn't it be a better idea to stop Canadians getting cancer in the first place rather than just argue over how much more money to

spend to treat it once we have it? Wouldn't that be a better course of action?

And it's not just cancer. Seventy percent of strokes are preventable. Eighty percent of diabetes. Eighty percent of heart disease. When you actually do the math, if we don't aggressively focus on prevention, we are not going to be able to spend our way out of the health care crisis that we face. And yet, the Green Party is the only party talking about health, not just health care.

I'm proud to say as I've campaigned and canvassed all across Canada, we take unique positions all throughout the country. I was just in Alberta, where there they have outsourced or privatized their health care system. And the net result – only 7 of the 23 long term care facilities for seniors meet standards set by the province. Less than one third. So the quality of care of our seniors is in serious threat in Alberta, because of privatization of our health care.

I'm proud to say that the Green Party unequivocally stands for a one tier system accessible to all Canadians, and the only way we will fix the system is through prevention.

Defending our Democracy

We have a democratic deficit of immense proportions.

Imagine five parties running in every in Canada and all five parties get exactly the same vote –20%. But one party gets one more vote in all 308 ridings. That one party would have 100 per cent of the seats in Parliament with 20% of popular vote. Would you call that fair? Let's look at the other four parties which collectively got 80% of the vote and didn't win a single seat. Would you call that fair?

We are working with an 18th century electoral system and we are now in a 21st century reality.

We need to defend our democracy. We had the lowest voter turn out in the history of Canada in the last election. Almost 40% of Canadian didn't vote – and when you ask them why, it's because they didn't see their values and ethics reflected in any of the old-line political parties.

We will fight for proportional representation – an electoral system that makes everyone's vote count equally. Proportional representation would go a long way to encouraging voter participation and restoring people's faith that their voice is truly being heard.

Defending our Reputation Internationally

Canadians are proud of the reputation that we have worldwide as peace loving people and a

peacekeeping nation. The Green Party would focus the military's role exclusively on peacekeeping internationally. We unequivocally opposed the war in Iraq and we unequivocally opposed the antiballistic missile defense system that Mr. Bush wanted us to join. Had Mr. Harper been in power we would have joined both.

Defending Against Climate Change

Global climate change is the most important that the world faces today. This is not environmentalists who are saying this but business leaders. Swiss Re is the second largest insurance company worldwide. As an insurance company that insures insurance companies – it knows first hand the effects of climate change. We have seen more severe hurricanes this past year, and of greater intensity than any other recorded year. Swiss Re has documented how the pay outs for catastrophic weather events has been doubling every decade.

In the first oil crisis in the early 1970's, Japan which is 100% dependent on foreign oil imports, realized the vulnerability of its economy was when the price of oil quadrupled in just 18 months. So Japan embarked on the most aggressive energy conservation program in the country's and the world's history. And the net effect? Japan increased its energy efficiency in its heavy industries – petrochemical, cement dramatically. The steel industry for instance, increased its efficiency by 50% in following years. And the effect? Japan's steel industry was 41% more energy efficient than US steelmakers. The impact? 230,000 US steelmakers lost their work. So was energy efficiency a threat or a huge competitive advantage?

Defending Our Economy

Canada's economy is the most energy inefficient in the world. It means that our economy is most vulnerable to the inevitable oil shock. We think that it was excessive when oil broke \$US70 a barrel in 2005 – but when you look back to the early 1980s and adjust for inflation – oil was well over \$100 a barrel. So what are the old-line parties doing to defend our economy against the inevitable oil shock?

Defending Our Planet

It is with tremendous sadness that I note the work of Dr. Ram Meyers who has released a study identifying how the populations of large fish in the world's oceans has plummeted by 90% from levels in 1950. 90% fewer whales, 90% sharks, marlin, tuna. 90% fewer cod and flounder. Don't we know this all too well on the East Coast of Canada? Whatever we do to the planet we do to ourselves. If we attack the earth economy we destroy the human economy. *We cannot truly have a strong economy, without a strong ecology.*

Conclusion

The issues we are talking about are concerns of every Canadian. In fact when you ask Canadians – over 80% of us believe that our grandchildren will inherit a world that is significantly degraded. And to the Green Party that is just not acceptable. We have to defend our future. There is, in my opinion, no higher calling.

As Canadian's we don't wear our pride on our sleeve. We are quietly proud, reservedly proud. What is it that makes us Canadian? The beauty of our land. Because I am in love with Canada. I would rather live no other place in the world. And something that we all love so deeply is something that is not only worth defending, but Canada is something that we must defend.

I believe we can. We can have a government that is truly accountable to Canadians, by renewing our democratic institutions. *We can* have a Canada that protects our air, soil and water while developing a strong, sustainable economy. *We can* move beyond our basic Kyoto commitments to make Canada a world leader in combating climate. *We can* have a Canada that works for all communities, by honouring Aboriginal rights, Québec's rightful place in our federation, and the promise that new Canadians bring to our communities from coast to coast to coast.

We can defend and promote a Canada is inclusive, progressive, fiscally prudent, and passionately, firmly focused on the future of the planet. We value diversity, tolerance and compassion try to ensure no one is left behind. We want to defend Canada. And so in this election the greatest action you can take to defend the Canada we love is by voting Green. Thank you very much.