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Oct. 20, 2004. 06:45 PM

Conflicted MPs, muddling PM 'hurting Kyoto'

CANADIAN PRESS

OTTAWA — Canada's \$3.6 billion-climate change program is being thwarted by cabinet ministers who act like lobbyists for industry and by a lack of firm direction from the prime minister, says former environment minister David Anderson.

In a scathing assessment of Ottawa's efforts to achieve compliance with the Kyoto climate treaty, Anderson blasted the government for subsidizing auto plants even while auto manufacturers resist government demands for improved fuel efficiency in new vehicles.

Anderson said it's unacceptable that the government is spending billions of dollars on climate change while greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise.

"The trouble with the Canadian government is that we do not have a coherent voice, we do not have coherent leadership stating this must be done," he said in an interview.

"We have departments of government . . . about a half dozen, which are notorious for being the spokespersons for industrial sectors, or being essentially lobbyists for industrial sectors."

Prime Minister Paul Martin said the government is serious about its Kyoto commitment.

"We are moving ahead on climate change, there should be no doubt about that," he said during a photo opportunity with the president of Mongolia.

"There are obviously cabinet discussions and that's been the way since Confederation and those will continue. But we are moving ahead."

Anderson didn't specify which ministers he had in mind, but there is a

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long history of conflict between Natural Resources, responsible for the energy sector, and Environment Canada.

Most recently, Natural Resources dismissed suggestions by Environment Minister Stephane Dion that Canada adopt stringent vehicle emissions regulations like those in California.

Dion has since backed down, saying he supports Natural Resources Minister John Efford's focus on voluntary efforts by industry.

"This town is stiff with lobbyists," said Anderson. "We don't need them within the government system. We certainly don't need them at the cabinet table and it's time for the prime minister to make this abundantly clear."

Under the Kyoto protocol, Canada is committed to cutting greenhouse emissions six per cent from 1990 levels by 2010, yet emissions are now 20 per cent above 1990 levels.

"Why are we up on emissions?" asked Anderson. "Because the government kept on putting off tough decisions.

"We've allocated \$3.6 billion already, why has it not had an effect? We've never said, `This is where the buck stops, this industry is going to have to reduce its emissions by this much, and do it.

"We have spent the money on a lot of research, a lot of communications and new technologies which is not threatening to old industry, but it hasn't reduced emissions."

When Martin became prime minister he said Canada needed a clear plan for achieving the Kyoto objectives, yet there is no indication that such a plan is in the works.

There are even signs of retreat from a preliminary plan published in 2002. It called for legislation to put a cap on emissions from major industrial facilities, but Dion recently told Montreal Le Devoir he's not sure legislation will be introduced.

The 2002 plan called for a 25 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency in new fleets of vehicles by 2010, but the government has relied on voluntary action by industry rather than regulation, and negotiations have dragged on for years.

Anderson said manufacturers are offering a 12.5 per cent improvement in fuel efficiency, half of what the government wants.

"But at the same time of course they want half a billion dollars of federal money to match provincial money to establish new plants in Canada. Well bugger that.

"The government essentially turns facilities over to them on a turnkey basis and they make cars. That's what happens in the southern states. Well that's fine if the southern states want to do that but there's no reason for us to do it other than the domestic politics of Ontario."

Asked to respond to the general thrust of Anderson's criticisms, Dion said he's adopting a less adversarial style in cabinet, and his top priority is to develop a new decision-making process.

"I think you are referring to an old model where the minister of the environment was a bit at war with everyone in the government. Mr. Anderson, my predecessor, was very good to win battles more than otherwise.

"This being said . . . the decision-making process must be new. That means the Department of the Environment will be very involved in the industrial strategy of Canada, with the Department of Industry, the Department of Natural Resources, with the Department of Trade and so on.

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