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MEDIA RELEASE FROM BRAD TROST, MP

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MP Trost criticizes Liberals for saying “high gas prices are good for Canada”

MP Brad Trost questioned Minister McCallum at the House of Commons Industry Committee yesterday about no federal plan to help farmers and truckers with skyrocketing fuel costs:

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): You said governments were good to resist the call for tax cuts. I had also noted that your cabinet colleague, Minister of the Environment, Minister Dion had said high prices were good for Canada on this. Is it the position of the government that high prices are good, high gasoline prices are good, high home fuel feeding prices are good? Since Minister Dion has indicated that's the policy does the government then support keeping prices high through artificial means once the supply and demand situation eases somewhat?

Hon. John McCallum: Absolutely not. When I said that tax cuts were not a good idea I meant that given the alternatives we have before us and the funds we have available to assist Canadians in coping with the higher energy prices we're better off to focus on the measures such as we have adopted i.e., improving energy efficiency and cash supplements for lower income Canadians than to put those same resources into lower taxes.

Mr. Bradley Trost: So you disagree with the Minister of Environment high prices are bad.

Hon. John McCallum: That's not what I said. I said given the resources we have it's more helpful to Canadians and it's more rational given our environment objectives to focus on the medium term as well as some financial assistance to lower income Canadians. Certainly the government is not adverse to tax cuts. In general we are the government that brought in the biggest tax cuts in Canadian history in the Year 2000.

Mr. Bradley Trost: I'm well aware of the accounting.

Hon. John McCallum: It's a possibility of further tax cuts in the future, but focusing on other kinds of taxes like income tax rather than taxes on the price of gas at the pump.

Mr. Bradley Trost: I'm well aware the government counts a lack of a tax hike as a tax cut. My other question is this. There's been no provision for specifically to help agriculture and truckers in this group that are specifically hard hit. Will the government be taking anything to help farmers or truckers, or will they be leaving those groups out so that they are paying a disproportionate percentage of the burden?

Hon. John McCallum: The first point I would make is that we do have ongoing programs to help industries, including the ones you mentioned to become more energy efficient. As I said in response to an earlier question we have to focus the resources that we have. I think we are putting cash out to the lowest income Canadians. We are helping all Canadians to have more energy efficient homes. We are providing particularly strong assistance to lower income Canadians to reduce their energy heating costs in the winter. We've established this office to monitor prices which will give very powerful ammunition to the media, to provincial government's who are the regulators, to individual consumers, to parliamentarians in the event that abusive price behaviour occurs. That information will also allow a beefed up Competition Bureau to take action. I think our package is responsible.

Mr. Bradley Trost: Nothing for agriculture.

Hon. John McCallum: As I said we have programs for agriculture.

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The excerpt above is from a question and answer session following acting Natural Resources Minister John McCallum's presentation before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Industry, Natural Resources, Science and Technology on Tuesday, October 25, 2005 in the West Block building, Parliament Hill. MP Brad Trost is a member of the Standing Committee and is also chair of the Conservative Party of Canada's Energy Caucus.

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