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NAFTA allies urge single voice on emissions

Premiers, state governors meet. As UN summit nears, Charest calls for 'doable solutions' on greenhouse gases

BY KEVIN DOUGHERTY, THE GAZETTE **JUNE 4, 2009**

Canada, the United States and Mexico should adopt a common position on greenhouse gases, Premier Jean Charest said yesterday after playing host at a meeting of premiers and state governors from the three countries.

He met reporters at the end of the meeting of provinces and states from the three countries in the North American Free Trade Agreement, and presented a declaration calling for a common NAFTA position on carbon emissions.

"This is something that would be difficult to obtain, a consensus," Charest said. "But we need to start now to talk about what will be doable solutions with real impact on the reduction of greenhouse gases.

"If we were able to accomplish that much, we would all be in Copenhagen with a much stronger hand than if we stood alone," he added, alluding to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December.

That meeting will be a follow-up to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which set targets for greenhouse gas reduction.

U.S. President Barack Obama reversed the opposition of his predecessor, George W. Bush, to the Kyoto process, but Prime Minister Stephen Harper remains cool to it.

Harper was invited by Charest to a dinner last night that was attended by the other premiers and governors, offering them a chance to pitch the idea to the PM.

Charest said he would like a common position endorsing the "cap and trade" concept, which calls for limits on allowable emissions of greenhouse gases and trading of credits that industries spewing excess carbon dioxide could buy.

The Quebec National Assembly is considering a bill to create a carbon exchange in Montreal. The U.S. Congress is also looking at a cap and trade scheme, Charest noted.

Manitoba Premier Gary Doer, who was at the meeting, said it makes sense for trading partners to have a "common position of principle going into Copenhagen."

Doer said he, like Charest, would also like to see the United States designate hydro-electricity from Canada as renewable energy.

Hydro dams exert pressure on the Earth that releases methyl mercury, which enters the ecosystem through fish that humans consume. Canadian provinces, seeking export contracts for hydro-electricity in the United States, want the U.S. to overlook this environmental side-effect.

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