

Chretien dedicates site of mammoth SARS concert

The Whitehorse Daily Star
Print Edition 30/09/2003

TORONTO (CP) -- Prime Minister Jean Chretien showed the greener side of his legacy Monday, unveiling a plan for Toronto's Downsview Park and accepting an environmental award for ratifying the Kyoto Protocol. Chretien, who announced a plan for 10 new national parks and five marine conservation areas in 2002, stressed the importance of creating urban green spaces, saying they are "something that we will remember for generations to come."

"One of the greatest pleasures I have at the moment -- I'm quitting my job in a few months, yeah, I'm quitting don't worry, I don't want to have a divorce -- (is) to create new national parks everywhere," he said.

The 320-hectare Downsview Park, which hosted the Rolling Stones' SARS benefit concert this summer and the Pope's World Youth Day last year, was a Canadian Forces base until 1994 when it was closed by the Liberal government. A design for a park on the site, which will cost \$40 million over 10 years to complete, was selected through an international competition.

Chretien praised the efforts of the design team as well as Transport.

Minister David Collenette and Toronto member of Parliament Art Eggleton, a former defence minister, for making sure the former base will become a public place.

"When we knew that this big piece of land was available it would have been a shame if we had not taken the step to make sure that it will be a park in perpetuity," Chretien said.

Chretien later received the inaugural Award for Advancing the Environmental Agenda from the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy for his role in Canada's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

"Yes, it was a bold thing to do, but for me I think that it will be recognized as a very important moment," Chretien said. "Because under the pressure we faced, some were kind of afraid that we were going to fast, too far."

But Chretien said the 1997 protocol, under which Canada must cut average greenhouse gas emissions between 2008 and 2012 by six per cent below 1990 levels, will make real progress on the environment.

He said Canada's ratification of the accord will likely put pressure on the United States, which has refused to sign it for fear of economic damage.

"Because we've done it, it will be probably something that will, in the near future, force our neighbour of the south to do the same thing," Chretien said.

Earlier Monday, Environment Minister David Anderson said Canada will implement the Kyoto protocol even if Russia backs out and leaves the treaty with no real force.

Anderson made the comment hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin joked at a climate conference in Moscow that global warming could be good for a cold country like Russia.

Paul Martin, who is set to replace Chretien, has said he supports the Kyoto commitment.

Chretien was in a jocular mood Monday, joking with dignitaries and, at one point, opening a pair of ribbon-cutting shears around his throat during the Downsview dedication ceremony.

He recalled many instances during his political career in which he had taken steps to help preserve Canada's green spaces.

"It has been for me a great joy of my public life to be involved in the environment," Chretien said.