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PM meets with Calgary businessmen

By RENATO GANDIA, QMI Agency

CALGARY -- Alberta-based businessmen who met with the prime minister behind closed doors Monday are optimistic Canada's economy will fully recover but they say they're also cautious because it remains fragile.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Environment Minister Jim Prentice spoke with 10 business leaders representing energy, agriculture and finance less than a month before to the federal budget is announced.

Carbon capture, the state of the economy and federal stimulus funds topped the agenda.

Calgary lawyer Doug Mitchell with law firm Borden Ladner Gervais described the mood as generally positive.

"But I think everybody in the room was cautious," Mitchell told reporters.

Mitchell said there are several reasons why the public remains nervous about the stability of the economy.

"They're worried about their jobs, they're worried about the future, and I think we have to be cautious," said Mitchell.

Edmonton-based Cal Nichols, chairman of Alberta Enterprise Group, said there were talks about "what's working, what's not working" in the economy, but he declined to elaborate, saying Harper should be the one commenting on the matter.

Harper didn't speak to reporters before heading off to another budget discussion with Alberta politicians, but Prentice later told journalists the discussions were very focused on the economy and the importance of recovery.

He said the federal stimulus money is now entering the economy and its positive effects are being felt across the country.

Both Mitchell and Nichols said everyone agreed the money can't last forever, but it appears current planned programs will continue.

"Eventually we have to switch from stimulus and let the economy generate on its own," said Mitchell.

"My personal view is you can't continue to do it forever, somebody has to pay for it," he said.

Harper has held as many as eight economic roundtable discussions across the country since mid-January, before the budget release on March 4.

