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PRIME MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT AND PRESS
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UNIDENTIFIED: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. (APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, thank you very much, everybody. Bonjour, tout le monde. First of all, I want to thank Rob for his kind introduction, and actually, Rob overstates my part. Rob has been the Minister primarily responsible for this file in our cabinet. We're just delighted at how quickly it's moved along, and congratulations, Rob, on what we're announcing here today. Give him a big hand, everybody. He deserves a lot of credit. (APPLAUSE)

I also want to give greetings to all of my colleagues here today, to Senator Fabien Manning, who kicked us off, Senator Ethyl Cochrane, to my other colleagues from the ministry, Minister Peter MacKay, who's taken responsibility for this province in our cabinet, who flew down with me last night. Also Senator Keith Ashfield, who's come from New Brunswick. We appreciate the attendance of all of you. Also greetings to our hosts from Marine Atlantic: chairman of the board Rob Crosby, president and CEO Wayne Follett, and of course as well as the crew of this fine vessel, who greeted us on our way down the ramp today. Regards as well to Lieutenant Colonel Alex Brennan, commanding officer of the first battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, and thank you for the members of the regiment and this wonderful band for being with us today as well.

I also want to give special greetings to members of the other levels of government, municipal and provincial who are here, but special greetings to Premier Dunderdale, and I also want to use this opportunity, although we met in Ottawa only a little while ago, this is my first chance,

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Premier, to congratulate you here in your province of Newfoundland and Labrador on your historic ascension to the Premiership. It's a great achievement, and congratulations. (APPLAUSE)

And these are indeed auspicious circumstances, for today we are celebrating the strengthening of a crucial transportation link between Newfoundland and the mainland, as it has been called, the nautical section of the TransCanada Highway.

Aujourd'hui constitue un événement historique, soit la mise en service et le changement d'opération officielle du dernier ajout à la flotte de traversiers de Marine Atlantic qui s'appellera NM Blue Puttees.

Today is a historic event. The official welcome and renaming of the newest edition of the Marine Atlantic ferry fleet, the MV Blue Puttees. We are both making and honouring history today. We're making history with the major revitalization announced in the last federal budget of Marine Atlantic's fleet and shore facilities at North Sydney, Port aux Basques and Argentia. We're honouring history by naming this new ship after the renowned Royal Newfoundland Regiment. These sons of Newfoundland and Labrador were well-known for the blue puttees they wore, and the Blue Puttees became their nickname. But they will be famous forever for their extraordinary courage, their steadfastness, and their matchless sacrifice on the battlefields of Europe almost a century ago. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the reason that this fine vessel will carry their name as a tribute to them and as a tribute to the great province of Newfoundland and Labrador from which they hailed. The... (APPLAUSE)

The MV Blue Puttees is one of the two modern, comprehensively upgraded ferries chartered for Marine Atlantic under our

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revitalization program. Her sister ship, the MV Highlanders, is now refitting and will enter service later this spring. She too honours our military history, being named for the Cape Breton Highlanders, tough citizen soldiers from communities like North Sydney, who were particularly famous for their role in breaking the Nazi grip on Italy and liberating Holland during the Second World War.

Ces deux navires permettront à Marine Atlantic d'augmenter considérablement sa capacité de fournir des services de traversier fiable et ponctuel.

These two ships will significantly improve Marine Atlantic's ability to provide reliable, on-time ferry service. To meet the increasing demand for ferry transport across the Cabot Strait, they will carry more people, vehicles and freight than the two older ships that they're replacing, and they will provide more comfort and amenities for travellers. Our government is investing in these ferries and Marine Atlantic's shoreline infrastructure because we know how important the ferry connection to the mainland is for the people and for the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. This investment is, by the way, consistent with our actions across Canada over the last two years during the global recession. As part of our economic action plan to create jobs and stimulate economic activity, we accelerated our long-term plan to revitalize Canada's transportation and economic infrastructure, including right here working with the government of Newfoundland and Labrador. And as the recovery gathers steam, these investments will pay tremendous dividends in terms of economic growth and prosperity. And ladies and gentlemen, Canada is emerging and will continue to emerge stronger than ever.

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Tant que nous nous emploierons à continuer de réduire le déficit sans augmenter les taxes et les impôts, les perspectives économiques du Canada resteront très encourageantes.

As long as we stay the course, keep moving our deficit down, keep it coming down without raising taxes, Canada's economic future prospects will remain extremely promising. But staying the course means keeping a firm hand on the tiller. You probably remember that old saying, "Only the guy who isn't rowing has time to rock the boat." (LAUGHTER) We know that Canadians don't want us to spend recklessly on expensive new programs. Canadians do expect us to invest in the things that will continue to help us create jobs and growth, and you can be sure that we will.

Assurer une reprise durable demeure la priorité de notre gouvernement.

Building a sustained recovery remains our government's number one priority. We have a plan and it is working, but there is, of course, much more to do. And we will continue as we go forward to be guided by the values of hardworking Canadians. We will live within our means, we will cut waste duplication and red tape, and we will keep taxes down. That's what our ministers and MPs and senators have been hearing from Canadians over the last few weeks at almost 200 pre-budget consultations we've held right across this country, and we believe that these messages are right. This is the best way to provide economic stability. It is the key to the financial security all Canadians deserve, and it is the recipe for clear sailing for the Canadian economy, just as, ladies and gentlemen, we will get clear sailing from this investment in the MV Blue Puttees. I want to thank you very much. Merci beaucoup, et bon voyage! (APPLAUSE)

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(ANOTHER SPEAKER)

MODERATOR: Prime Minister Harper will now have time to take questions. When I call your name, if you could please make your way to the microphone at the end of the cameras. They have their hands up there. We'll start with Chris O'Neil-Yates from CBC. Prime Minister...can you hear me? Prime Minister, we've had the Wells inquiry into the crash of Cougar 491, and this week we saw the delivery of the TSB report, also with some recommendations. Will your government move forward in implementing the recommendations of those to particularly the one recommended by Justice Wells, that an independent regulatory authority be established to oversee the offshore.

Et est-ce que vous pouvez répondre en anglais et en français aussi, s'il vous plaît.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We're certainly aware of the report. We've received it. Transport Canada officials are looking at it and we'll go over the recommendations forthwith. Obviously we want to do anything that can improve safety and protect lives. That's what this is all about.

Nous avons reçu le rapport. Nos fonctionnaires du Transport Canada va étudier ces recommandations aussi vite que possible. Notre objectif est d'assurer la sécurité des gens par tous les moyens possibles.

MODERATOR: Continue with Sue Bailey, Canadian Press.

REPORTER: Ok? Good morning, Prime Minister. Of course everyone...many people in the world are watching what's happening in Egypt. There are reports that the President has stepped down. I wondered what

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you thought of his initial refusal to step down, how that escalated things overnight, and your thoughts on how this could affect the region.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, you know, let me just be clear, as I've been clear every time I've answered this question, that the future of Egypt is for Egyptians to decide. What I think we all want to see and what I think is clear most of the people of Egypt want to see is a transition to a democratic Egypt. We want to see free and fair elections. We want to see the rule of law and stability. We want to see respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, including the rights of religious minorities, and we want to see a government that will continue to respect peace treaties and seek peace in the Middle East. As I say, we are all seeing what's happening. A transition is taking place in Egypt. That transition, in my judgement, there is no going back. I think the old expression, "They're not going to put the toothpaste back in the tube on this one." Our, you know, our strong recommendations to those in power would be to lead change: get in front of it, be a part of it, and make a bright future happen for the people of Egypt.

MODÉRATEUR : On va continuer avec Julien LaFille.

JOURNALISTE : Est-ce que je pourrais aussi avoir votre réponse en français au sujet de l'Égypte, et pour faire suite à la question sur la commission Wells, est-ce que vous pouvez nous dire si vous avez l'intention de mettre sur place une agence indépendante pour veiller à la sécurité dans l'industrie pétrolière, et si vous pourriez répondre à cette question dans les deux langues, s'il vous plaît.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Oui, je pense que je viens de répondre à la dernière question, mais pour l'Égypte, je peux répéter

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ma réponse. C'est clair qu'il y a une transition en Égypte. C'est quelque chose que nous favorisons, mais c'est pour la population égyptienne de décider. Nous voulons voir une Égypte démocratique avec des élections libres et justes, avec la primauté du droit, avec le respect des droits humains, y compris des droits des minorités, y compris des droits des minorités religieuses. Et on veut voir un gouvernement en Égypte qui va continuer à poursuivre et à respecter la paix et les traités de paix dans la région. Et c'est clair pour tout le monde, pour le monde, qu'il y a une transition qui est en train de l'Égypte. Notre conseil, je pensais que le conseil mondial des autorités égyptiennes est de mener cette transition et c'est clair on ne va pas retourner en arrière, et c'est essentiel d'assurer une transition démocratique et stable; c'est ce que la population de ce pays veut, c'est clair.

MODERATOR: We'll continue with Natalie Colada, CBC.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, in your speech you mentioned the federal government's commitment to projects that create jobs. What does that mean, and will you be giving money to, or rather a loan guarantee to Newfoundland and Labrador to develop the Lower Churchill?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, as I said before, the answer to the general question, obviously in the past two years in response to the extraordinary collapse we had in global financial markets and global confidence, we joined with our colleagues around the world in launching stimulus programs in this country. Those have been rolled out quickly and effectively. I mean, you know, this is an example of that: accelerating the acquisition of this vessel, which you know, is a tremendous thing. I must say, you know, I was saying to my colleagues earlier, we sit

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around Ottawa and we're reading documents and we're passing motions and passing things through cabinet, and it's reassuring to actually get on the ground and see these kinds of things happening, so this is a great day, and it's an example of the kind of projects that we've been undertaking that will make a real difference in the long term. Now we're entering a different phase. We obviously have a restoration of confidence in the marketplace. There is some growth in the private sector. It's necessary for countries, including ourselves, to reduce our deficits, so we're winding up our stimulus programs, and we are...will be in this budget making various investments that will continue jobs and growth in the Canadian economy.

On the specific question, this is a very large project, as you know, that I understand is very important to this province, and more broadly, very important to this region. I am tasking my...I'll be discussing with the Premier later today. I'm tasking my senior officials to meet with the province's senior officials and to give me much better information on the economics of this project, and obviously on some of the environmental benefits we expect as well. This is a very good project, and we're going to look at this very carefully before reaching a conclusion.

MODERATOR: Continue with Michael Connors from NTV.

REPORTER: Premier Dunderdale said she may make the Lower Churchill an issue if there's a federal election in this spring. Do you need the help of the provincial PC Party to win back seats in this province?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: As I think I've told you, I'm not...I've told everybody at various press conferences I've had in recent weeks, I'm not the one calling for an election. I think the role of Parliament

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right now is to focus on the economy. We have, compared to most other countries in the world, significant increases in growth, but particularly in employment. Jobs are being created. We've created more jobs than were lost during the recession, but there is still a ways to go to get to where we want to be, and that is the focus of the government. I encourage all parties in Parliament to make that their focus as well, to provide good, solid ideas on how we can continue to grow the Canadian economy. As you know, I don't think...I think what is not a good idea is to raise taxes across the board right now. I don't think that makes any sense at all, but we're looking for good ideas. We are moving forward, and that's the focus we want to have, and I have been not engaged in election scenarios or election speculation, and I'm going to keep it at that.

MODERATOR: Finish with James McLeod from The Telegram.

REPORTER: If there is an election, do you...do you think investments like this will augur well for your chances in this province?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I...yeah, I just told you I'm not going to speculate on election. (LAUGHTER) But I always admire your persistence. I think this investment, investments like this are good for the province, and they are good for the long-term economic prospects of this region of the country, whether there is an election or not. I'm very proud that we've done them, and I think they're going to be great for the future. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone. Merci beaucoup.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Merci, tout le monde.

MODERATOR: Thanks, everyone.

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12

2600 words

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