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**PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN EDMONTON**

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UNIDENTIFIED: Questions from the media. Sir, thank you.

MODERATOR: We'll start with a few questions. If you could move to the gentleman with the microphone. And we'll start with Scott (Inaudible) with CBC Television.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, what concrete actions will you take to create jobs in light of today's numbers?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, first of all, if I can just comment on today's numbers, I'm obviously pleased that the Canadian economy did create jobs in December. That's good news. I'm obviously pleased as well to see some increasing job growth in the United States in the last few months. This has been one of the things that's been lacking over the past couple of years. We've seen some 600,000 net new jobs created in Canada, but we haven't been seeing the kind of job growth we need in the United States to help with our trade. So I think there's some good news. Obviously the news is not all good in the jobs report, as you know. There's some mixed news. It reminds us that the, as I said, that the global recovery is very fragile, and we will continue on the next phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan. We're going to continue to keep the taxes low, and to take action to reduce our deficit and avoid the debt problems we see in other western countries. We're going to continue to make key investments in training like we're doing here today, but also things like research and infrastructure, and we're also going to continue to fight protectionism and to work to open trade opportunities for Canadian firms. So

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those are the things we're going to continue to do, and I'm confident that Canada will continue to lead the global recovery.

Je vais répéter cette réponse en français. Évidemment je suis heureux que l'économie canadienne a créé des emplois en décembre. Ce sont des bonnes nouvelles. Aussi on remarque la création d'emplois aux États-Unis, qui est quelque chose qui est... qui nous manque jusqu'à maintenant. C'est essentiel pour continuer notre relance économique. L'économie canadienne a créé près de 600 000 emplois depuis la récession, mais on a besoin de plus de création d'emplois aux États-Unis pour vraiment encourager la relance de l'économie continentale. Nous continuerons aussi la prochaine étape de notre Plan d'action économique, et j'ai déjà mentionné plusieurs éléments. Nous continuons à garder bas nos taxes et nos impôts, de combattre le déficit et d'éviter les problèmes de la dette qui existe dans d'autres pays occidentaux. Nous investissons dans l'entraînement des travailleurs, mais aussi nous faisons des investissements clés dans la recherche et dans l'infrastructure. Et finalement, nous continuons à augmenter la possibilité de nos échanges commerciaux.

MODERATOR: Karen Wang, OMNI News.

REPORTER: Hi, Prime Minister. As important as the welfare of veterans, I guess the prospect of our energy export market is also the primary concern of all Albertans. Can you please share some of your thoughts on the hearing of Northern Gateway pipeline project that's coming up next week? Thank you.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Sure. Well, first of all, you know, the government doesn't take positions on specific projects that are before a regulatory process. That's obviously for the regulatory process to

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judge. But I think this government has been very clear, particularly in light of some of the decisions that have been taking place in the United States, we've been very clear about the necessity for Canada of broadening our markets for energy products. I think it is particularly essential for this country that over time we have the capacity to sell our energy products into the growing markets of Asia. In terms of the hearings that are taking place, we're watching this with great interest. We want to ensure in Canada that we have a regulatory system that protects our environment and also obviously protects worker safety and various other community interests. At the same time, though, we have to have processes in Canada that come to a decision in a reasonable amount of time, and processes that cannot be hijacked; in particular, growing concern has been expressed to me about the use of foreign money to really overload the public consultation phase of regulatory hearings, just for the purpose of slowing down the process. This is something that is not good for the Canadian economy, and the government of Canada will be taking a close look at how we can ensure that our regulatory processes are effective and deliver decisions in a reasonable amount of time.

MODERATOR: (Inaudible) with Global News.

REPORTER: Hi, Prime Minister. Premier Alison Redford has spoken at length recently about the development of a national energy strategy. I'm wondering what you think about the role of the federal government in such a strategy, what that role should be.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, she has broached that issue with me, although I actually am anticipating we'll be having some meetings in the not too distant future with Alberta and with several other provinces to get more details about precisely what they have in mind. As you

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know, this is an area of mixed jurisdiction. The federal government has some limited jurisdiction in energy, and our approach as a government for, well, since we came to office, but the approach of the federal government for some years has been to have an energy sector that is primarily driven by market demand. That policy I think generally has served this part of the country and served the country as a whole quite well. We are, frankly, probably about the only market provide... market-driven provider of energy products that is a growing and... has a growing and profitable energy sector going forward, so that is the basis of our policy. Obviously I've made some comments recently about the necessity of broadening and diversifying export markets for our energy, and so I look forward to discussing that with not just Premier Redford, but some of the other Premiers, and hearing also what other ideas they may have in mind in terms of energy strategy.

MODÉRATRICE : Laurent, avec Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE : Bonjour, Monsieur Premier ministre. Ma question concerne vos intentions face au régime de pension des employés de la fonction publique. On apprend ce matin dans le National Post que votre gouvernement songe à effectuer des changements importants sur ce dossier. Que pourriez-vous faire?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Je peux mentionner que depuis notre arrivée en fonction, nous avons déjà changé le plan de pension pour assurer une plus grande partie payée par des employés qu'au passé. Notre intention est d'assurer que nos régimes de pension sont juste pour nos employés de la fonction publique et aussi pour les contribuables. Pour l'article, la spéculation dans l'article que vous avez citée, je peux dire qu'aucune décision a été prise.

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MODERATOR: Jane S. Johnson, CBC Radio.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, your thoughts, please, today on Edmonton East MP Peter Goldring leaving your party and declaring himself as a Civil Libertarian?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: As you know, Mr. Goldring left the caucus around the particular incident that's been in the newspapers, and that will continue to be the case until this issue is resolved. I'm not going to comment on the specifics of that. We're obviously anxious to see what the resolution is. But one should be under no illusion that this government considers the issue of drinking and driving to be a very serious issue. There are still far too many accidents and fatalities in this country that occur because of that problem, and so this is an issue that we consider one of our highest priorities.

MODERATOR: Thanks very much, everyone. Merci beaucoup.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Thanks, everybody.  
(APPLAUSE)

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