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RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER (Canadian Prime Minister): Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. Merci beaucoup. Good day. It's wonderful to be back in this beautiful province, especially when we have this contrast of weather with Ottawa right about now.

I want to begin by thanking my introducer. I know you welcomed him already, but he one of the hardest working members of our government, did tremendously innovative and transformational work as Minister of Citizenship. He's now responsible for Employment, Social Development, Multiculturalism and is the Minister actually responsible for today's announcement.

So another big hand to my colleague, Jason Kenney.

(Applause)

Thanks also to another one of my colleagues who introduced us today, our emcee. She is the member of Parliament for this riding, Delta-Richmond East and Canada's Minister of National Revenue. One more hand of applause for Kerry-Lynne Findlay.

(Applause)

And I want to thank all of my colleagues who have joined us today: Minister of Industry James Moore, Minister of State for Seniors, Alice Wong, Senator Yonah Kim-Martin, members of Parliament Nina Grewal, John Weston, Dan Albas, all of ... all of my colleagues for being here. Thank you very much for joining us today.

(Applause)

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Greetings to the many talented students who have joined us, who have been very patient, and to each of the men and women who teach and train them. Greetings as well to the employers and job creators who are here. To you, Nobina, and to your colleagues from Polytechnics Canada, to the representatives of labour and obviously to those who have joined us here on behalf of other levels of government, welcome one and all and thank you, all of you, for your presence.

Finally, for their generous hospitality I want to extend my sincere thanks to our hosts, the Annacis Island Campus of the British Columbia Institute of Technology and the Vancouver Community College, especially to President Kathy Kinloch and Peter Nunoda, thank them for hosting us here today. Give them a big hand.

(Applause)

Now ladies and gentlemen, before I turn to today's business, the reason I came out today, I do want to take a moment to offer a few short comments on the recent events that have transpired in France.

Quand un trio d'hommes cagoulés se sont attaqués à certains de nos principes les plus précieux, la liberté d'expression et la liberté de la presse, ils ont attaqué la démocratie partout.

Hier des centaines de milliers de personnes partout dans le monde et dans plusieurs villes du Canada ont démontré à visage découvert que nous ne serons pas intimidés par des terroristes djihadistes. Aujourd'hui tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes se tiennent au côté du peuple de la France pendant leur période de deuil national.

(Applaudissements)

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I will just repeat that. When a trio of hooded men struck at some of our most cherished democratic principles – freedom of expression, freedom of the press – they assaulted democracy everywhere.

Yesterday hundreds of thousands of people around the world and in cities across this country openly demonstrated that we will not be intimidated by jihadist terrorists. Today I know all Canadians, during this time of national mourning, we all stand together with the people of France, our great friends and allies.

(Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, Mesdames et Messieurs, nous sommes réunis ici pour parler de l'avenir des compétences et de la formation des Canadiens brillants et ambitieux.

We're here today to talk about the future of skills and training for smart, ambitious young Canadians. But before we get to today's announcements, I want to talk very briefly about our government's infrastructure strategy because these two things go together. Infrastructure doesn't build itself. We need trained people to erect bridges, weld pipelines, lay track for rapid transit. In short, to construct the world in which we live.

Jason mentioned some of this.

Mais depuis que nous avons été élus pour la première fois nous avons fait les plus importants investissements dans l'infrastructure dans l'histoire de notre pays et nous avons fait ces investissements en baissant les taxes et les impôts et en équilibrant le budget.

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Since we were first elected, we have been making the largest infrastructure investments ever in the history of this country and we have made these investments while lowering taxes and balancing the budget. We've lowered taxes for families, individuals and businesses and we are committed to keeping those taxes low.

We invest in infrastructure for three reasons: First, smart, well-designed infrastructure makes life safer and better for Canadians and for Canadian families. Second, infrastructure projects give Canada a strategic advantage in an increasingly competitive world. And finally, these projects generate tens of thousands of new, well-paying jobs for hard-working citizens.

There are many large-scale infrastructure projects being planned right now, right here in British Columbia. The Evergreen Line, the proposed liquefied natural gas facility, the Site C Dam and of course replacement ships for the Canadian Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Navy which will be built in Seaspan's newly transformed and modernized Vancouver shipyard. Those are just a few of the things.

What we must do now is train Canadians to fill those jobs.

Compétences Canada prévoit que nous aurons besoin d'un million de travailleurs qualifiés additionnels d'ici 2020.

Skills Canada predicts that we are going to need one million additional skilled workers by 2020. This, ladies and gentlemen, is the reason we're here today.

Malgré l'incertitude ailleurs dans l'économie mondiale, l'économie du Canada est vigoureuse et il y a plus de Canadiens et Canadiennes qui travaillent aujourd'hui que jamais auparavant.

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Despite the global uncertainty elsewhere, the uncertainty elsewhere in the global economy, Canada's economy is strong and there are more Canadians working today than ever before.

Pourtant, nous sommes encore confrontés au chômage et au défi que représente le déséquilibre des compétences.

Yet we still say unemployment and the challenge of a skills mismatch. Too many people without jobs and too many jobs without people. Fortunately there is something we can do about it.

L'une des solutions à ce problème réside en l'apprentissage.

One of the solutions to this challenge is apprenticeships, an old style of training for today's in demand jobs.

Now you know, I have to say this. I have to... I have to say this. I don't want to talk around the issue here. For reasons that escape me, for many years, vocational education in this country had become less fashionable. Now make no mistake, a university education is a very fine thing, no matter what advancements in knowledge... but no matter what advancements in knowledge and technology universities and the business sector may bring forth, le Canada aura toujours besoin d'hommes et de femmes prêts à se servir de leurs mains et de leur tête pour créer.

Canada will always need men and women who are prepared to use their hands as well as their mind to build things, literally to build Canada's future.

Now Jason says – I'm going to quote Jason here – Jason says these are the people who shower after work rather than before. And as long as we

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need, as long as we need homes built, roads repaired or great monuments like skyscrapers and sporting arenas, as long as we need these things, we're going to need those people and lots of them.

C'est pourquoi depuis qu'il a été élu pour la première fois notre gouvernement fait la promotion de l'apprentissage.

Therefore, since we were first elected, our government has been promoting apprenticeships and we have been highlighting the benefits of a career in the trades. What too many people still do not understand is this – learning a trade is interesting, the work is rewarding, the money is good, often it is very, very good, et de la façon dont les choses se déroulent, les carrières dans les métiers spécialisés seront longues et enrichissantes.

And the way things are unfolding, trades careers will be long and they will be full.

So we have taken practical steps to reduce the barriers to learning a trade. Jason mentioned some of these. We've made accreditation easier for apprentices. We're working with the provinces to boost labour mobility and with businesses to give apprentices better training opportunities. We've introduced financial measures to reward employers who hire apprentices and a tax deduction to make purchasing tools less expensive for workers. And we are providing real direct support for students and training.

En 2007 notre gouvernement a commencé à octroyer des subventions aux apprentis.

Beginning in 2007, our government began delivering our apprenticeship grants. Our grant is given to students when they begin red seal training and another grant is given when the student completes that training. These

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grants have been tremendously popular. Just last September, in fact – a statistic – just last September at Toronto's George Brown College our government celebrated an important milestone, the delivery of our 500,000th apprenticeship grant.

Et dans le Plan d'action économique 2014 notre gouvernement a annoncé notre intention de créer le prêt canadien aux apprentis.

And in Economic Action Plan 2014 our government went one step further and announced that we would be creating the Canada Apprentice Loan. This loan will be designed to correct a long-held view of policy makers that has been frankly wrong. That is the view that only those who attend university and college should have access to Canada's student loans program.

By expanding our Canada student loans program and creating a separate category of interest-free loans for Canadians looking to learn a trade, our government intends to send a strong and clear message to Canadians, particularly young Canadians, that vocational training matters. It matters a lot.

(Applause)

In fact, it matters to the wider economy just as much as a college or university degree.

And ladies and gentlemen, Mesdames et Messieurs, je suis heureux d'annoncer aujourd'hui que le prêt canadien aux apprentis est maintenant lancé et que nous acceptons les candidatures.

I'm delighted to announce that the Canada Apprenticeship Loan is now open and it is now accepting applications across the country.

(Applause)

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And we strongly encourage Canadians, especially young Canadians, to apply for a Canada Apprentice Loan so that they will learn a trade, gain hands-on experience and build something that lasts.

Now I mentioned young Canadians in particular – I have several times – because although our young people are among the most educated in the world, and although postsecondary enrolment is at an all-time high, Canada has an above average youth unemployment rate. And so we are counting on this new program to be part of the solution to this imbalance.

Finally, I should note that while our government is making investments in apprenticeships today to build the skilled workforce of tomorrow, it's ultimately up to businesses to bring on board a greater number of apprentices. It's not right – you know, I have to say this, ladies and gentlemen – it is not right that Canada is at the top of the pack in terms of public education investments, but we are at the bottom in terms of private sector spending on skills development.

To put it in colloquial terms, business must get with the program.

Now Kathy and Peter tell me that they have had good experience getting businesses on board here, which is good, because we need the private sector to make investing in skills development a higher priority than it has been.

Seuls les efforts collectifs du gouvernement, de l'industrie et des polytechniques permettront de relever le défi que posent les compétences du Canada.

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Only the collective efforts of government, industry and polytechnics will successfully tackle Canada's skills challenges and give more Canadians the chance to work hard at work that needs doing, work that can be fulfilling and well paying for the rest of an employee's life.

Now ladies and gentlemen, let me just close with this. As you know, the beginning of January – we're not that far removed from New Year's Day – is a time when many Canadians set goals. Some even writing them down, writing down all they hope to accomplish in the year ahead.

Let me share with you our government's resolutions for 2015.

Nous équilibrerons le budget tout en maintenant un faible taux d'imposition en investissant dans les infrastructures, l'innovation et les gens et en créant des emplois.

We're going to balance the budget while keeping taxes down for hard-working Canadians, Canadian families and Canadian businesses. We're going to continue investing in critical infrastructure projects and innovative products, and we will continue supporting the men and women who will turn these projects from dreams into reality. And we will continue to create even more good jobs and opportunities for all Canadians.

Those are our resolutions, our goals for the year 2015 and beyond.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

(Applause)

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