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PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH IN HALIFAX

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(APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you, Peter, for that kind introduction, for the great work you're doing for the Canadian Armed Forces, and also, I'd be remiss if I didn't use the opportunity publicly to congratulate you on your recent marriage. (APPLAUSE)

Greetings as well to my colleagues that are here today. First of all, all the way from New Brunswick, the Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, please welcome the Honourable Bernard Valcourt. (APPLAUSE) Our Members of Parliament, the Member of Parliament for West Nova, Greg Kerr. (APPLAUSE) Member of Parliament for South Shore-St. Margaret's, Gerald Keddy. (APPLAUSE) And Member of Parliament for Cumberland-Colchester, Scott Armstrong. (APPLAUSE) As well, thanks to our hosts, Jim Irving, Steve Durell, and of course, the whole team here at Irving Shipbuilding.

We're gathered today in these historic shipyards to launch a new era in the life of this industry, to build on a great tradition, one that goes back more than 200 years, one that predates even the war of 1812, whose

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anniversary we're commemorating this year. Of course, in those days Halifax was already a major naval base. In fact, the Royal Navy was so critical to the local economy that in 1815, when there finally was peace both here in North America, and back in Europe, Halifax had its first taste of shipbuilding's boom and bust cycle. Sadly, it's a cycle that's been repeated many times since. In just a moment, I'll talk about this government's plan.

Notre plan assurera trois décennies de stabilité pour les constructeurs navals de partout au pays, ainsi que pour fournir à la prochaine génération de personnel naval canadien de l'équipement essentiel.

Our plan will provide three decades of stability for shipbuilders right across this country, not to mention, giving vital equipment to the next generation of this country's naval personnel. But first, let me be clear about why this agreement, this umbrella agreement is being announced here with Irving Shipbuilding. It's because the company won the bid fair and square, on its own merits, without any political intervention. (APPLAUSE) If you've read the papers, you know that some politicians, including the national leader of the NDP, didn't want an open competition, and I understand that it's always tempting to play politics with these big projects. But playing politics with military planning is exactly what gives us the boom and bust periods that are all too familiar to this industry and to this region. And of course, this is

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also how our navy ends up with ships nearly 40 years old, some that should have been replaced years ago.

C'est pourquoi ce gouvernement, dans le cadre de la stratégie nationale d'approvisionnement en matière de construction navale, a élaboré un processus d'évaluation indépendante. En fait, pour ces contrats, nous avons lancé le processus d'appels d'offres le plus ouvert, équitable et transparent jamais tenu jusqu'à ce jour.

That's why this government, under our national shipbuilding procurement strategy designed a hands off evaluation process. In fact, for the shipbuilding contracts, we launched the most open, fair and transparent competition ever held. We made sure everyone understood the rules, actually participated in developing the rules. Lobbyists were told to stay away. Slick advertising campaigns were ignored by the judges. And then the bids were evaluated on merit, and merit alone. As your Minister, Peter MacKay, always said, he always said just one thing. He said, "Just give us a process that is fair, that is above politics, and we here in Atlantic Canada will be successful." (APPLAUSE) And I'm proud to look each and every shipbuilder in the eye and say that merit and merit alone, that is why this shipyard won the contract. (APPLAUSE)

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And when the next generation of Royal Canadian Navy warships, all of the latest design and capabilities, start coming off of your slipways, you will be building on a proud history. Halifax shipbuilders have always taken the lead in maritime technology. They did so in 1889 when these yards were first opened as the Halifax graving dock, and the golden age of sail was giving way to steamships built of iron and steel. They did so again during the First World War, as Halifax faced the challenge of quickly rebuilding these yards after the explosion of 1917. During the Second World War, to relieve the pressure on beleaguered British shipbuilders, Nova Scotians began turning out major warships, such as the famous Tribal class, the first all-Canadian built destroyers. Then in the 1950s, as Canada assumed its role in NATO, here were built two of the St. Laurent class destroyers; not only Canadian built, but Canadian designed. Remarkable vessels for their day, sailors nicknamed them the Cadillacs. Why? Because they were the best. And Canadians justly took pride in them.

And so through the decades it followed that Halifax shipyards modernized repeatedly to keep up with the times. Sadly, governments didn't keep pace. Since the construction of the Kingston class ships in the 1990s, this community and many other shipbuilding communities across the country have been experiencing the worst of the boom and bust

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cycle. An uneven flow of orders means that yards are busy for a time, become highly efficient, but then must reduce operations or close altogether for lack of work, and everybody suffers. Canada loses a vital strategic asset when that happens. Skilled men and women lose well-paid work. Those who move... Those who can, move. And once those skills are effectively lost, they are often lost for good. Communities gutted in this way can take years to recover. That's just bad; it's bad all around, bad for the communities and industry, bad for the navy, bad for Canada. Therefore, this time our government has launched the long-term strategic National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy. Under the umbrella agreement that we're announcing today, Irving Shipyards has become a partner of the government of Canada to build ships for the Royal Canadian Navy over the next 30 years. (APPLAUSE) This includes both the Arctic offshore patrol ships, and the new Canadian surface combatants. Later today in Vancouver, we will announce a similar agreement with Seaspan, where seven non-combat vessels are to be built, including a massive new icebreaker, the John G. Diefenbaker. And that's not all.

De plus, 116 autres petits navires seront construits. Les autres constructeurs navals canadiens auront l'occasion de soumissionner pour ces contrats.

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There is also some 116 additional smaller ships to be built. The rest of Canada's shipbuilders will have an opportunity to bid on those contracts. And in due time, the regular maintenance, life extension, refit and repair work for these ships will be open for bids. Our national strategy for shipbuilding is the largest single hardware investment ever undertaken by the government of Canada. How large?

La stratégie de notre gouvernement créera au pays quelques 75 millions d'heures/personnes de travail partout au pays pendant 30 ans.

Our government's shipbuilding strategy will create across the country over its duration some 75 million man hours of work. The Maritime provinces' share of this vast shipbuilding exercise will mean at peak production some eleven and a half thousand direct jobs, jobs that mean economic prosperity for Nova Scotia, and growth for all the Atlantic provinces for three decades. Will this stop the flow of young people out of Atlantic Canada? Yes, it will. Will there be opportunities for those who have already left and wish to return? Yes, there will. As there will be in other projects, such as the Lower Churchill. We understand the potential of this region. There is a once in a lifetime opportunity to generate long-term economic growth here in Atlantic Canada. Our government is working hard with you to make it happen.

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Now, let me just conclude by saying that I am confident you will build the best combat ships this country has ever seen. You will build them with pride, just like your predecessors. You will set new standards for innovation and excellence in shipbuilding with Canadian designs, and you will equip our naval personnel with the quality vessels they need wherever our flag waves, in the Arctic or in the tropics, whether to bring aid or to stand up for what is right. So this is a great day not only for Irving Shipyards, but for the Royal Canadian Navy, and of course, for Canada. Once again, félicitations, congratulations, everybody. (APPLAUSE)

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