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PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN VANCOUVER

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(APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: The Prime Minister will now take a few questions from the media. When I say your name, please make your way to the microphone, the gentleman with his hand up there. We'll begin with Gord Huckstra with Sun TV.

REPORTER: A recent decision with the two ladies who were not granted a divorce, does that mean that the government is thinking about rolling back on its same-sex marriage policy?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): No, the question is no. As I say, we're not going to reopen that particular issue. The Minister of Justice... This is a complicated case, and the Minister of Justice, I think, has put out a statement clarifying the government's position on that.

MODERATOR: Ian Bailey, Globe and Mail.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, speaking to you as sort of the chief executive, I know that the Minister has spoken on this, but does the government consider same-sex marriages of non-citizens to be legal or not?

UNIDENTIFIED: (Yelling)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: The government... the law recognizes same-sex marriage in Canada, and the government is not going to reopen that issue.

MODERATOR: Maybe on to another topic with Eric Chan, with Ming Pao. Eric.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Sorry, maybe we'll just wait to get a microphone....

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MODERATOR: You're going to have to use a mic.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: ...for you so I can hear you.

MODERATOR: Come on up. In the meantime, we'll move on to Carla Wilson with the Times Columnist. Carla.

REPORTER: Thanks. I've got a shipbuilding question. I wanted to... (CHEERING, APPLAUSE) Given how happy everyone seems to be with the results of the process between the public service and the hands off political situation, I'm wondering if this is going to be a template for future procurement programs.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, as I said earlier today, I certainly hope so. I mean, this government, since we've come to office, we have tried, and I think we have a pretty good record of making sure our major procurements are free of political interference. This is obviously the biggest single example of that, and is really unprecedented, because as you know in the past, particularly in this industry, these decisions tended to be highly politicized. So that is what we want to do generally. Obviously what's unique about this particular situation and this particular industry is the scale of the purchase, the unique nature of this industry, and the tendency of this industry over time to have boom and bust cycles. What the government is trying to do here in having a long-term procurement strategy is not just insure a good hands off process and competitive... a good competition for the use of taxpayer dollars, but also to make sure we work with the industry to build capacity in the long term, so the industry becomes strong and stays strong over the long haul. So that's why this is so important an initiative, but you can rest assured. You know, I... I, as you know, spent a long time in politics, and one of

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the things that first got me involved in politics was the very politicized procurement decisions that were made that were often of great disadvantage to this part of the country, and we will always insure as a government that decisions like this procurement decisions are not political. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: We'll go back to Eric Chan with Ming Pao.

REPORTER: Hi, Prime Minister. Last time when you visit China, the business community was hoping the two countries can sign the investment protection agreement, and this time you think there is good news on this agreement?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: We have been negotiating a foreign investment protection and promotion agreement with the government of China for some time. We have not yet arrived at a... we'd like to get one, but we have not yet arrived at a suitable agreement. We are in that... in that boat, we're frankly in line with a number of other countries. I think China has yet to conclude major agreements along those lines, but we will continue to work with our Chinese partners and try and get that agreement, which I think would be beneficial to both countries. Chinese investment, as you know, is increasingly important in some sectors of Canada, and part of this country's growth strategy, particularly the growth strategy here in Western Canada is to make sure that we invest and that we fully exploit the economic opportunities that we have in China in the long term.

MODERATOR: James Roberts, CBC TV.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, on another very big economic project that will affect many British Columbians, what efforts has

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your government or your office made to convince the BC government to go ahead with the Northern Gateway project?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, first of all, as you know, the... the government, I have not made it the government's business to back or not back a specific project. What I have said is it is in the vital interests of this country that we be able to fully trade with the growing powers of Asia, the growing economic powers of Asia, and that includes having Asian markets, more diversified markets for our energy exports. Now, as you know, there's a project proponent. That proponent is going through a process, and ultimately the process will reach a decision. What this government's responsibility is is to ensure that processes are thorough, but that they also timely and that we reach a decision in a reasonable amount of time, and that's a responsibility that this government takes very seriously. In terms of British Columbia, we've had only very preliminary discussions. British Columbia will have to make its own decisions on some of its particular elements of this.

MODERATOR: Catherine Chan, OMNI TV.

REPORTER: Hi, Prime Minister. A lot of people in the Chinese community, they have hopes that this time in a visit in February you will reach an agreement on oil sands and natural gas. And I'm just wondering while you're hoping to reach these kind of agreements, will you also raise issues regarding human rights or justice in China, and are you worried this will jeopardize the chances of reaching these agreements?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, in terms of energy cooperation, we hope for greater energy cooperation with China in the years to come. One of the reasons I'm so enthusiastic about potentially selling more of our energy products to Asia is I think there's a tremendous demand in

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Asia, and I'm quite sure that China and other countries would love to be able to buy some of those projects. I think right now that, you know, the barrier's not on the Chinese side, it's on our side. It's actually making sure some of these projects get done, we have the capacity to take things to market. The Chinese are already investing in our energy sector because of their interests in that sector. Look, I am confident.... when this government first came to office, as you'll recall, we were very clear that when we approached all countries in the world, including big, important countries like China, that we would never just check our values at the door, that issues of human rights and democracy are important. They're part of our relationship with any country. People said you could not raise both with the Chinese. We have raised these issues with the Chinese, and at the same time, we've seen our economic and trade relationships grow, so we will continue to deal with the Chinese on all of the range of issues that are important to Canadians. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: Caroline Morneau, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE : Oui, Monsieur le Premier ministre, en français. J'aimerais connaître les prochaines étapes. Donc aujourd'hui on parle de l'entente, mais quelles sont les prochaines étapes d'ici le début de la construction?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Pour cette entente, dans quelques semaines on va réaliser, finaliser l'entente légale, le texte légal de l'entente. Après ça, on va commencer le processus de faire des contrats sur des navires individuels. C'est un processus un peu moins compliqué que la situation dans l'Atlantique, à Irving, parce que ces bateaux ont beaucoup moins de questions de design que dans ces cas. Alors dans la prochaine année, le processus va poursuivre très rapidement. Je connais que déjà la compagnie

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ici investit dans des facilités. Il cherche des travailleurs. Et dans un peu plus d'un an, on va commencer la construction. Ça va se passer très rapidement.

Maybe I'll just answer that in English as well. It was a good question, what happens next? In the next few weeks we'll be finalizing the legal text of our agreement in principle, our umbrella agreement that we're announcing here today. Then basically we'll start the process of contracting individual ships. So this is going to unfold very rapidly. Within a year or so, you'll start construction, and I know that the company here is already making investments. It's already looking for workers, so things will move quite quickly. Things will move more quickly than in the East Coast situation, because there, there are much more complex design issues with some of the boats. So it will be a slower process, but here we will be moving quite rapidly.

MODERATOR: Thanks very much, everyone. Merci beaucoup. (APPLAUSE)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Great, thanks.

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