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**P.M. MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN INUVIK, NWT**

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mr. Leaf. As you said the Prime Minister will take some questions from the media. When I call your name if you can please make your way to the microphone which is on your right. We'll start with Elizabeth McKinnon, from CBC North, please.

ELIZABETH MCKINNON (CBC North): Mr. Prime Minister, why are you building the highway here when oil and gas exploration is happening now in the Sahtu?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER (Canadian Prime Minister): Well, you know, as I said, this was discussed, been discussed several years beginning with the previous government and this was the immediate priority. And as I say, it is ... it is completion of really a historic dream and something I think that is in the... not just in the interest of the Northwest Territories but in the wider interests of Canada to have that road link to all three oceans.

So that's why we've chosen this particular project and I'm pleased that the Government of the Northwest Territories is ... has contributed financially, as have others to this project.

Look, in terms of other highway needs, we realize there are other highway needs and demands in the Territories that could certainly help open up the possibilities of a kind of resource development that you mentioned. But I'll just say for today one highway at a time.

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MODERATOR: We're going to continue with Nick Crozier, from APTN.

NICK CROZIER (APTN): Yeah, I was just wondering how you respond to criticisms that you've pulled back from your initial enthusiasm in the north. Is there any forward movement on an adequate search and rescue infrastructure in the Northwest Passage and a northern university?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: There has certainly been no pulling back, on the contrary. You know, I think I can say with... with very little dispute that no government has put as much resources and has started as many projects in this part of the country as the present conservative government of Canada.

You know, we're talking about, you know, just talk about infrastructure, for example. You know, we've... obviously here we're doing this historic project. We did the big Mayo B Hydroelectric expansion in the Yukon Territory. In Nunavut, we have through successive budgets provided literally hundreds of millions of unprecedented funding in the housing area.

Let me just mention a couple of other things. I mean, there are many projects that are under way and are coming... and are coming to completion or moving ahead quite rapidly. This highway, I'm going to mention a couple of them, that these are just in the last couple of years. This highway, the devolution agreement. We have now signed a historic devolution agreement with the Government of the Northwest Territories that is going to come into effect April 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. So that is very soon.

(applause)

We completed this past fall the Pangnirtung Small Craft Harbour, Nunavut's first commercial fishing harbour is now in place and now

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operating. The Arctic training centre. This is part of the big military infrastructure we're opening. The Arctic training centre in Resolute Bay opened its doors in 2013, as we promised earlier on in our mandate. The Canadian Rangers. This is an important investment in job creation and life experience and security in every community in the north. The Rangers now have 5,000 members, a significant increase in size, as we promised in 2007. The Canadian High Arctic Research Station in Cambridge Bay, construction's beginning this year and is on track for opening in 2017.

I could tell you, I could go on a very long time but these are some very major projects. So look, we're very proud of our record here but we are determined to move forward and we do recognize, as is implied in your question, there are many more things to do to fully realize the potential of Canada's north.

(applause)

MODERATOR: We're going to continue with Mr. Webber, from the Canadian Press.

BOB. WEBBER (Canadian Press): Mr. Prime Minister, on another infrastructure issue we've got another situation in New Brunswick where there's an oil shipped by rail emergency. I'm wondering what your government can do to ensure these kinds of incidents don't happen again and how you'll work with the private sector to ensure that, you know, this... this is not going to happen again?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Well look, whenever there is any kind of an accident or derailment, there is an organization responsible, the Transport Safety Board. They do a thorough investigation and provide any recommendations that need... that flow from that experience and the government does act on those things. We have made significant investments in rail

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safety and in rail inspections since coming to office. We have increased those vastly. And of course we will take whatever further steps are necessary.

I mean, Canadians should not be mistaken though. You know, the rate of rail accident in Canada is actually extremely low, and is lowest right now in history.

But of course all of these incidents indicate that something went wrong and things can go better. So we will look at what the Transportation Safety Board says.

MODERATOR: Shawn Gilck, from the Inuvik Drum.

SHAWN GILCK (Inuvik Drum): Yes, hello, Mr. Prime Minister. I just want to sort of return to the first question from the CBC reporter. I don't want to push my luck with four years of construction ahead, on the Inuvik Tuk Highway, but I'm wondering, because the Mackenzie Valley Highway could be considered as important to the linking the whole Northwest Territories together, whether the same enthusiasm is going to hold in place when Inuvik Tuk is done and that one's ready to start?

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: As I said I know there are lots of needs and demands and look, the concept of year-round transportation all the way down the Mackenzie Valley, you know, potentially if you think about it as a national project, something that would run ultimately all the way from the American border, all the way through right up to Tuktoyaktuk for that direction is also a tremendously exciting prospect. But as I say, we have \$300 million these two level of governments are spending to move this project forward. And we'll take one project at a time.

MODERATOR: Et on va terminer avec Caroline Nepton-Hotte, de Radio-Canada.

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CAROLINE NEPTON-HOTTE (Radio-Canada): Bonjour, Monsieur le Premier ministre. J'aimerais savoir, c'est une question concernant l'ex ministre Chuck Strahl. Il siège présentement à un comité de surveillance et de sécurité qui fait aussi du lobby pour l'entreprise Enbridge. Donc on s'en va dans les infrastructures un peu plus au sud. Est-ce qu'il n'y a pas de danger de conflit d'intérêt ou apparence de conflit d'intérêt?

TRÈS HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER: M. Strahl est en train de consulter le commissaire de l'éthique pour assurer qu'il n'y aura pas de conflit d'intérêt. Il est un homme d'intégrité et je suis bien certain qu'il va assurer qu'il peut faire... C'est un rôle, un rôle que vous venez de mentionner est un rôle au niveau provincial. Évidemment au niveau fédéral il travaille dans un dossier tout à fait... tout à fait différent. Mais M. Strahl est en train de consulter le commissaire à l'éthique.

ANIMATEUR : Merci beaucoup.

TRÈS HONORABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Merci.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, everyone.

RT. HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER: Thanks, everybody.

(applause)

WORDS: 1265

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