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**PRIME MINISTER'S MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN ST. STEPHEN, NB**

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MODERATOR: We have a few questions today for the Prime Minister. We'll start with Cathy (inaudible) with the (Inaudible) Courier. You'll have to find the mic over there. Cathy? Behind you.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, on December the 18<sup>th</sup> just last month, a Calais LNG filed an application with the United States Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to construct and operate a terminal in Calais with construction to be completed in 2014. Would you please give us your position on whether Canada will allow LNG tankers through Head Harbour Passage and Passamaquoddy Bay?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well, I think as you know, our position on this, there are things from time to time on which we don't agree with our American friends. Our position is that these are sovereign Canadian waters. We've been opposed to tanker traffic through this passage, and we continue to make representations to the United States government at the highest levels on this.

MODERATOR: All right, thank you. Next we have Charles-Antoine Gagnon with L'Acadie Nouvelle.

JOURNALISTE : Bonjour. Il y a un poste vacant au Sénat pour le Nouveau-Brunswick. Je me demandais si vous aviez l'intention de nommer quelqu'un rapidement et si c'est possible d'avoir un nom aujourd'hui. (RIRES)

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: J'ai indiqué à plusieurs reprises que nous avons l'intention de nommer des nouveaux sénateurs. C'est inacceptable qu'une chambre inélue (sic) bloque des mesures importantes du

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gouvernement, surtout des mesures contre la criminalité, et évidemment je ferais...je prendrai ces décisions dans un proche avenir, mais pas aujourd'hui.

So I will just repeat that. As you know, we've been clear that we do intend to name vacancies to the Senate. It remains, in our judgement, unacceptable that the unelected Liberal majority in the Senate continues to block measures that are strongly supported by the Canadian people, including our measures against criminal behaviour in this country, and obviously we do intend to fill those positions, but not today. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: Next we have Rosaire l'Italien with Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: Monsieur le Premier ministre, ce serait une question au sujet de la rencontre à St-Jean un peu plus tard. C'est que vous avez dit hier à Montréal que...qu'il y aura des...qu'il y avait rien à changer dans le plan d'action du gouvernement fédéral, et que pourquoi tenir une consultation pré-budgétaire alors que les économistes disent que la récession est à peu près terminée?

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Au contraire, j'ai indiqué deux choses, que nous pensons que c'est important de continuer de livrer des mesures de stimulus. C'est un plan d'action économique avec une durée de deux ans, et nous sommes...évidemment nous sommes très proches à la deuxième année. Nous continuerons à livrer ces mesures. En même temps, nous regarderons vers l'avenir, vers une situation économique qui va commencer à changer, et j'espère qu'il va changer pour une relance économique, et nous aurons des défis à l'avenir, pas seulement de bâtir l'économie dans un nouveau monde et un monde où nous sommes bien positionnés, mais aussi dans une situation où les gouvernements à travers le

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monde et ici au Canada doivent réduire leurs déficits, et nous cherchons les idées des Canadiens à travers le pays, et moi et plusieurs autres ministres, nous avons l'intention de faire ces consultations à travers ce pays.

MODERATOR: Next we have Oliver Moore with Globe and Mail.

REPORTER: Mr. Harper, in response to today's number showing jobs are down, Mr. Ignatieff has said there is a jobs crisis in Canada, and that's why he's holding hearings on the matter starting this month. Is there a jobs crisis, and are you missing an opportunity to deal with this because the House is prorogued?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: In terms of the unemployment numbers today, obviously we're disappointed that employment is down slightly. That said, and you know, it's never good news, never acceptable when someone loses their job. That said, if you look over the past two or three months, we are seeing stabilization in our labour force. As I've said, the challenge now, as we believe we will enter a year where we'll see some recovery, is to make sure we actually get employment now going up. We've, I think, responded. I think Canadians recognize we've responded in a timely and effective manner to job losses across the country, including vastly increasing support for retraining and support through the employment insurance system for those who've been contributors, but clearly more has to be done, and as I said before, if the opposition has any particular ideas on this, we're delighted to hear them.

MODERATOR: Ok, we'll next go to Dina Bartolucci with CTV.

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REPORTER: Thank you. I'd like to know how you respond to growing public opinion against your decision to prorogue Parliament.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: You know, I'll just follow up on that and the last question. It's interesting to see, a week after we set the date for Parliament to return, the opposition now says they're going to be really mad about this when they get back from vacation on January the 25<sup>th</sup>. The fact of the matter is this: as I've said before, the government is going to take advantage of this time. We need the time to look carefully at our agenda, to continue to deliver the economic measures that are being delivered here and elsewhere across the country as part of the economic action plan. We also need time to re-examine our agenda, to prepare for the next year of Parliament, and prepare for a very different economy going forward, one that on the one hand I think we're going to start to see a recovery. We've seen stabilization in the last few months. We're going to see a recovery. We need to get policies in place to better build that recovery and to build the jobs of the future, but at the same time, to do so in an environment where governments across this country will have to begin to reduce our deficits. We've run very large deficits to cope with the extraordinary situation we've found ourselves in the past year. I think those policies have been fairly effective. I think they need to continue for a while, but we do need to think about exit strategies so that we obviously move back towards balance, but continue to build the jobs of the future in this country.

MODERATOR: Great, and last question is going to Darren Gowan of the Telegraph Journal.

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REPORTER: Hi Mr. Harper. On the LNG issue, will the government consider passing the regulation to simply ban tankers from Head Harbour Passage?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: The government will examine all of its options. Obviously our preference is to work with our American friends and try and find a resolution to this issue.

MODERATOR: Thanks very much, everyone.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah, thanks everyone.

(APPLAUSE)

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