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LISA RAITT (Minister of Labour): From Halton, please help me welcome a man who embodies all of these and who has made our country simply outstanding in the world, and in my opinion, the best place to work and to raise a family, our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper.

(applause)

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Canada's Prime Minister): Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, first of all, Lisa, for your kind introduction, your very warm introduction. Thank you also, Terence, for being our master of ceremonies, and of course thank you also for your hard work in the House of Commons on behalf of the people of Oakville.

Give them both a big hand for the work they do for this area.

(applause)

I'd like to extend my welcomes, my greetings to all of my parliamentary colleagues who have joined us today. I see we have most of the auto caucus with us. I also wish to thank our gracious host here at Ford Canada headquarters, led by Joe Hinrichs and Diane Craig. And of course greetings to all of the employees as well as to Ken Lewenza of the Canadian Autoworkers.

At Ford, you know, you have been building cars here and by extension, helping the people who depend on those vehicles here since 1953, 60 years this year. It is a very fine record, so congratulations to you on your 60th anniversary here.

(applause)

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Distinguished guests, Mesdames et Messieurs, ladies and gentlemen, I really am delighted to be back in Oakville and to be once again visiting Canada's automotive... automobile industry.

As you know, the global economic downturn presented Canada's manufacturing industry with unprecedented challenges, and in particular the auto assembly and the related parts industry, the engine of Southern Ontario's manufacturing economy was hit especially hard. For a while, it seemed, it seemed like its very existence was in real danger, but we acted –management, labour, government – we acted together and we came out of this crisis. And we did so because we knew that Canadians built some of the best vehicles in the world and Canadians also have the creativity to adapt and to find new and better ways of doing things.

Now friends, that's why we established the Automotive Innovation Fund, to help Canada's automobile industry find the efficiencies and develop the new and improved products that we need to remain globally competitive. Efficiencies such as assembly lines that can smoothly and rapidly switch between products and the technologies that make cars be safer, be easier on the environment and go farther on a tank of gas.

Our goal in creating this fund was to promote and secure more high quality manufacturing jobs for Canadian workers in this industry through innovation.

Therefore using the Automotive Innovation Fund we've invested in proven industry high performers such as Ford whose Essex engine plant was retooled to boost efficiency through greater flexibility and output; Toyota that lowered fuel consumption on its Rav 4; Linamar that developed more fuel-efficient power trains and lighter stronger alloys; and Magnum,

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which has been working on lighter, more advanced materials to give better mileage to customers.

And so we now have a good story to tell. Instead of layoffs, we've seen jobs saved; instead of seeing assembly plants close their doors, shifts have been added. And Canada's auto sector once collapsing is now more innovative, more agile and more competitive than ever before.

In fact, it looks as if we've just gone through a record, well almost a record year, very close to a record year for vehicle sales in 2012.

(applause)

I'll have more to say about that in a moment.

Mesdames et Messieurs, la remontée de notre industrie automobile est l'une des plus grandes réussites économiques et industrielles du Canada depuis cinq ans.

In other words, remember this. The rebound of our auto sector in this country is one of Canada's biggest economic and industrial success stories of the last five years. So far, so good.

However, as I know many of you have heard me say many times, the global economy remains troubled. That is the backdrop. Now, I know with some satisfaction that the Canadian economy did create 40,000 new jobs in December. That's over 900,000 net new jobs since the end of the recession. However we are not out of the woods, not out of the woods globally. Our American neighbours and our European friends continue to struggle, and so we remain focused on reinforcing success.

And that of course applies to Canada's automotive sector, and indeed to our entire manufacturing industry.

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Donc, je suis très heureux aujourd'hui d'annoncer que notre gouvernement fera un autre important investissement sur cinq ans dans le Fonds d'innovation pour le secteur d'automobile.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce today that our government will make another significant five-year investment in the Automotive Innovation Fund.

(applause)

Now, I said I wanted to talk a little bit about the sales. Sales of Canadian-made vehicles have been very, very strong during the last year. But what is really interesting is where these cars are actually being sold. Let me give you just a couple of examples. Ford Canada this year exported 6,000 of its Edge model to China. It sent another 4,000 to Brazil.

So while I know that we as Canadians sometimes wring our hands about competition from lower cost overseas producers, what I can tell you is this: Canadian made automobiles, the cars you build right here in Oakville are being bought by our global competitors. We can sell and we are selling right into their back yards.

(applause)

Here's another thing. The record vehicle sales I'm speaking of are largely driven in this country by prosperity in those regions where resource development is booming, especially Saskatchewan, Alberta and in particular, the oil sands.

Nous savons que la solidité du secteur des ressources contribue à créer de bons emplois dans le secteur de la fabrication et des endroits comme St. Catharines, Saguenay et ici même à Oakville.

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So let us have no doubts about this, friends. A strong resource sector in the west means high quality manufacturing jobs in the east in places such as St. Catharines, Saguenay and here, in Oakville. That is how Canada works, my friends. The success of one sector, of one province, of one region becomes the good fortune for all of us.

(applause)

Permettez-moi d'ajouter, Mesdames et Messieurs, que cet investissement est juste l'une des actions prises par notre gouvernement pour créer de bons emplois, stimuler la croissance et d'assurer une prospérité durable pour tous les Canadiens et Canadiennes aux quatre coins du pays.

Ladies and gentlemen, you have been very generous with your time, with your attention. So let me just conclude by saying this: A strong automobile sector is just one part of our government's plan for a strong manufacturing industry and for jobs, growth and long-term prosperity for all Canadians. There is new hope in this industry, thanks to the willingness of all parties to work together.

As our car makers, you have shown that you're tough, resilient and able to sell around the world and our government is always willing to invest in a winning team.

So good luck. Merci beaucoup and may you all have another productive and prosperous new year.

(applause)

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