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PRIME MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT AND PRESS CONFERENCE
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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Nice to see all of you here. Greetings of course to Premier MacDonald and to Member of Parliament for West Nova, Greg Kerr, a great addition to our caucus. Delighted to have you here. (APPLAUSE) Should also introduce from our Senate side, we have Senators Oliver and Comeau are also with us today. Nice to have you. (APPLAUSE) And let me introduce two provincial ministers. We have Brooke Taylor and David Morse. (APPLAUSE) And welcome to everyone.

It is a great pleasure for me to be back in the beautiful Annapolis Valley. Let me begin by recalling one of my fondest memories of Nova Scotia from a visit I made through this area in the summer of 2005. We were headed down to the Annapolis Basin Conference Centre to visit the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and to meet with some of the fine young sea cadets training there. As we drove through the area southwest on highway 101, I couldn't help but think of the words of the late country music legend Hank Snow, and I won't sing them. I'll just read them. (LAUGHTER) "If God came here on Earth with us and asked if he could rest, I'd take him to my Nova Scotian home, the place I love best." (APPLAUSE) Now, I have to tell you, it was warmer and greener on that day in 2005. And while the province has changed a great deal since those words were first sung more than 40 years ago, the natural beauty and down-home hospitality that inspired them haven't changed a bit, so I'd like to thank all of you for welcoming me once again so warmly today. Mesdames et messieurs...go ahead. (APPLAUSE)

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Mesdames et messieurs, il y a un peu plus d'un mois, notre gouvernement a présenté un des budgets les plus importants de notre histoire.

Ladies and gentlemen, a little over a month ago our government brought forward one of the most important budgets in our history. Canada's economic action plan, the most comprehensive stimulus package in Canadian history, tackles our short-term needs in order to meet this country's long-term goals. One key part of stimulus...of the stimulus plan is to speed up construction on the bridges, highways and other essential infrastructure that link us together and connect us to the world. By doing this, we can create jobs for Canadians today when they are most needed while also paving the way to future economic growth and prosperity. All across Canada, our government is working with the provinces to cut red tape and get these much-needed projects up and running, which brings us to the reason we are here today.

En partenariat avec le Premier ministre MacDonald et le gouvernement de la Nouvelle-Écosse, notre gouvernement va accélérer les améliorations à la ligne de transport vital de la Vallée de l'Annapolis, l'autoroute 101. Les travaux vont bientôt commencer sur des voies de dépassement essentielles de Colbrook à Kingston. Ce projet... something back there? Ok. Ce projet va créer des emplois bien payés pour les citoyens de la Nouvelle-Écosse, accélérer le transport est-ouest des biens dans toute la province, et améliorer considérablement la sécurité des camionneurs et des voyageurs.

In partnership with Premier MacDonald and the government of Nova Scotia, I'm pleased to announce that our government will accelerate upgrades to the Annapolis Valley's transportation lifeline, highway

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101. (APPLAUSE) And as Greg tells me, we will be focusing work on something that has been demanded for a long time, much-needed passing lanes from Colbrook to Kingston. (APPLAUSE) This project will create well-paying jobs for Nova Scotians, will speed the east-west flow of goods throughout the province and dramatically improve safety for truckers and travellers alike. I'd like to thank Premier MacDonald for his vital role in making today's announcement a reality. This initiative is a testament to the quick action that can be achieved when governments work together. (APPLAUSE) It is also a continuing example of this Premier's commitment to the people of Nova Scotia and indeed to Canada itself. (APPLAUSE)

The Premier will share further details with you in a moment. But I want to make clear once again that today's announcement isn't simply about highway upgrades or the jobs they will create. It is more fundamentally about where we are heading as a country. As the world struggles with the effects of the global recession, we as Canadians are looking ahead. We are using our strong balance sheets to aggressively fund initiatives during this recession in communities all across this country, initiatives which will generate economic growth for many years to come.

Au cours des prochaines semaines, notre gouvernement va faire d'autres annonces dans le cadre de notre plan d'action économique. Notre objectif est de créer des emplois et des stimuler l'économie dans toutes les régions du pays maintenant et de s'assurer que notre pays sort de la crise plus fort que jamais.

While the challenges Canada face may be great...excuse me, let me say that again. While the challenges Canada faces may be great, so are this country's strengths, and greater yet is our resolve to move ahead. By

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looking forward today and investing in key infrastructure like highways, we are seizing the opportunities that will help get us through these tough times and ensure that our country emerges stronger than ever. Merci beaucoup, thank you. (APPLAUSE) Oh, you can take over.

RODNEY MACDONALD (Premier of Nova Scotia):
(SPEECH)

DIMITRI SOUDAS (Press Secretary to the Prime Minister): We'll start with Lane Ferguson, CTV. Everybody could maybe come to the front.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, while a lot of people in this room here will appreciate this announcement, here in Nova Scotia, we've actually seen more fatalities on highway 103 than on the 101 in recent years. So in terms of safety, a lot of people would argue that the investment should have been on the other highway. What do you say to that?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, I say very simply that investing in highway 101 doesn't preclude other potential investments with the province, and we are having good discussions with the province on other priorities. I won't comment on any future announcements, but I think this is an important announcement for today, but look, we're having good discussions. We know there are many priorities across the province, and we will be looking at making other important investments.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Tom Murphy, CBC.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, a question about Afghanistan. Your Defence Minister has been using the term "reconfiguration". I'm wondering what that means for the troops on the ground in Afghanistan going forward. And also, do you intend to appoint a

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special envoy to Afghanistan, and if you could answer in French and English (inaudible).

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, just to reiterate, you know, we passed an important motion last year in the Parliament of Canada to extend the Afghan mission by an additional actually close to four years. What we did when we passed that motion is we made very clear that the mission was evolving, that we were concentrating more and more of our efforts on the military side, on the training of the Afghan forces, so they could take more responsibility for their own security, and we were seeking better civilian military cooperation with a transition to greater emphasis on reconstruction, development and governance. So that's what we've been doing. We've had an approach that is what we called 3D from day one, tried to combine defence, diplomacy and development, but obviously we're in a new phase to put a greater emphasis on making the transition we want to make in 2011. Let me just, you know, remind people of one of the first things...or tell people a little story about one of the first things I was told by the first Canadian troops I met on my first trip to Afghanistan. And what they said to me is, "We are here, Prime Minister, and we understand. We are not here to run Afghanistan. We are here to provide enough security and make a transition so that we can give this country back to the Afghans themselves." That's... (APPLAUSE) And that's what we're doing, obviously working with our NATO allies. As you know, the Americans in particular are putting a great deal more troops in the sector we are in. That will obviously be another part of the reconfiguration of our efforts in Kandahar province. In terms of a special envoy, you know, we look at all suggestions. This was a suggestion made by the...by the...Manley panel, by the bipartisan panel that was chaired

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by former Deputy Prime Minister John Manley. We've taken a somewhat different tact. We have escalated our diplomatic presence, particularly in Afghanistan under our ambassador there, Ron Hoffman. We have a lot of confidence as well in the high commissioner we have in Pakistan, and we've appointed David Mulroney as a senior deputy minister responsible for the overall coordination of our Afghan policy in that region. We haven't named him as an envoy, but he does have some similar function. So we're in a little bit of a different position than some of the other countries. We'll continue to look at whatever option's most viable. But you know, when I read in the paper or hear the opposition say, you know, the Americans or the British or whatever have done this in the region, we have to remember that we are in a different position in the region. We have, first of all, I think a lot more diplomatic presence on the ground now where we're at in Kandahar. We have a diplomatic presence in Iran that a lot of our allies do not have in the region. So we're in somewhat of a different situation. Of course while we'll look at all of these suggestions, we in Canada always make our own foreign policies.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: On va continuer avec Jean Albermer, Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE: Bonjour Monsieur Harper. Je serais le seul à m'exprimer pour les réseaux francophones, et j'aurais deux questions à vous poser. La serait de revenir sur l'Afghanistan en expliquant ce que veut dire "reconfigurer", et d'autre part, qu'est-ce que feront nos soldats s'ils ne font pas de missions de combat? Et ma deuxième question serait sur les trois milliards du fonds d'urgence pour lequel on demande des détails. Avez-vous des détails à nous donner? (Inaudible).

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TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Deux questions là. Pour la mission en Afghanistan, on devrait être clair: nos soldats en Afghanistan font encore une mission de combat à Kandahar. Ça continue. Évidemment, l'emphase devient de plus en plus l'entraînement des soldats afghans pour que...pour qu'ils puissent assumer leurs responsabilités à la fin de notre mission militaire à la fin de 2011. Aussi, nous faisons dans une coordination améliorée entre notre militaire et nos diplomates et nos travailleurs humanitaires, nous faisons des efforts pour mieux intégrer les actions militaires et civiles de notre mission en Afghanistan, aussi pour la transition à une mission plus de développement à la fin de 2011.

Pour la question des 3 milliards \$, notre position est claire: nous...par exemple, dans cette annonce aujourd'hui, nous accélérons les fonds de Chantiers Canada, mais nous avons l'intention de dépenser plus que des fonds de Chantiers Canada. Nous avons des programmes d'infrastructure limités pour deux ans dans le budget actuel. Nous voulons que ces fonds coulent pendant cette saison de construction, même au printemps dans certains cas. Nous sommes en négociations avec les provinces, et nous avons besoin pour de flexibilité de ces 3 milliards \$ pour assurer que ces fonds coulent immédiatement ce printemps. En même temps, nous faisons, nous ferons un rapport à la Chambre des communes en juin avec plus de détails des annonces de ces fonds. Mais l'opposition...l'opposition doit décider leur position. Hier le chef de l'opposition m'a critiqué pour tenter de faire avancer plus vite les fonds. Aujourd'hui Monsieur Goodale critique le gouvernement pour ne pas avoir dépensé de l'argent. Évidemment nous avons l'intention de dépenser vite, de dépenser plus et c'est la raison pour la nécessité de ces votes dans les estimés.

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DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Mary Atset, Global Television.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, I'd like to give you an opportunity to set a different tone in your answer to the deadliest highway in this province, because the families today were probably really hoping that they would hear news about twinning down in that area. What do you have to say to families today that aren't receiving that news?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you know, obviously I understand there have been some recent accidents on that highway, and obviously all levels of government, whenever we get news like that, it's terrible news, and we all understand that. It's terrible news for the families. You know, obviously we work with the province to make sure that we're addressing the projects that are most ready to go right now. This has been the priority the province and ourselves have identified immediately. Doesn't preclude other funding announcements by any means. As I said, we're working on...province is working on its capital plans and we're working on a coordinated strategy with the province, but nothing...the fact that we're making major improvements to this highway today I don't think in any way detracts from those families, and obviously we express our sympathies to anybody who's lost loved ones on any highway accident in this province.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Continue with Keith Doucet, Canadian Press.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, back to Afghanistan. You wanted to shift the emphasis to building the Afghan army and keeping to your commitment to pull out by the date. How is that done without involving the

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Taliban in any kind of discussion? You think that the Afghan army's...if we can't defeat them, as you said, how can the Afghan army defeat them?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, what I've said is that it is not realistic. I mean, we have to define what victory means in Saskatchewan. Or in...Saskatchewan! What victory means in...I don't know why I said that. No idea! (LAUGHTER) We have to...we have to define what victory means in Afghanistan. And I don't think victory realistically can mean international or western forces under NATO eliminating every last vestige of the insurgency. I just don't think that's realistic. If you look at the history of Afghanistan, you look at the nature of the insurgency, the porous border. But I think what is realistic is that we would considerably push back the insurgency, which has happened in much of the country, that we diminish the security threats significantly enough that we can kick-start much more effective effort on development and aid, and put the responsibility for day-to-day security of Afghanistan in the hands of the Afghan forces themselves. President Karzai himself, as you know, has said that part of the long-term strategy for Afghanistan is not just...it not just an aggressive response to the security, to those who are trying to destroy the constitutional and democratic order through violence, but also attempting to reach out and attempting to find political reconciliation, particularly locally where that's possible. One does not preclude the other. And I always am amused by questions I get from the opposition which seem to imply that our government or the United Nations, or NATO or even the government of Afghanistan has only two options: it's either to fight the insurgency or surrender. You know, you can actually have an aggressive stance towards the insurgency, which NATO has had, while at the same time promoting other political and governance developments that may

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help with a more peaceful solution down the road. I think you actually have to do a bit of both.

DIMITRI SOUDAS: We have time for one last question, Richard Foot, CanWest.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, you may have answered some of this in your previous answer in French. It's a question about the budget. Nova Scotia's largest newspaper, the Chronicle-Herald today endorsed your plan for a special discretionary \$3 billion fund for quick stimulus action. But they also said that the Liberals are correct in asking for details of that. So can you provide us with any specifics today about what you want to use that money for? And if you can't, why not? Why can't you tell us what you want that money for?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I've got to tell you, any time I can get an endorsement from the Chronicle-Herald, I'm going to put that one in the scrapbook. (APPLAUSE) Look, the \$3 billion in the supplementary estimates, and we've been clear about the purpose here. The \$3 billion, this is money over and above existing infrastructure program. These are the new, this relates to the new spending programs announced specifically in this budget. Those spending programs are of a two-year duration. Most of that money will lapse if it is not spent, and we want to make sure it is spent beginning this construction season. What we...and I should just mention, by the way, on this particular project today, this is an example of accelerating funds from Building Canada. We still need that Parliamentary authority to bring the new programs into place quickly, and we can't do that unless we get some authorization immediately. We're in the process of negotiating those projects under the various programs. Those projects will be announced very

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quickly, and we will be reporting to Parliament on the details of those announcements between now and June, so you know, look, it's in this government's interests to get those details out as quickly as possible. We will, but there is no excuse for an opposition that has been saying we need to deliver money more quickly, to now say we need to delay that money or say things like we need to have Parliamentary sign off on every individual project that is not realistic, it's not going to work that way. They need to do their jobs. I've said to the opposition before, you know, we didn't get from this opposition, this so-called coalition never even gave our government a pre-budget submission. Now we've got programs to deliver. Rather than trying to throw out roadblocks, they need to get out of the way and let that money flow. (APPLAUSE)

DIMITRI SOUDAS: Thank you very much, everybody.
Merci. Thank you.

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