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PM HARPER ROUNDTABLE Q & A
RICHMOND HILL

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UNIDENTIFIED: Good afternoon Prime Minister. My question is about the new security bill (inaudible). My question is: In this country do law enforcement agencies already have wide ranging powers at their disposal and could use rarely tapped provisions in other laws? So is it therefore necessary to introduce a new security bill? And what are the implications on constitutionally protected rights such as freedom of speech, religion, and association?

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): Well let me address the first part of the question directly: Is the bill necessary? The answer is absolutely yes. And if you don't mind I'm going to go through some detail on that because you mentioned, there are things in the law now. But I want to point out to you how this changes the law to actually make sure the powers are expanded and more effective.

For example, right now, there is not actually an explicit power to police officers to take down web sites. We can (inaudible) that promote terrorism or attempt terrorist recruitment. One can argue that perhaps those powers exist under some (inaudible) provisions but they are not being used because they are not explicit. So this gives these authorities the explicit right to take down web sites that do those things because it isn't being done now.

Right now there are powers on the books for security agencies with court... with approval of the court to detain... to arrest and to detain terrorism suspects who are believed to be... believed to be about... imminently about ... to be imminently involved in terrorist activities. Those

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exist on the books but the conditions for them to be used are so strict that they are rarely used. For example the recognizance condition has never been used. I actually spoke to the director of public prosecutions, who, for all intents and purposes, told me it will never be used. It's written so strictly there's no basis on which you can use it. Peace bonds have been only used in about a half-dozen cases. They were brought in (inaudible) 50 years ago. So this lowers the threshold so that the police, when they know an imminent threat is coming, will have more powers to arrest and detain. This, by the way, was an issue in the Rouleau case in St. Jean Quebec where the police were trying to obtain peace bonds but could not because of the stringency of the conditions.

Information sharing is in this legislation. It will now be the right of any one of about 17 agencies in the Government of Canada – these are police agencies, security agencies, and other agencies that will come across security information, like Immigration and Citizenship, like FINTRAC, the financial transactions center, occasionally the Coast Guard and Fisheries and Oceans. It will allow any security or police organization or other department of the Government of Canada that becomes aware of information about a terrorist threat or about terror suspects, to pass that information to other departments and agencies. I think most Canadians would be shocked to find out they can't do that now under the law. They can't... They cannot in most cases. There is a presumption in the law in the Government of Canada, long-standing, that every department and agency is a unique holder of information and has no right to share that information unless explicitly authorized by law. So this gives them that information. They can readily share that information in future. This is an important thing forward...going forward.

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What's another example I can give you? Passenger protections. Right now the passenger protect legislation allows airlines and government to refuse people boarding an aircraft if they have reason to believe the person will have... represents a terrorist threat to that aircraft - not a terrorist threat generally. This will now make it so that if we believe the person is a threat more generally they can be refused boarding. We don't have to prove specifically they are a threat to that plane. I mean these are crazy restrictions. So we are obviously widening the provision under which that can be used.

Let me think, what else? But you get what I'm talking about. These are really giving officers tools that they need. One more. There's one more. Canadian Security Intelligence Service. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, attracts and collects information on potential terrorist threats. But, today, even if they know a terrorist threat is about to be imminently undertaken, they can do nothing to actually act against it. They can only collect the information. So we are now giving them the authority, with a court... with a court's permission, to actually directly intervene and stop the terrorist threat from occurring.

So, as you say, there are these things. All exist in law now but they are dramatically inadequate for the tasks that are before us, and that's why we made the changes which we've made. I don't think any of these things, in any way, shape, or form, threaten Canadians' rights and freedoms. I think on the contrary they protect our rights and freedoms from the terrorists.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you Prime Minister. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Can I (inaudible)...?

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RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Sorry, it's very long. I normally don't (inaudible)...

UNIDENTIFIED: Very detailed. Very good.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Prime Minister, the legislation is being brought forward I guess because of the urgency of a couple of lone wolf attacks that happened recently. My question is, in your legislation there's a place where there's a provision to stop them from traveling abroad.

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah.

UNIDENTIFIED: To stop people from leaving. I would say, why not let them out and then not let them come back in? Good riddance to bad rubbish.

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah. A good question and one that I hear frequently. First of all let me just comment on the preamble to your question that we are doing this in response to the attacks in October. That's actually not true. Some of you may recall I had said before those attacks, we were coming forward with new measures. And the reason I said that it was, more frankly, a response to the growth of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Why is that important? Because with the growth of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, our security agencies are becoming aware of a vastly growing number of plots against this country. So the reason we're not... was not because of a couple of things that happened but because we know that a hell of a lot more is coming down the pike at us and we are very concerned about it. So we're trying to get out in front of the various plots and conspiracies and plans that the terrorist organizations, ISIL and others, have.

On your question, your direct question, especially... Some have pointed out that, you know, given the attack in Quebec, in St. Jean,

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where Rouleau, you know, he engaged in the attack against Warrant Officer Vincent after he was refused the ability to leave the country to engage in terrorist training. So, some would say, geez if you had just let him leave that would never have happened. That's a response to that incident. But think about Charlie Hebdo in Paris. There is the other case. They were allowed to leave. A couple of guys who were radicals, not really knowing what they were doing but threatening people, were allowed to leave. Came back as trained military execution personnel. So, yeah, in the short-term you let a guy leave, he is less of a threat here, but the risk is he will come back as a lot bigger threat than he ever was when he was in Canada. He'll get trained. He'll get to talk to commanders who will give him a mission and how to execute it. And that is a lot bigger threat than the two things we faced in October.

So while I have some sympathy for what you're saying I think it is still in all of our interests and the international community to stop these people before they can travel and before they can increase their capabilities.

MODERATOR: (Inaudible) from *South Asian Midweek*.

UNIDENTIFIED (*South Asian Midweek* Reporter): Prime Minister your government did set up an inquiry regarding Air India and there were certain recommendations from that inquiry. What does the government think about those recommendations of the Air India inquiry?

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Well, the government responded... That's some time ago now that the government responded to the Air India inquiry. We undertook a number of steps back then. The passenger protect program was instituted and is now being expanded, and some of that is in response to, you know, we've also set up an organization to really study the

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phenomenon of terrorism. I forget the name of it off the top of my head but that was part of our response. So, you know it was... Look, I could... I don't have it in front of me. We could get you the formal response at the time. We responded to most of the recommendations that the Major inquiry made. There were a couple where we did not... did not pursue the recommendations, or didn't pursue them in the way they were... that Justice Major put them. He advocated that we create essentially what was called a national security coordinator who would... was... would basically... he would actually be in charge of a range of national security agencies. And our judgment was that that was getting close to the kind of Homeland Security department in the United States which we think is not the best way to go. Keeping our agencies separate and a little more focused and agile is a better way to go.

But what we did do is we enhanced the powers of my national security advisor. While he is not directly in charge of the security agencies, he is responsible for coordinating information between them and with my office. So we thought that was a better way to handle that. Justice Major also recommended a parliamentary committee, specifically dedicated to national security issues. The government already has... The House of Commons already has a public security committee that can look at some of these issues. But I think (inaudible) it was our judgment, particular the experience of the past 10 years where we've had a lot of minority governments and a lot of political parties playing games with national security issues, that putting more of that authority in Parliament was probably not going to be a good idea. In fact we've gone in the opposite direction. Organizations like SIRC, the review organization for CSIS, the RCMP Public Review Commission, the Canadian Security Establishment Commissioner's Office,

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we've gone further down the road not of partisan review of national security but of independent, expert, nonpartisan bodies that provide oversight. And I think that's actually a better route to go down. So, as I say, we could...

Actually, I do have a list... Just quickly on Air India, I do have a list of things we did. We did streamline terrorist offenses as they recommended in Bill C-2 back in 2011. We've also set up a better and more effective witness protection programs and better trial processes. That was a lot of the recommendations around John Major because it was about the... Not so much about just the terrorist incident, but the failure of the prosecution process later. So we took steps on a lot of those things. We set up FINTRAC to track terrorist financing. And, yeah, I could just go through a number of other things. But essentially we took most of those recommendations. Where we didn't take his recommendations there were specific reasons and we did (inaudible).

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Okay. (Inaudible) from Fairchild (Inaudible).

UNIDENTIFIED (Fairchild TV Reporter): (Inaudible) With the recent events impacting (inaudible) interest rate (inaudible) oil prices, what does that mean for Canada's economy in terms of job growth, (inaudible) April (inaudible) October election?

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Well, let me handle them in the order of the budget, the economy, this election. In terms of the budget, there's no doubt that a lower oil price will negatively impact the government's revenues and will restrict our fiscal flexibility. I probably would have told you six months ago we would have expected a substantial surplus this year. That

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won't be the case but we will be able to balance the budget. We will... As we promised. So, look, we made two commitments to Canadians on the budget in the last election. One was that we would, by the end of this term, barring a recession, we'd have a balanced budget. And we'd also deliver a series of tax reductions for Canadian families. And both of those things we'll realize.

In terms of the economy, look, a little harder to predict. Obviously where I'm from, Alberta, the oil and gas sector there will see negative impacts on that sector and on parts of the western economy. There's no doubt about it. On the other hand, as I've said, people in the west and in Alberta have been through these cycles before and business understands it. And the prospects for oil and gas, even in the medium-term, remain pretty good. So, you know, we'll ride that one through. It has some benefits in the rest of the economy. The lower dollar helps manufacturing. Lower gas prices help other industries, help consumers. So the effects of all this volatility, while it's destabilizing, the effects are not all negative. There's some good effects as well and we will manage... We will manage those things.

The Canadian economy will grow slower this year than it had been anticipated, but the Canadian economy will grow. We will have, post-2009, we will have our sixth consecutive year of growth. And that's frankly not very common in the western world. So we'll keep moving forward.

In terms of the election, look, it has no direct impact on the election in the sense that the election is scheduled for October 19th. There would have to be some kind of very, very significant reason for that to change. I'm not looking at changing that date. But I do think some of this puts – if I can talk politically for a minute – some of this, I would think, will put things back in focus for the electorate.

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Given that we are reminded that there's volatility in the economy and that there are challenges out there and we can't take anything for granted, I think this is a reason why Canadians should stick with the government whose performance has been recognized as superior around the world and whose economic plans just continue to work and will continue to work to move the country forward. And why it is a reason, in the case of both the NDP and the Liberals, for Canadians to reject parties that would change our policies, go to higher taxes, higher deficits, and reckless spending, and some very bad... some very bad uses of public money that, you know, virtually every credible business and economic group in the country says are not good policies. Frankly they're the kind of policies we've seen in countries like Greece (inaudible). There... I think they should reinforce to Canadians why we should not look at those kinds of policies that the Liberals and NDP propose and in the case of the Liberals specifically, I think the challenges and the volatility in the world tell us why now would be a bad time to have this country led by somebody who has no economic experience and no economic (inaudible).

MODERATOR: (Inaudible) Yang from *Korea Daily*, Toronto.

YANG (*Korea Daily* - Toronto): Good afternoon Prime Minister. How would you (inaudible) the pre-trade between South Korea and Canada which is expected to be (inaudible) for most countries (inaudible) economic growth in Canada and the job creation for Korean-Canadians?

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Good question. We're very pleased first of all that the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement came into effect January 1st of this year. As you know we finished the negotiations late in 2013,

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signed it early in 2014, and both parliaments implemented it on schedule. It's probably...it's our first trade agreement in the Asian-Pacific region. It's one of the bigger ones we've signed. It's probably the third biggest after NAFTA and the European Union agreement, but it's certainly the one that has gone into effect the absolute quickest, so congratulations to President Park and her government for doing that.

And I should just mention our goal for this year 2015 is to implement the Canada-Europe trade agreement or at least get the legislation through our parliament.

Look, there are lots of opportunities. I won't go into specifics. We have already done a couple of trade missions to Korea, taking Canadian business leaders and also Korean-Canadian business and cultural leaders so we can increasingly identify the opportunities that exist for us in that country and I expect the Koreans will do exactly the same. 85...some percent in tariffs come off the moment the trade agreement goes into effect. They're already off 90-some percent...98, 99% will be gone in a few years, so it's obviously opening up tremendous opportunity. So our trade commissioners (inaudible) and trade missions and others will work closely with both the Canadian business community generally and the Canadian-Korean business community specifically to make sure they are aware of opportunities and take advantage of them.

MODERATOR: Mark Cadiz from *The Philippine Reporter*.

MARK CADIZ (Reporter, *The Philippine Reporter*): Good afternoon, Prime Minister. My question revolves around the income-splitting scheme. There are claims by other parties that are opposition that the scheme itself

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only benefits the higher-earned income families and doesn't really have a specific impact or positive impact on the lower-income to middle-class families. What can you say about that?

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Well, it's simply not true. And the reason they say those things is because they want to take income-splitting away from Canadian families. That's how they are going to try and justify raising taxes on Canadian families. We've also had for many years now under this government, income-splitting for Canadian pensioners. Canadian pensioners actually have a much more generous arrangement where they can split a pension income between two elderly Canadians and so I think that's also (inaudible). As I say, the opposition is saying these things—the Liberals and the NDP—only to justify taking these benefits away from Canadians and raising taxes on them.

Let me be clear. This series of measures we brought in which wasn't just income-splitting, but also enhanced expense reductions for those who use institutional childcare, and also the expanded universal childcare benefit which will go from \$100 to \$160 for children up to six, and for children up to 17 will go on up to \$60 now from nothing so we've expanded it to go past children who are six. All those things taken together, every single Canadian family with children benefits. Every single one. Every single one.

The Liberals and NDP have not just opposed income-splitting, they have also opposed the universal childcare benefit. What they have said they want to do is take these monies that go to Canadian families and spend them instead on government bureaucracy for childcare. We do not think that will help most Canadian families.

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The facts on income-splitting, all of these...well, with all of these things put together, the fact is that not only does the average...does every single Canadian family benefit, but the relative tax benefit is actually greater... there is actually a greater impact the lower your income is. Relative to your income, the benefit is actually greater if you earn less than if you earn more. What the income-splitting proposal and the family tax cut itself does though, Mark, and this is important to understand, is it corrects an unfairness. Right now, if a couple earns radically different incomes, they are taxed more than the same couple where the two parents earn roughly the same amount of money. So if you have \$80,000, earning 40,000 and 40,000, you pay a lot less tax than if one parent earns 60 and the other earns 20. Well, that's not fair. You've got the same family raising the same children and one pays higher tax than the other. The idea of income-splitting is to make sure that we end this inequity in the tax system. It's fair. It helps everybody, and the other guys would take it away (inaudible).

MODERATE: Ravi (inaudible) from *India Abroad*.

RAVI (*India Abroad* Reporter): Good afternoon, Mr. Prime Minister. What are the steps that the Canadian government has done to prevent crime in communities, including youth crime? And what (inaudible) would you like to (inaudible)...

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Well, that's always a tough question, Ravi, because we have I think taken some 60 measures to correct (inaudible) crime since we came to office. And I don't want to go through all of them but maybe some of the ones—I'll just try and put through here—some of the ones that are most relevant to youth crime, or to young people.

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We have introduced, and it's still before parliament, tougher penalties for child predators. We've taken a number of actions to try and protect our children from the growing problems of child exploitation and child pornography, child sex trade. We have more of those before parliament now. We have undertaken some enhanced criminal justice measures on the whole area of guns, gangs and drugs, trying to crack down on drug traffickers by bringing in mandatory prison sentences for certain kinds of trafficking offences or gun offences. We also have been establishing a youth gang prevention fund and a number of other facilities to try and provide alternatives for young people who may be susceptible to recruitment into gangs and to a criminal way of life. Crack down on auto theft, street racing, certain property crimes, I could go through the list but as I say, it's a very large number of things we've tried to do the crackdown on crime more generally.

I would say a lot of them are targeted at youth crime, or more broadly targeted at more serious guns and gangs and all this type of phenomena. And we will continue to move forward. You know, I tell people, when our government in 2006 undertook to make our criminal justice laws tougher, we were changing the direction the criminal justice system had been going in for 60 years and we continue to be amazed how many things it is we have to fix. I just want to give you a couple of examples—things we've had to change.

For example, you probably didn't know—we didn't know—the system had become so pro-criminal, that there was actually a special employment insurance benefit provision in the act for people in prisons—that you could collect EI when in prison. You can collect old age security payments when in prison. You could actually collect a survivor's benefit if you'd murdered your

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spouse. This is how crazy the system had become. So we were doing all of these things to try and toughen the criminal justice system to make sure to put penalties that are appropriate, especially for serious and violent (inaudible) offenders.

I think the benefits are showing themselves. The crime rate is falling. Obviously there remain challenges but it's moving in the right direction. And I will also say this: I've mentioned maybe a dozen in the last few minutes, a dozen of 60-some measures we've passed. I don't think there's a single one of them (inaudible) in fact Justin Trudeau says he will repeal all of these (inaudible) including the notion that you should have a mandatory prison sentence for a repeat violent crime. He says he would repeal on it. I...you know, I can't even explain the positions of the other parties on this. But we can give you more details...a more detailed list but the list of things we've done is quite (inaudible).

MODERATOR: Okay, and the last question from Sarah Xie at *World Journal*.

SARAH XIE (*World Journal* Reporter): Good afternoon, Prime Minister. My question is, the Liberal leader Justin Trudeau said he supports the legalization of marijuana. So how will the Conservative party's policy help keep marijuana away from kids?

RT HON STEPHEN HARPER: Well, you know, I know that various people are looking at different ways of trying to treat the phenomenon of marijuana use. We start from the premise—whatever different views people may have on the approach to trying to discourage its use, whether it's criminal or other approaches—we start from the premise and the understanding that prolonged marijuana use is very, very bad for a person's health. It's, you know, it's...we

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have spent the last several decades trying to convince, with some success, more and more Canadians not to smoke tobacco because of the serious health effects that tobacco has. There is no good from it. And as you all know, many, many bad consequences of smoking tobacco.

Smoking marijuana has no good health benefits for a healthy person. It is nothing but the same problems you have with tobacco and a lot more ones that you don't have. So there is no reason why we would encourage young people or anybody else to smoke marijuana. That being said, Mr. Trudeau's policy is to legalize—not decriminalize, not change the sentencing—to completely legalize marijuana so that it can be sold in stores like tobacco and alcohol. That cannot possibly lead to anything other than increased consumption of the product. And so for that reason, we obviously don't support that policy. We think it's the wrong way to (inaudible).

SARAH XIE: Thank you.

[AUDIO CUTS]

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