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PRIME MINISTER'S SCRUM IN TRURO

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MODERATOR: ...with the Truro Daily News.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, the local community is...over here.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER (Prime Minister of Canada): There you are.

REPORTER: No doubt the local community is very grateful for today's announcement, but there is a lot of questions about why it's taken so long for this day to come. You know, Scott mentioned 2004. This project has been discussed, debated. Why so long waiting for this money from the federal government?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I should just say that I think Scott Armstrong deserves a lot of credit for delivering this project so quickly after (inaudible). (APPLAUSE) And obviously this is a joint effort of three levels of government. All these projects that involve all three levels of government are prioritized with all the levels of government. We appreciate that obviously everybody is making a significant contribution. Minister MacKay wants me just to mention, just not to forget to mention that the federal contribution is \$10 million, and (inaudible) (APPLAUSE). And we look forward to seeing ground broken in the spring. So there we are.

MODERATOR: Ricky Landry, with Radio-Canada.

JOURNALISTE : Bonjour. La plupart des spécialistes ou des experts s'entendent pour dire que les coupures ne suffiront pas pour faire disparaître un déficit structurel, qu'il faut envisager augmenter les revenus, par exemple une hausse de la TPS. Êtes-vous prêt à envisager ça?

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TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Je suis clair que c'est important à la fin de la récession d'éliminer, de réduire et éventuellement éliminer le déficit. La position du gouvernement est clair, est que nos programmes de stimulus vont terminer à la fin de la récession comme prévu, et en même temps nous avons besoin, nous aurons besoin de contrôler la croissance des dépenses à l'avenir. Nous ne voulons pas une situation comme dans des autres pays avec des déficits permanents et des dettes massives. Ce n'est pas la position du Canada. Nous sommes dans déjà une meilleure position, et nous devons garder cette position pour l'avenir pour avoir la flexibilité de dépenser dans une période aussi difficile comme la période actuelle. Mais la position du gouvernement est que nous sommes un gouvernement qui veut réduire les taxes et les impôts pour la croissance de l'économie pas les augmentations des taxes et des impôts.

MODERATOR: Next question to Mary Ellen McIntyre with the Chronicle-Herald.

REPORTER: Mr. Harper, I guess what many of us are wondering, we've heard announcements before of \$10 million for different projects in the province, but it doesn't usually bring down the Prime Minister and the entourage. It would take a considerable amount of effort, I would think, for you to come here, and all the people that you bring with you, and the money that it costs for you to come. I wonder why it was important to come here today.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I do, you know, I'm maybe a little different than previous Prime Ministers. I do travel around our country a lot, and I don't just go to Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. (APPLAUSE) I visit communities all across this country. I was in Toronto

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this week, but I was in Rivière-du-Loup and Montmagny last week. I was also in St. John, New Brunswick. You know, I make a point of getting around the country and working with other levels of government in showing what we're doing. And I especially think it is important during a time where we are spending an awful lot on infrastructure projects and giving confidence to Canadians, to the Canadian economy, for their Prime Minister to be out there and to be seen and make it clear what the government is doing on their behalf. So I will continue to do this. (APPLAUSE)

MODERATOR: Next question to Rick Grant, with CTV.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, before I ask my question, would you mind dealing in English with the question you were answering in French on the deficit?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Yeah. My...our position has been very clear. At the end of this recession, our stimulus spending, which is very large, will end as we have said it will end. We will also have to discipline the growth of spending very carefully in the future. But that will not necessarily be an easy exercise, especially politically, but it does have to be done. We want to maintain long-term balanced budgets in this country. We don't want to see the kind of massive long-term deficits we have in other industrialized countries. We don't want the kind of debt levels we have in other industrialized countries, and we are going to have to control our spending very carefully when this recession ends, so that we have the kind of flexibility we have had to respond when Canadians need it as they do now. That's the position of the government. That's how we are going to proceed, and as I've said, this government's position on taxes, of course, is that we look for opportunities to lower tax. We've lowered many taxes, as you know. We

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believe not raising taxes is important to economic growth and to the country's future.

REPORTER: Prime Minister, with respect to that, when this problem was being dealt with back in the '90s and up through the early 2000s, a lot of the costs were being downloaded to provincial governments as the federal government tried to get a handle on its deficit. Nova Scotia is grappling with a serious problem now. Do you see a lot of the problems that you're going to have to deal with financially being shared with the provinces as well as their own difficulties?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: My suspicion...I don't know every province's financial situation, but I know all of the provinces have been very good partners with us during this recession in terms of putting additional spending in place and getting infrastructure projects going. I suspect the provinces will have to make some of the same difficult decisions we are making to control their spending in the years in the future, and I think we'll all be in the same boat in that regard. I think that's just a reality. As you know under this government transfers to the provinces have increased significantly. They will continue to grow in the years to come. We are not looking at the kind of deep cuts in program transfers we saw by the previous government. You know, the previous government, as we know, ultimately balanced its budgets through a series of tax increases and deep cuts to health and education spending, and you know, they did that because they waited too long. They had large structural deficits. They had debt levels that are double today's debt levels, and we will take the actions necessary to make sure we don't get there.

JOURNALISTE : En français.

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TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : Oui, je viens de la répondre en français.

MODERATOR: Jennifer Henderson with CBC.

REPORTER: Mr. Prime Minister, I'm wondering what advice or direction you could give a Haitian woman in Halifax who has encountered some difficulty trying to sponsor her father. She's trying to get him out of Haiti. What can you suggest?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: You know, I can't in fairness, I can't in fairness give advice or comment on individual cases. Obviously there are, as we know, literally hundreds of thousands, if not millions of terrible tragic cases in Haiti. This government has, Canada has the most generous immigration policies in the world when it comes to not just general immigration policy, adoption policy, sponsorship, family reunification policies. The Minister, Minister Kenney has been very clear that the government will do everything to facilitate the already thousands of cases that are in the queue and to get those through as quickly as possible.

JOURNALISTE : En français, Monsieur Harper, là-dessus.

TR. HON. STEPHEN HARPER : C'est la même chose, je peux pas...je peux pas faire un commentaire sur un cas individuel, mais il y a des centaines de milliers, peut-être des millions de cas d'urgence, des cas désespérés en Haïti, on le sait. En même temps, ce pays, le Canada a des politiques d'immigration le plus...les plus ouvertes du monde, pas seulement pour les immigrants en général, mais pour les réfugiés, pour les cas des adoptions, pour la réunification familiale et le ministre Kenney a été clair que le gouvernement va faciliter aussi vite que possible tous les cas, des milliers de

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cas qui existent déjà et nous continuons à faire dans ce dossier et de plusieurs autres toutes les mesures que nous pouvons faire.

MODERATOR: Last question to Marie Adzat with Global.

REPORTER: Good afternoon, Prime Minister. Could you please give me your reaction to the latest poll that shows that Conservatives and Liberals are neck-in-neck, and if you could also add, today's announcement seems like such a luxury in light of the fact of what's happened in Haiti, so could you please give us the latest on Canada's commitment to that country?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, on the first question, there's been a raft of polls with different numbers. My concern is obviously with the governing of the country, and in particular, rolling out our economic action plan during this recession. That is the government's number one priority, has been for the last year, and will continue to be. (APPLAUSE) In terms of...the government has already made a commitment, as you know, a direct commitment of \$5 million. That's in addition to all of the personnel we've sent down. We've agreed we are matching Canadians' contributions. Last I heard, those contributions are somewhere now in the area between \$30 and 40 million. So that's a pot of \$60-80 million that is growing very rapidly. And of course, the government of Canada, Minister Cannon will be leading an international development conference on Haiti with the Prime Minister of Haiti in Montreal this coming Monday. So obviously, as we've said, the government of Canada is going to be working with our international partners and leading international efforts to assist and to rebuild this country. (APPLAUSE)

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Is that it? Just one other comment I would like to ask...I would like to add. Nobody asked me today about a story that I did see on the front page of one of my newspapers today, and that is public reactions, some public outrage about the sentencing of a terror suspect in Toronto. I'm not going to comment on the specifics of the sentence, but let me just say I understand why Canadians are shocked. This is a consequence of a longstanding law in this country under which this individual was tried, that have allowed criminal defendants to be given credit, two-for-one credit for time already served in prison. That is why this suspect is able to be released. This government brought in a law this past fall that would eliminate that provision in the criminal code, so these types of criminals and terrorists would no longer have those types of sentences. Unfortunately it could not apply to this. It took us a long time to get through this through Parliament because, as with so many other of our laws, they were fought every step of the way, including in the Senate of Canada, where Fred and our Conservative senators fought a pitched battle. The Liberals kept gutting the legislation and we kept changing it back, and we finally got it through, so this two-for-one and sometimes three-for-one credit for time served has been eliminated. So congratulations to Senator Dixon... (APPLAUSE) and his colleagues, his Conservative colleagues for making sure this doesn't happen in the future, but just let me say this to remind you why there will be more Conservative colleagues joining Senator Dixon in the Senate, to make sure these kinds of laws go through even quicker in the future. Thank you. (APPLAUSE)

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