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STEPHEN HARPER (Canadian Prime Minister): I'll just let the cameras get back into position here. Good morning, everyone. Bonjour, tout le monde. Greetings to Premier Wall. Where has he gone? There he is, Premier Wall. To our Agriculture Minister, Gerry Ritz. To Lynne Yelich, Minister of Western Economic Diversification. Greetings also to my other parliamentary colleagues, members of Parliament Brad Trost, Randy Hoback, Kelly Block, Maurice Villacott is here as well. And great to see all of you guys. Also greetings to Your Worships, Mayors Scarrow and Atchison, thank you all for being here today.

In today's difficult economic times, Canadians are looking for their governments to work together and to provide leadership to guide our country forward.

Last fall, I met with Premier Wall and the other First Ministers to discuss how to do just that. Consensus on one point was very clear. To kick start our economy, we need to speed up construction on the bridges, highways, and other essential infrastructure that link us together as Canadians.

They link us together as Canadians and they also connect us to the world economy as a whole. Not only will these actions create jobs for Canadians today, when they are most needed. It will also pave the way to Canada's future prosperity and economic growth.

Le plan d'action économique de notre gouvernement va nous permettre d'aller de l'avant. En répondant à nos besoins à court terme, notre plan atteint des objectifs à long terme par des investissements diversifiés, en éducation, en recherche, dans les secteurs traditionnels et de pointe, et bien

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sûr pour construire des routes, des ponts, des viaducs et d'autres infrastructures essentielles.

Moving Canada through difficult times and into a better future is the purpose of our government's national economic plan. By addressing our short-term needs we will achieve our long-term goals. Our plan invests in everything from education and research, to traditional and cutting-edge industries, and of course, in infrastructure. 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 that we are here today.

J'ai le plaisir d'annoncer que notre gouvernement s'associe au gouvernement de la Saskatchewan pour accélérer la réalisation d'un projet d'autoroute essentiel pour la province, soit l'élargissement de l'autoroute 11 entre Saskatoon et Prince-Albert.

Grâce à ce nouveau partenariat, le temps pour compléter les travaux sera réduit en moitié de huit à quatre ans.

I am pleased to announce that our government, in partnership with Premier Wall and the government of Saskatchewan, will accelerate construction of an essential Saskatchewan highway project, the twinning of Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

(applause)

Thanks to this initiative, the time needed to complete the twinning will be cut in half from eight years to four. This means well-paying jobs will be created faster, goods and services will flow quicker, and the direct benefits to the people of Northern Saskatchewan will be enjoyed sooner.

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Premier Wall will give us additional details, but as in previous announcements across the country, I want to make one thing very clear: that today's announcement is not simply about twinning a highway or the jobs that go with it. It is about where we are headed as a country. As the world struggles with the effects of the global recession, we as Canadians are looking ahead and in the weeks to come, our government will be making more announcements on more initiatives, under our Economic Action Plan, all designed to create jobs and boost economic activity in communities all across this country.

En regardant vers l'avenir, vers l'avant aujourd'hui et en investissant dans des infrastructures clé comme les autoroutes, notre gouvernement tire profit des occasions qui vont nous aider à traverser cette période difficile et qui vont assurer que le Canada en sort plus fort que jamais.

By looking forward today and investing in key infrastructure like highways, our government is seizing the opportunities that will help get us through tough times and ensure that Canada emerges stronger than ever.

Once again, I'd like to thank Premier Wall for his leadership in partnering with us, on this and other important projects to achieve results for the people of Saskatchewan and indeed for the people of this great country.

Merci beaucoup. Thank you.

(applause)

And I'll ask Premier Wall to provide us with the additional details. Thanks, Brad.

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BRAD WALL (Saskatchewan Premier): Thank you very much, Prime Minister. Let me just offer a word of welcome to the federal members that have joined us today, the federal ministers that have joined us, and to our own provincial members of the cabinet and MLAs that are here and the mayors, Mayor Atchison and Mayor Scarrow.

You represent the people of our province that have been waiting for a day like today, that have been working towards a day like today. And as elected representatives, you have worked towards a day like today, lobbying your respective governments, working within your respective governments and I want to just acknowledge that and thank you for the work and the leadership that you have shown and to all of those people who have stepped forward to say that this is exactly the kind of project that needs to be done. That message has clearly been heard by the Prime Minister, by our federal government.

Whenever there is a positive announcement like this made in Saskatchewan, I want to begin whatever remarks I have with something that's probably words that are overused but sincerely meant today, and they are just simply "Thank you, Prime Minister".

(applause)

Thank you for this decision and again to your colleagues for their work to make sure that it happens. You commented on the weather when we talked earlier this morning, Prime Minister. I'm not sure why but we're under some sort of global warming exemption, it seems.

(laughter)

Maybe that's going to change soon. We know spring is coming, but we welcome you here.

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On our own, we have been making some progress with respect to the twinning of the highway between Saskatoon and Prince Albert. The section north of Warman to north of Osler was open to traffic in November of 2007. The section from Osler to Hague was opened in October of 2008. The initial grading work north of Hague to South of Rosthern is 60 per cent complete. However, as a result of today's announcement, we'll get this important project done a lot quicker – 2012 instead of 2016.

That is important, as we all know, because of the families and the businesses that use that highway. My wife is from Prince Albert and we camp at Candle Lake with her mom almost every year, and so I pull a camper down that highway. And when you get away from that twinning bit, I think I speak for a lot of people from Saskatchewan when I say your knuckles turn out a particular shade of white sometimes as you're on that highway. This is important from a safety standpoint.

It's very important from an economic standpoint because of course of the huge resources that this road accesses, from Prince Albert in the north. Yesterday, I was talking about the nuclear industry in Ottawa. You know, many people in Saskatoon and in the area around here are working in that uranium industry and they need a safe highway to get to the north, to get to Prince Albert where they will then often fly in the mines. That's how important today's announcement is and to reduce two, three years from the schedule, I don't think we can overstate the importance of that.

There is another important benefit to today's announcement, today as well, though. The Prime Minister has touched on it, and that is the economic stimulus that can come from accelerated

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infrastructure spending, that can come from the jobs that will be created, the investment that will be made as a result of the twinning project.

The specifics in terms of the staged process here, to take us to 2012 and completion up to MacDowell are certainly available for you to have a look at. But again, I just want to say to the federal government thank you, to Wayne Elhard, our provincial Minister, thank you for your leadership on this file as well.

Today's announcement is another example how a pragmatic and positive relationship between levels of government could benefit those that we work for, those that we serve, the residents of Saskatchewan.

No relationship is perfect. There is going to be some disagreements, some agreement to disagree. And there will be many, many more occasions where there is agreement and there is consensus and there is cooperation to the great benefit of the people that we work for. Again, we say to the Prime Minister and the federal government, thank you.

To all of the officials who are here, thank you very much for this announcement. You're welcome back any time with more good news.

(applause)

MODERATOR: So we'll start with Vassi Capilos(ph), Global TV. Right behind you.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, I'm wondering, the Premier gave your budget a failing grade. How much of this announcement your visit here is about appeasement?

STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I don't, as you know, tend to operate that way. I know one of the concerns the Premier expressed is the slow

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pace of delivery of federal infrastructure projects and federal infrastructure money. I think this announcement obviously should indicate to everybody, not just in Saskatchewan, but the various announcements we're doing with this government does intend as part of its budget in fact, it's a major objective of the budget, to accelerate the delivery of federal infrastructure funds and of infrastructure projects across the country.

So I think it should certainly... this announcement certainly should help to put that concern to rest. Let me just repeat though what I said yesterday in Vancouver. I notice now that we are bringing forward moves in our estimates to ensure that we deliver this money as quick as possible, we have the NPD-Bloc coalition making noises against this. Accusing it of being a slush fund.

The bottom line is that this government is clear, this infrastructure money has to be delivered, has to be delivered quickly and the message should be delivered to the NDP here, in Saskatchewan, and across the country to get out of the way and make sure we pass these funds and we get on with the job.

ANIMATEUR: Je vais continuer avec Catherine Brûlotte, de Radio-Canada.

QUESTION: C'est une question sur en fait les avions russes qui ont volé au-dessus de l'Arctique hier. J'aimerais savoir à quel point ça vous préoccupe sur la souveraineté de l'Arctique?

STEPHEN HARPER: Nous avons vu une augmentation des activités des Russes dans l'Arctique et dans notre espace de souveraineté. Évidemment, c'est une préoccupation majeure. Ce gouvernement a réagi à chaque fois sur... contre ces activités et nous allons continuer à le faire.

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Évidemment, c'est une grande préoccupation pas seulement pour nous mais pour nos alliés américains de NORAD et nous avons l'intention de poursuivre nos obligations continentales mais aussi la défense de notre souveraineté dans l'Arctique et nous sommes clairs sur ce point.

MODERATOR : We'll continue with Mike Siona(ph),  
CTV.

QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, I have a local question first. How important, given that Saskatchewan is one of the places in this country that still is in economic growth, how important is maintaining the growth of Saskatchewan's economy to the country and are there specifically other measures your government is considering to help this province?

QUESTION: And also a question from Ottawa. Canadian Forces intercepted two Russian bears 24 hours before President Obama's visit. Is Russia becoming more of a threat and are they increasing their spying activity?

STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, as I've said before on the... on my recent trips to the province in the past couple of years, it's a wonderful thing that Saskatchewan is really coming into its own, becoming a have province and in fact, increasingly leading the country in economic activity.

Obviously, you know, many of the policies in the budget are designed for the global recession we're all experiencing, and it is hitting, as we know, some Saskatchewan industries. But Saskatchewan is in a relatively better position. We will ensure that all of the assistance that goes across the country where it helps industries also goes to those parts of the Saskatchewan economy that need help as well.

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But, look, as Prime Minister, I just wish every part of the country were going as well as Saskatchewan these days.

On the issue of the Russian, the intercept of the Russian aircraft, as I just said in French, this is a real concern to us. I've expressed in various... at various times the deep concern our government has with increasingly aggressive Russian actions around the globe and Russian intrusions into our air space.

This government has responded every time the Russians have done that. We will continue to respond. We will defend our airspace. We also have obligations of continental defence with the United States. We will fulfil those obligations to defend our continental airspace and we will defend our sovereignty and we will respond every time the Russians make any kind of intrusion on the sovereignty in Canada's Arctic.

That's our obligation. That's what we'll do.

MODERATOR: We'll continue with Jennifer Graham, Canadian Press.

QUESTION: Yes, I'm just wondering, there were suggestions that you might consider an election if the stimulus spending isn't sped up. How far would you be willing to go to push that?

STEPHEN HARPER: Well, the passage of the budget, and not just the initial motion, but the passage of budget legislation, the passage of estimates, these are all confidence measures by convention. And the opposition cannot have it both ways. They cannot complain that we are too slow to deliver our economic policies and then attempt to block delivery of those economic policies in Parliament.

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So the choice for them is very clear. And I think the choice of Canadians is clear. Canadians do not want an election. They want this Parliament to get on with passing these economic measures and get them implemented.

And quite frankly, since the opposition has absolutely nothing positive to suggest in terms of the economy, they really have no choice but to pass these measures. So obviously, we would encourage them to do it immediately and that's what we expect will happen.

ANIMATEUR: Caroline Cloutier, CBC.

QUESTION: Oui, bonjour. J'aimerais savoir, Monsieur le premier ministre, pour quelle raison, quels sont vos intérêts à investir dans ce projet d'infrastructure alors qu'il y a des projets d'infrastructure un peu partout au pays?

STEPHEN HARPER: J'ai manqué la question. Si vous pouvez la répéter.

QUESTION: Oui, j'aimerais savoir pourquoi, quel est l'intérêt de votre gouvernement d'investir dans ce projet d'infrastructure alors qu'il y a des projets d'infrastructure un peu partout au pays?

STEPHEN HARPER: Évidemment, nous investissons beaucoup dans l'infrastructure pour plusieurs raisons. La raison majeure immédiate, c'est de stimuler l'activité économique à travers le pays. Et la construction des autoroutes, des ponts, des autres infrastructures essentielles est une façon idéale de le faire. Beaucoup d'autres paliers de gouvernements, pas seulement le gouvernement fédéral, mais les provinces, les municipalités ont des projets d'infrastructure prêts à livrer immédiatement.

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En même temps, ce sont la grande majorité des projets d'infrastructure sont des choses importantes pour le développement de notre économie et la capacité économique pour la croissance à l'avenir. C'est une façon de dépenser aujourd'hui, d'emprunter des fonds dans le marché que les consommateurs ne dépensent pas, que les affaires, les compagnies n'investissent pas maintenant et d'assurer que ces fonds sont utilisés pour le développement à long terme de l'économie. Et c'est quelque chose qu'un gouvernement fédéral, un gouvernement national peut faire dans un ralentissement économique.

MODERATOR: We have time for one last question.  
James Wood, Star-Phoenix.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, I was wondering, a two-part question, if you could comment on your take on the state of relations between the provincial government and the federal government given some of the recent back and forth. And I also was wondering if you could talk about what your government's plans for AECL are and what... how you see Saskatchewan having a role in that, if any?

STEPHEN HARPER: I won't comment on the latter question on AECL. As is well known, the government is reviewing various options with respect to AECL. At the same time, AECL continues to have important business lines and important business objectives that the government is supporting. And I won't comment on that further.

In terms of relations with the province, look, I think overall we have a good relationship with the province. You know, just look at things that have been in the news recently, not just infrastructure investment like today. I noted the Premier's comments on the positive things that the

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Government of Canada is doing in the nuclear industry – quite frankly, primarily in response to needs of the government of Saskatchewan.

There has been a lot of ink spilled about the livestock sector recently. But I think the important thing to note there, although we may disagree on approaches, we both agree on the necessity of assisting the livestock sector which is under some considerable difficulty right now.

So that's something, you know, obviously we say we disagree on the methods perhaps, but we agree on the objective. And we agree a lot more than we disagree. And the important thing is this: I found in any relationship with a provincial government, to be frank, is not whether you agree all the time because that's not realistic. The question is when you disagree, are you able to communicate and are you able to communicate on your disagreement and are you able to move on to other things on which you do agree?

And I think we've been able to do that with this government since it was elected, the new government of Saskatchewan. I think it's a big difference with the previous government.

I don't think we had any more disagreements, to be honest with you, with the previous government than with this government. But with the previous government, once you disagreed with them on one thing, it contaminated your relationship on everything.

And that's not the case with this present government. And we appreciate that.

I would just say though, repeat what I said before, that, you know, one thing that I think the people of Saskatchewan do have to remember is that Saskatchewan is in a different place right now than just

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about, you know, the entire rest of the country. And for that matter, the entire rest of the western world. The economy here for the most part remains pretty robust.

And that, as you know, is increasingly not true across the world economy. So it does put Saskatchewan in a little bit of a different position, one that I think the residents of Saskatchewan should guard jealously.

MODERATOR: Great. Thank you very much, everybody. Merci beaucoup.

STEPHEN HARPER: Great, thanks.

(applause)

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