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SOURCE: PMO

DATE: JANUARY 4, 2013

REFERENCE/ RÉFÉRENCE: 0401DOC2

LOCATION/LIEU: OAKVILLE, ONTARIO

TIME/ HEURE: 12H10

LENGTH/DURÉE: 11:30

MINUTES

**P.M. MEDIA AVAILABILITY IN OAKVILLE, ONTARIO**

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UNIDENTIFIED MALE SPEAKER: That concludes the formal part of the program. Thank you.

(Applause)

MODERATOR: Can you turn the microphone? Thank you very much. The Prime Minister will now take questions from the media. When I call your name, could you please make your way to the microphone which is on your right? We will start with Rebecca Thomson from Sun News.

REBECCA THOMSON (Sun News): Hi. Hi, Prime Minister. Hi. There's been increasing anger and frustration over the recent revelations of earnings of the Chief of Attawapiskat and her partner, in particular given the size of the community.

Now the government has asked Deloitte to complete a financial audit of Attawapiskat. Will the government release this financial audit before January 11th, and will it raise even bigger questions and concerns into the Attawapiskat financial situation?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: I can't tell you the date it will be released. I can tell you there is a process that the Department follows. It gets the audit. It reviews it, and then it releases it. And it will be released on the normal timetable.

MODERATOR: Mike Drolet, Global.

MIKE DROLET (Global): Thank you. Good afternoon. Same spot over here, Prime Minister.

A question about the Idle No More movement. I understand you're meeting with the chiefs on the 11th. I don't know if that includes Chief Spence. But the question is why now?

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And are you worried about this movement spiralling out of control, snowballing as it were, such as similar to the Occupy Movement or the student protests in Montreal?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: First of all, just the origin of this. As you know, we had the historic Crown-First Nations gathering last year and we arrived at a work plan on a number of things we want to see move forward. Obviously these are long-term challenges, but we are committed to addressing them.

I met with National Chief Atleo in November about setting up future meetings to follow progress and to ensure we're making more progress on all of the items. And so we're following up on that. And the Assembly of First Nations will determine the composition of their own delegation.

Look, my only comment in terms of ... in terms of various protests and demonstrations is the following: in this country people have the right in our country to demonstrate and express their points of view peacefully, as long as they obey the law. But I think the Canadian population expects everyone will obey the law in holding such protests.

MODERATOR: John (inaudible), CTV.

QUESTION: We woke up this morning to see that the unemployment rate is at a four-year low in Canada now. The job growth numbers surprised economists, surprised a lot of people. Were you surprised by the numbers this morning? Can you explain them? And also, do you think this is sustainable? Should Canadians get their hopes up that we're going to continue to see this given a lot of predictions that we're in for a housing slump?

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RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Yes. Look, the numbers were obviously a bit stronger than had been predicted by markets. You know, I always tell people not to read too much into a single monthly number. Even though it's a very good number this month, it's very good in all dimensions. Actually, the underlying numbers are in a sense even better.

What I would say is important is that the trend over the past several years, including over the past year, has continued to be quite positive in terms of job growth in this country. We have... you know, I remind people, we have more Canadians working today than ever before and we are one of the very few advanced industrial economies that can say that.

So it is a positive development.

As I've said before, we know we are in a very difficult global economy. We've seen what's been going on in the United States. We know the ongoing problems in Europe. And so, you know, we can't be surprised that we will continue to have some bumps along the road.

But what we are doing in this country and what I've told Canadians is try and ... let's try not to focus too much on all those problems in the other countries that we can't control. Let's work on the things we can do in this country to continue to ensure jobs, growth and long-term prosperity as we go forward. And that's what we're doing. And obviously, I'm pleased to see that the economy is continuing to move that way.

MODERATOR: And we will continue with Cameron French, from Reuters.

ALEX BOISSONNEAULT (Radio-Canada): Monsieur le Premier ministre, si c'est possible de me répondre en français et en anglais.

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ANIMATEUR: Excusez-moi, on va poursuivre avec Cameron French, de Reuters. Et là on va revenir à vous ensuite.

CAMERON FRENCH (Reuters): The Idle No More movement has said that they plan to shut down the borders I think on Saturday. I was just wondering what your response to this is and would you allow that to happen?

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Well, I think I've already answered the question about protests.

ANIMATEUR: On va continuer avec Alex Boissonneault, de Radio-Canada.

ALEX BOISSONNEAULT (Radio-Canada): French for the language.

TRÈS HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Oui.

ALEX BOISSONNEAULT: Monsieur le Premier ministre, en français et en anglais, 250 millions de dollars, c'est un investissement considérable. Comment on peut expliquer aux contribuables un tel investissement quand on voit semble-t-il que les investisseurs américains, du côté de l'automobile ne continuent pas toujours à investir ici et même parfois retirent des investissements, comme on a vu avec Camaro récemment, donc qui va commencer à être produit aux États-Unis à partir de l'année prochaine?

TRÈS HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je pense que si on examine le bilan de ce fonds, le Fonds d'innovation pour le secteur de l'automobile, ça a été un grand succès jusqu'à maintenant. Avec les fonds des contribuables et la grande majorité de ces fonds sont des prêts sans conditions et ils sont... les compagnies repaie ces contributions. Et ces contributions

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nous ont aidés à encourager des investissements six fois plus grands que la part des compagnies investies.

Et je pense que pour cette raison c'est un grand succès et nous sommes comme Joe vient de le mentionner, nous sommes dans une compétition. La réalité est que c'est une industrie où des gouvernements à travers le monde font la concurrence pour ... pour avoir ces compagnies dans ces communautés parce que c'est le moteur en effet d'une plus grande économie, d'une plus grande activité économique, pas seulement activité des composants, des pièces des automobiles mais aussi pour la communauté en général.

Je pense que le bilan est fort et c'est la raison pour laquelle nous renouvelons ça parce que ça va nous donner au long terme beaucoup plus d'argent que nous avons investi.

TRÈS HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Oui.

So I'll just repeat that. The reason we're reinvesting in this particular fund, it has been a very big success. These are, for the most part, unconditional loans. It's important to note they're repaid for the most part. And on top of that, they have leveraged, the Automotive Innovation Fund at this point has leveraged investments six times the size of the government's investment from the private sector. So this pays off.

And as Joe mentioned, we are in... the reality of the automobile sector is we're in a globally competitive economy where the real... where there is real fierce competition for the central core of this business, which is the assembly plants and the activities they undertake because those things spin off a whole wider range of economic activity; obviously all of the parts manufacturers but also the wider economic activity in the community.

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So look, any analysis of this fund is that what we have invested from taxpayer dollars has been paid back many, many times to the taxpayer and will continue to be paid many, many times to the taxpayer back in terms of direct repayments but also economic activity. These have been very good investments for Canada.

Et parce que vous avez demandé des réponses en français et en anglais je suis prêt à répondre à une autre question en français, si tu veux.

ALEX BOISSONNEAULT: Bien, si ça serait possible, j'aimerais ça aussi savoir en quelle mesure dans la situation de ce qui se passe avec les Premières nations, en quelle mesure l'action ou la grève de la faim de Mme Spence a joué dans cette rencontre possible que vous allez avoir avec les leaders des Premières nations?

TRÈS HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Je vais répéter ma réponse. Nous avons eu l'année dernière cette historique rencontre entre la Couronne et les Premières nations à Rideau Hall et la réunion de la semaine prochaine est une ... on continue ces actions. On a créé un plan de travail il y a un an. J'ai rencontré le chef national Atleo en novembre pour planifier, pour planifier des réunions, et ça va continuer parce que ce sont des objectifs au long terme et nous ... nous voulons faire des progrès parce qu'il y a un grand potentiel dans nos Premières nations et nous voulons voir la réalisation de cette... de ce potentiel.

Pour la délégation de l'Assemblée des Premières nations, c'est pour cette organisation de décider ses délégués propres.

MODERATOR: And we will finish with Hugo Miller, from Bloomberg, please.

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HUGO MILLER (Bloomberg): Thank you, Prime Minister. Now that the U.S. is moving ahead with selling its GM stake, just wondering if you could update us on where Canada stands to sell its stake?

And just a follow up is have you had at this point any discussions about this President Obama or Secretary Geithner? Thanks.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Look, I haven't had discussions. I haven't personally had discussions on that with them in some time, but I think what you have to understand, and as sometimes has been misreported, the Government of the United States obviously holds a significant amount of shares, as does the Government of Canada. And in our partnership, we were also in partnership with the Government of Ontario. So all three of us hold shares and all of us can sell our shares at a time of our own choosing.

We are not bound by what the Government of the United States decides and the Government of Ontario is not bound by what we decide.

Our objective – we have sold some of our shares – our objective remains to sell those shares in a way that, in our judgement and in the judgement of the financial experts whose advice we seek in these matters, we'll sell them in a way that attempts to maximize the value for the Canadian taxpayer.

But obviously in the long term it is not the intention of the Government of Canada to be an owner in the automobile sector.

MODERATOR: Merci beaucoup. Thank you very much.

RT. HON. STEPHEN HARPER: Thanks, everybody.

(Applause)

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