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YUKON TO HOST 2009 WESTERN PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

PRINCE ALBERT - The 2008 Western Premiers' Conference (WPC) wrapped up today with an announcement that Yukon will host the 2009 WPC in Dawson City next June. Labour and skills shortages, sustaining the strength of the western economy, climate change innovation and technology, and First Nations' participation in the workforce topped this year's agenda at the Prince Albert meeting.

"Meeting face-to-face with Western Premiers is the best way to raise awareness of our challenges and opportunities, and to advance and make progress on regional issues of mutual importance," Deputy Premier Elaine Taylor said. "Yukon looks forward to continuing discussions at next year's WPC in Dawson City."

Over the three-day conference, Western Premiers agreed to work collaboratively on several issues, including actions to address competitiveness of the West, environmental sustainability, Canada/U.S. relations, innovation around climate change research, and the need to close the gap in educational achievement for Aboriginal people.

Premiers also had the opportunity to meet with U.S. Ambassador David Wilkins and Chair of Western Governors' Association David Freudenthal, on Canada/U.S. relations, smart and secure borders, and energy.

Taylor raised issues of concern to Yukoners regarding the security requirements associated with the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) on land and sea border crossings. In particular, she raised the importance of exempting First Nation citizens because of close family and cultural ties between Alaska and Yukon.

Taylor also raised the proposed U.S. passenger vessel regulations with Ambassador David Wilkins and the negative impact such regulations would have on Yukon's tourism industry.

Taylor met to discuss issues of importance to the North with Premier Paul Okalik and Premier Floyd Roland. Issues included the proposed elimination of GST on home heating fuel, power generation, and on the transportation of essential goods north of 60. As well, Yukon's participation in the upcoming National Aboriginal Women's Summit was confirmed.

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PHOTO: Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall hosts Deputy Premier Elaine Taylor in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan this week. Taylor and Wall were joined by other provincial and territorial leaders at the Western Premiers' Conference.