



## **COMMUNIQUE**

### ***A Stronger North and a Better Canada***

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (June 28, 2008) – Premiers from the three territories met today in Yellowknife to discuss issues relevant to northern people, the northern environment, and northern economies.

#### **OUR PEOPLE**

##### **National Aboriginal Women's Summit**

In recognition of the significance and complexity of the issues facing Aboriginal women today, Premier Roland will be hosting and co-chairing the 2008 National Aboriginal Women's Summit in Yellowknife on July 28-30 with Ms. Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada. This summit is a follow up to the very important first National Aboriginal Women's Summit hosted by Newfoundland and Labrador Premier Danny Williams in June of 2007 and an opportunity for jurisdictions, particularly northern jurisdictions, to share progress and initiatives.

Premiers remain committed to keeping the social, economic and political well-being of Aboriginal women and their families as a priority issue and look forward to receiving the recommendations from the 2008 Summit.

##### **Housing**

Premiers acknowledged that recent federal investments through the Northern Housing Trust have resulted in significant improvements in the quality and availability of housing for Northerners. However, the particular social, geographic and climatic realities of the North continue to present a challenge.

Long-term sustainable investment is needed to ensure that housing built in partnership with the federal government is sustainable as is a commitment from the federal government to sustainable investments toward the high operation and maintenance costs associated with housing delivery in the North. Federal funding

for the operation and maintenance of the northern public housing stock is currently declining and will lapse completely in 2038.

Premiers call upon the federal government to commit to strengthening its role in housing, including immediately freezing current federal funding levels and renewing its engagement with provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for housing on the broad range of housing issues facing the country. Premiers also called for the renewal of the federal housing programs and trusts set to expire in March 2009.

### **Labour Market**

Premiers stressed the need for education and skills training in communities so that Northerners are better equipped to participate in the emerging employment and economic development opportunities in the North.

Premiers recognized the importance of identifying existing skills within their communities' labour forces and matching those skilled workers to employment, and agreed to examine the opportunities presented by the Nunavut Community Skills Information System.

A balanced approach is required in addressing northern labour market issues and Premiers agreed to continue to share best practices such as the Yukon Nominee Program and Yukon Immigration Web Portal. Premiers acknowledged the progress the federal government has made in reforming the immigration process to reduce delays in processing applications and encouraged further efforts in this important policy area.

### **Cost of Living**

Premiers discussed the reality that the cost of living in the North is too high and acknowledged that these high costs make it difficult for many northern families to pay their basic bills, while increasing energy and consumer prices impede local economic development, and stand in the way of achieving a better quality of life.

In recognition of the fact that Northerners living in remote communities have limited options to find alternative means of transport or heat for their homes, territorial governments do not tax home heating fuel.

Premiers called on the federal government to eliminate the GST on fuel for home heating and power generation north of 60 and the transportation of essential goods. Premiers offered to work with the federal government to facilitate implementation of such an exemption.

## **OUR ENVIRONMENT**

### **Climate Change**

Premiers unanimously rejected any proposal for a national carbon tax as a viable solution that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the North. Premiers agreed that a much more productive or sensible solution to combating the impact of climate change is by making strategic investments in alternative energy sources such as hydro electricity, wind power and biomass.

Premiers expressed their concern about the increasing costs of energy and the growing impact of energy use on the environment and had an extensive discussion about the need for alternative energy sources to reduce the dependency on diesel as the single fuel source for many northern communities.

Investing in northern alternative energy sources is in the national interest. In Yukon, the extension of the hydro grid to the Minto mine and Pelly Crossing will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 24,100 tonnes per year.

Premiers recognize that private and public investment is required to fully develop the territories hydro, wind, and other clean and alternative energy potential. In addition, the federal government could further enable territorial governments to make their own strategic investments in such initiatives by removing current restrictions on debt financing imposed by legislation.

Premiers shared information about the progress their governments are making to develop climate change adaptation strategies tailored to the unique context in each of the territories. Premiers committed to continue to pursue innovative partnerships between the territories, the federal government, Aboriginal governments and organizations, academic institutions and other jurisdictions in order to effectively adapt to climate change.

Once each territory has completed its own Climate Change Adaptation Plan, Premiers will then be in a position to develop a pan-territorial Northern Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

### **Energy Efficiency**

Premiers restated their commitment to reducing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions. They discussed their recently released energy strategies and acknowledged the importance of energy efficiency initiatives in contributing to reducing emissions and realizing savings for government and residents alike.

All three territorial governments have recently launched a number of significant energy efficiency initiatives and conservation measures including home energy audits and retrofits, energy efficiency incentives programs to encourage residents to purchase energy efficient appliances and vehicles, and programs.

## **OUR ECONOMY**

### **Transportation Infrastructure**

Premiers acknowledged the federal government's significant investments in northern infrastructure through the new long term Building Canada Fund: NWT \$245.8 million, Nunavut \$242.68 million, and Yukon \$242.91 million for a total of \$731.39 million. The territorial and federal governments agree that community infrastructure is one of the priorities for investment under this fund and will work together to address infrastructure priorities, such as water, wastewater, green energy, regional and community airports, community and intercommunity access roads.

Premiers noted that, while this is a very important contribution toward community-based infrastructure projects, there remains a critical transportation infrastructure deficit in Canada's North specifically regarding North-South connections.

Premiers discussed the recently released pan-territorial transportation strategy titled '*Northern Connections*' aimed at strengthening and modernizing the North's transportation system. *Northern Connections* identifies the need for strategic investments in new highway infrastructure in the Northwest Territories, reconstruction and improvements to the highway network in the Yukon, and Arctic marine infrastructure in Nunavut. It provides a common vision for strategic transportation projects across all three territories aimed at making transportation more reliable and less expensive.

Premiers discussed how investments in improved and expanded transportation infrastructure effectively linking northern communities to markets, services, and businesses promote economic development and diversification, reduce the cost of living, improve the quality of life, and are a key element in ensuring the vitality and sustainability of these communities. The continued presence of sustainable northern communities throughout the Arctic is an essential element in exercising Canada's sovereignty in the region.

Strategic investments in infrastructure will require partnerships between communities, industry and the federal government. The Premiers call on the federal government to work with them to improve and expand transportation infrastructure in the North to realize tangible benefits for Northerners and all Canadians. The economic development of the territories is critical to Canada's

future and Premiers noted that historically, strategic transportation projects have opened this country up and helped it grow.

## **Devolution**

Premiers firmly believe that Northerners should make decisions about northern lands and resources and reiterated the need for the transfer of province-like powers over public lands and resources in the NWT and Nunavut to the territorial governments.

The transfer of control and administration, referred to as devolution, must ensure northern residents have authority over northern land and the development of northern resources and that revenues realized from the development of northern resources are available to invest in programs and services for Northerners.

Devolution and the accompanying resource revenue sharing agreements with the federal government need to ensure that Northerners are the primary beneficiaries of resource development in the North.

Premiers agreed that fair agreements on devolution and resource revenue sharing for the territories are in the best interests of Canada as such agreements facilitate continued economic gains for all Canadians. Premiers called on the federal government to appoint a negotiator, develop a mandate and initiate formal negotiations with the Government of Nunavut.

## **OUR RELATIONS WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

Premiers are encouraged by the federal government's continued focus on northern issues and acknowledged the federal government's strategic aims for the North: sovereignty, environmental protection, economic/social development and improving/devolving governance, as shared interests between Canada and the three territories.

Premiers discussed the federal government's proposed investment in a High Arctic Research Station. While investments in northern research are welcome, Premiers placed special emphasis on the need for research to be undertaken in the North, involving Northerners, and that is practical and applicable to solving problems in the North. To that end, Premiers issued a formal request to the federal government to engage in direct discussions on the development of this important research facility.

They expressed their continuing interest in working with the Prime Minister on future collaboration between the federal government and the North on their shared objectives within their respective jurisdictions.

Premiers acknowledged the significant contribution the federal government has made and continues to make through key strategic investments in northern health care and economic development.

Premiers noted that a number of important funding initiatives are due to expire over the next couple of years and reiterated their desire to work with the federal government to identify continuing northern strategic investments. In particular, Premiers called on the federal government to provide economic development funding directly to territorial governments.

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