

Northern Premiers Discuss a Strong Canadian North

DAWSON CITY, YT (June 14, 2019) – Northern Premiers met today with a focus on discussing strategies and solutions to strengthen Canada’s North. Infrastructure investments continue to be needed to support Northerners’ desire for prosperity, growth, and sustainability, now and in to the future. Premiers agreed that growing and thriving northern economies should support local innovators, visionaries, and those capable of bolstering the North’s economic competitiveness and prosperity. There are significant opportunities for development in the North. Premiers stressed that strategic investments from the federal government in economic and energy infrastructure, as well as investments that support the wellness, safety, and well-being of Northerners is essential.

Climate change and geopolitical shifts are creating new and complex changes in Canada’s North. Northern Premiers recognized that the economy and environment cannot be separated from each other and a strong North balances environmental stewardship, reconciliation, traditional knowledge, economic benefit and a reasonable cost of living.

Northern Premiers will seek commitments from federal party leaders in the following areas.

Strengthening Canada’s Position in the Arctic

Northern Premiers note that the climactic, economic and geopolitical context of the Arctic is shifting. Internationally, the Arctic is seen as a place of investment and opportunity. Within Canada, Arctic investment can face barriers that prohibit the expansion and modernisation of major and transformative infrastructure throughout North.

Premiers noted the various territorial and federal strategies aimed at the North. They agreed a coordinated effort between the territories and the federal government to support infrastructure development to improve access to resources and to expand internal trade will help leverage the geographic advantage represented by the three territories.

Sustained, strategic investment in Northern people and communities is essential to strengthening Canada’s Arctic presence and to increasing awareness of the opportunities through development of Canada’s north and Arctic.

Climate Change

Premiers noted that climate change was woven into every item discussed throughout the day. Premiers agreed that every jurisdiction must do its part to address the impacts of climate change.

Canada's Northern and Arctic climate and landscape are changing rapidly and significantly. Temperatures in the North are changing at triple the rate than elsewhere. The North is seeing more frequent and severe fire events. Wildlife and plant species are claiming habitat in places they haven't been before. Water systems are taking new paths as glacial sources retreat. Ongoing coastal erosion along with sea ice forming later and thawing earlier in the year are affecting Indigenous traditional practices and wildlife hunting grounds. Highways and building foundations are shifting and cracking as permafrost thaws. The threat of climate change is pervasive – threatening to stifle and set-back growth, economic development and energy, housing, health and food security in the North.

Community Infrastructure and Disaster Mitigation

Recognizing that National Disaster Mitigation program will sunset in 2020, Premiers discussed the need for flexible, northern-specific federal funding to support communities as they prepare for the effects of natural disasters and address increasing costs related to infrastructure repair including:

- address the increasing incidences of natural disasters and infrastructure deterioration as the result of climate change;
- recognizes that there are cultural and socio-economic components to the impact of climate change;
- is accessible for the range of disasters that are increasing because of climate change, including flooding, wildfires, erosion and permafrost thaw;
- is accessible by communities in all three territories, and
- is more easily available to territories, instead of being scattered across federal departments.

Energy

Energy security and sustainability is a concern for all three territories. Northern Premiers noted the opportunities associated with intercontinental grid interties and discussed their commitment to reducing reliance on carbon-intensive energy while also ensuring reliable and affordable energy for northerners. Referencing discussions at the December 2018 First Ministers Meeting, Premiers acknowledged the possibility of national utility corridors and the potential benefits of intergovernmental cooperation to develop this idea further.

Northern Premiers called for sustained, continued federal funding to support energy security and reliability for all territorial communities. This increased investment must be

flexible and current program parameters and eligibility expanded to support communities in their efforts of innovation and green energy while understanding the realities that these remote communities face. As Northern Canada's population and economies continues to grow, people and industry will require more energy to drive growth.

Transportation

Historically, Canada has had a prominent role in supporting nation-building infrastructure including roads, ports, energy and fibre connectivity. The foundation to economic development in the North is investment in large scale transportation infrastructure across the territories. As such, Premiers welcomed dedicated northern National Trade Corridor Funds. However, they noted that the supplemental dollars in the 2019 federal budget are now available to the northern provinces, thereby reducing certainty for meaningful investment in the territories. The costs for the development of transportation infrastructure in the territories is much higher than in southern jurisdictions. Premiers emphasized that territorial government applications to the NTCF should be prioritized to increase certainty and support the development of transportation infrastructure. Similar views are expressed in the Senate Special Committee on the Arctic's recent report titled *Northern Lights: A Wake-up Call for the Future of Canada* and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development's report titled *Nation-Building At Home, Vigilance Beyond: Preparing for the Coming Decades in the Arctic*.

Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls

The release of the *Reclaiming Power and Place National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (MMIWG) final report took place on Monday, June 3 in Gatineau, Quebec. Northern Premiers remain committed to supporting families impacted by the loss of loved ones and responding to the Calls to Justice identified by the Inquiry. All three Premiers agreed that determining the most effective means to heal should be driven by Indigenous peoples and organizations, with support from all levels of government.

RCMP Funding

Premiers acknowledge the importance of Canada's policing resources in all three territories. The Government of Canada's proposed changes to RCMP funding in the territories has the potential to negatively impact policing resources and community support in the North, especially in countering the threat of organized crime and drug trafficking. Premiers are encouraged by the federal government's recent commitment to ensure continued support for a strong federal policing presence across the North by maintaining current funding and resources in the federal policing budget.

Mental Health and Addictions

Northern Premiers are committed to ensuring a high quality of life for all Northerners. Premiers discussed the health and well-being of northern residents, including mental health and problematic substance use challenges.

Premiers noted unique approaches in each of the territories that enable delivery of culturally appropriate programs and provide mental health supports and treatment in home communities. The territories will continue to invest in promotion, prevention and early intervention alongside identifying opportunities for innovation and collaboration.

Federal Relations

Over the past year, Northern Premiers have further strengthened their relationship with Canada, working to advance Northern priorities on the national stage. However, the human and economic potential in all territories is currently constrained by the lack of transportation, energy, and digital communications infrastructure.

Therefore, Premiers emphasized the unique circumstances of the north as it relates to federal funding. Premiers called on the federal government to rethink current funding arrangements with the objective of streamlining overly complex programs and transfers to better meet the capacity and needs of the territories. Furthermore, predictable and coordinated funding arrangements between federal, territorial and Indigenous governments will allow for more effective use of government services for northern residents.

While more work is needed, Northern Premiers noted the positive outcomes through advocating for Northern priorities that are being recognized by Canada.

Northwest Territories was confirmed as the host of the 2020 Northern Premiers' Forum.