



Communiqué 2011 Northern Premiers' Forum

Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (April 28, 2011) – Territorial Premiers met today to discuss issues of importance to northerners and all Canadians. The Northern Premiers' Forum provides Premiers with the opportunity to consider issues of common concern and develop northern solutions.

CIRCUMPOLAR ISSUES

Premiers meet with the Canadian Permanent Participant representatives

Premiers and Arctic Council Permanent Participant representatives met for the second time and discussed the upcoming Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting on May 12 in Nuuk, Greenland. They agreed to collaborate on Arctic Council matters and expressed a keen interest to extend an invitation to the federal government to work together towards developing a common position on Arctic Council matters such as the identification of "Arctic" priorities, observer status at Arctic Council meetings, the reinstatement of a circumpolar ambassador, the establishment and funding of a permanent indigenous secretariat for permanent participants, and the general need to share information and work together as a Canadian delegation in advance of, and at Arctic Council meetings. Developing a common Canadian position is particularly timely as Canada assumes the Chair for the Arctic Council in 2013.

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum which addresses issues faced by the Arctic countries and the indigenous people of the Arctic. The Ottawa Declaration of 1996 which formally established the Arctic Council lists the members of the Council, which are: Canada, Russia, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, the United States, Sweden and Finland.

In addition to its member-states, the Arctic Council includes six Permanent Participant organizations: Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC), Saami Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON), Aleut International Association (AIA), Gwich'in Council International (GCI) and the Arctic Athabaskan Council (AAC). Three of the permanent participant organizations have Canadian membership, the ICC, GCI and the AAC.

Arctic Council

Premiers discussed the work of the Arctic Council and the implications of a move toward an enhanced policy role for the council. Premiers look forward to working with the federal government to ensure Canada's Chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2013 reflects the interests of northerners.

HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Health care costs continue to increase in all provinces and territories and there are concerns about the long-term sustainability of health care systems across the entire country. Premiers are committed to supporting government-wide measures to help ensure the long-term sustainability of the territorial health care systems.

Premiers are working towards a continuation of the funding provided under the Territorial Health System Sustainability Initiative (THSSI), which will expire on March 31, 2012. The \$30-million annual THSSI contribution has allowed for critical investments to be made by all territories in support of long-term sustainability of the health care system. For example, the Northwest Territories has initiated a three-year plan towards system reform, *A Foundation for Change*, which focuses on three priorities: wellness, accessibility and sustainability. Yukon has made Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) a priority and is working towards identifying and implementing more effective strategies for awareness, identification, information sharing and specialized programming. Nunavut's Chronic Disease Prevention Strategy addresses the issues and factors that are preventing Nunavummiut to live healthy and productive daily lives.

Continuation of THSSI to coincide with the renewal of the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and the Canada Social Transfer (CST) funding by March 31, 2014 is essential to the territories' ability to continue to move towards long-term health care sustainability.

Northern Housing

The federal government's support for housing over the past five years has been instrumental in increasing the affordable housing stock in the territories. Premiers appreciate the contribution and view this commitment to northern housing as the beginning of a longer-term partnership to address the housing needs of northerners.

The territories' core need levels and the costs of housing remain higher than in the rest of Canada. As a result, the current per capita federal funding formula does not address current northern housing needs.

Premiers have tasked their Housing Ministers to develop a renewed partnership with Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). This new approach to northern housing should provide long term sustainable, predictable and flexible funding to improve on and sustain the existing housing stock across the three territories.

Policing in the North

Premiers noted that policing is a shared responsibility, delivered by the territorial governments in partnership with communities, the RCMP and the federal government.

Premiers highlighted the significant increases in territorial policing resources over the past decade to meet the policing needs of northern residents. Despite these efforts, the North leads the country in the overall crime rate, violent crime rate, youth crime and family violence. As a result, most policing resources are focused on reactive policing, leaving little or no resources for preventive measures to address the root causes of crime. Preventive measures would ultimately facilitate a reduction in crime and lead to safer communities.

Premiers acknowledged that the North faces unprecedented challenges in the delivery of policing services due to rising costs and critical infrastructure issues. The unique challenges facing the North in delivering policing services include language, cultural erosion, demographics, remoteness, small size of communities/economies of scale in service delivery, and these challenges combine to result in the highest jurisdictional costs per RCMP member in the country. The territorial governments' limited powers to raise revenue exacerbates their ability to provide adequate levels of police services and access to these services across the North. Meeting these challenges will require an ongoing partnership with the federal government.

Premiers call on the federal government to extend the application of the current national First Nation Policing Policy to the territories. They also stated the importance of successfully concluding negotiations to renew the Territorial Policing Services Agreements, including a cost mitigation strategy. In addition, Premiers urged Canada to address the pressing infrastructure needs for policing services across the North.

Devolution

Premiers discussed the Government of the Northwest Territories' recent signing of a Devolution Agreement-in-Principle with Canada and participating Aboriginal governments. They reaffirmed their commitment to working to ensure that northerners are the primary beneficiaries of their resources and those decisions affecting lands and resources are made in the North.

Premiers acknowledged Yukon's success with devolution as being key to allowing Yukon to manage lands and resources in a responsive way and providing greater control over the territory's resource economy.

Premiers also acknowledged the Northwest Territories' Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement in Principle (AiP) as a positive step for all residents of the NWT. The fiscal benefit described in the AiP was heralded as a potential model for bringing substantive benefit for all territories.

Premiers also stressed the importance of ensuring the federal government step up its efforts and appoint a federal Chief Negotiator to commence negotiations of a Devolution AiP with Nunavut.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Northern Infrastructure

Premiers recognized the significant benefits the North has received from federal infrastructure programs such as the Building Canada Plan, and the Knowledge Infrastructure and Arctic Research Infrastructure programs under Canada's Economic Action Plan. Funding received by the three territories has been instrumental in strengthening connections between northern communities, improving the quality of life and economic opportunities in the North, maintaining the North's safety and security and ensuring communities are healthy and sustainable.

Premiers noted that both the federal and territorial governments share a vision for healthy and sustainable communities that is vital in asserting Canada's sovereignty in the North. As a result, CanNor, as the federal regional investment body, should be refocused and guided by the long-term territorial priorities.

Premiers also noted that the immediate and long term infrastructure needs of the three territories far exceed each territorial government's financial ability to address them.

Aging and underdeveloped infrastructure, increasing resource development pressures, and climate change impacts are contributing to a growing northern infrastructure deficit. Territorial governments require a strong federal partner to develop a long term base funding program that addresses the issues and challenges of northern infrastructure.

National Energy Strategy

Premiers discussed the Canadian Energy Framework currently being developed by federal, provincial and territorial Energy Ministers. Premiers agreed that establishing a shared vision, common principles and objectives will strengthen the efforts of all Canadian jurisdictions to work together. Premiers noted the importance of a national energy strategy that reflects Canada's unique energy challenges and opportunities from coast to coast to coast.

RELEASE OF PAN-TERRITORIAL PAPERS

Today Premiers released two pan-territorial documents: the Pan-Territorial Adaptation Strategy and the Pan-Territorial Renewable Energy Inventory. These papers will be an important contribution to the national discussion on Canada's Energy Framework.

The Pan-Territorial Adaptation Strategy describes the challenges and goals of Canada's three northern territories in addressing climate change. Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories agreed to share knowledge and best practices to address areas of concern for adaptation to climate change in Arctic regions. The territories will continue to work with Aboriginal governments and organizations and the federal government to ensure that measures being taken in the three territories are coordinated between all levels of government.

The Pan-Territorial Renewable Energy Inventory identified ongoing efforts and opportunities in all three territories to shift to local and renewable energy supplies. Each territory continues to expand their use of renewable energy in ways that reduce the cost of providing energy to residents, communities, businesses and industry. Sharing of practices and experiences identified in this inventory strengthens knowledge of how to increase the supply of renewable energy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PREMIER FENTIE

This year's forum will be the last for Yukon's Premier and NPF co-founder, Dennis Fentie.

Premiers Aariak and Roland acknowledged the major contributions, wise guidance and unwavering commitment that Premier Fentie has provided to this and other First Ministers meetings.