



News Release

Premier, Minister Renew Federal Ties

IQALUIT, Nunavut (January 19, 2004) – Premier Paul Okalik and Health and Social Services Minister Ed Picco have held a constructive meeting with the new federal Minister of Health and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

“I am optimistic that we have turned a new leaf when it comes to our relationship with the federal government,” Okalik said of the meeting with Pierre Pettigrew. “We look forward to working in partnership with the federal government so that we can deal effectively with Nunavut’s economic, health and social issues,” the Premier added.

“Minister Pettigrew is the first federal health minister to visit Nunavut,” Picco said. “I believe this visit shows a sincere interest in our territory’s successes and challenges.”

The Premier urged the federal government to play a significant role to help Nunavut implement the territory’s first economic development strategy that was unveiled by the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., the land claims organization, last September. The territorial strategy would be a cornerstone for a regional federal economic strategy.

“I pointed out to Minister Pettigrew that the North is the only region in Canada that does not have a federal economic development strategy,” Okalik said.

To realize its economic potential Nunavut needs to benefit directly from its natural resources, the Premier said as he reiterated his call for urgent negotiations on devolving powers from the federal to the territorial government.

Health care funding was at the top of the agenda for Picco’s discussions with Pettigrew.

“The current funding under the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) contribution agreement does not meet the needs of Nunavut,” Picco said. “The inadequacy of this funding is felt on the front lines of health care delivery.”

The Department of Health and Social Services is currently working with the federal government to revise the territory’s contribution agreement to more accurately reflect the needs of Nunavut’s health care system. A completed agreement is expected in early spring 2004.

The issue of consent forms under the NIHB continues to be a concern for Nunavut and was also a topic of discussion for the two ministers.

“To continue to develop community capacity in bringing care closer to home, we must return to the 1995 funding levels provided by the Canadian Health Social Transfer,” Picco said.

Pettigrew was in Iqaluit as part of a national tour to meet his provincial and territorial counterparts and hear their views on how they can engage in a more constructive dialogue on national priorities.

-30-

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