



WESTERN PREMIERS FOCUS ON JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

In Winnipeg today, Western Premiers focused on jobs and the economy. They discussed labour market shortages and skills training, strategic infrastructure investments, immigration, energy, and international trade and investment. Premiers also discussed other important issues that affect the lives of Canadian families, such as managing natural disasters, improving water quality, and addressing the growing problem of bullying and cyber-bullying.

Premiers also met with Canada's Ambassador to the United States, Gary Doer, reaffirming Western Canada's commitment to ensuring a strong relationship with the United States.

A Skilled Workforce

Western Premiers discussed the acute labour and skills shortages affecting their jurisdictions. To ensure these shortages do not restrict economic growth, Premiers agreed on the need to:

- expand the labour force through skills training;
- attract workers through an effective approach to immigration;
- ensure Aboriginal people are well-positioned to fully participate in the economy; and
- engage with the private sector to encourage and support its necessary involvement in solving the skills shortage.

Premiers support a flexible approach to skills training that reflects the diverse needs of the West. Premiers support greater involvement by employers in skills and job training reflecting diverse provincial and territorial economies. There is concern that the proposed Canada Job Grant could interfere with provincial and territorial priorities in skills training and jeopardize the success of training programs already in place, particularly those that help the most vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities, who need additional supports to find jobs.

As an area of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, any federal initiatives in skills training should allow any jurisdiction to opt out with full compensation.

New federal initiatives should also take into account the unique skills training required for Canada's Aboriginal people. Canada's Aboriginal people represent an important part of

Canada's workforce. Premiers' priority is to ensure Aboriginal people have the necessary skills and job readiness to participate fully in the Canadian economy.

A more responsive and flexible immigration system is a vital component of developing a skilled Canadian workforce. Premiers expressed support for efforts to create new models for economic immigration, but noted that existing Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs continue to be essential tools to help meet economic and labour market needs.

Premiers emphasized the importance of federal-provincial-territorial collaboration in reforming Canada's immigration system and agree that reforms must:

- increase overall immigration levels;
- provide a greater role for provinces and territories in the selection of all immigrants;
- ensure Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs are not negatively affected by the implementation of the Expression of Interest model;
- include a streamlined visa processing system that is client-focused and ensures Canada is competitive in the global market for talent and tourism; and
- ensure timely and reliable access to Temporary Foreign Workers in order to fill legitimate labour and skills shortages, recognizing that Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs provide an effective path for these workers to become Canadian citizens.

Strategic Investments in Infrastructure

As the primary funders of infrastructure, provinces and territories are making strategic investments to maximize economic benefits, create jobs, and improve productivity.

Western Premiers welcomed the federal government's commitment to a new Building Canada Plan and are pleased the new program will include a "base plus per capita" formula. Premiers look forward to discussions with the federal government regarding the renewed program and emphasized that infrastructure funding programs should be fair, flexible and align with provincial and territorial priorities. An effective infrastructure program is critical in supporting economic growth.

Sustained economic growth in the West requires adequate and affordable housing to support business investment and to attract workers. In areas where there is limited supply of housing, particularly in remote areas, adequate and affordable housing helps to reduce the cost of living. Western Premiers discussed the critical importance of an effective partnership with the federal government in the housing field. They also agreed to explore joint procurement opportunities in social housing.

Building Canada's Energy Future

Growing established markets and opening new ones for all Western energy exports will help strengthen our economies and create jobs across Canada. From liquefied natural gas to uranium to oil and hydroelectricity, enhancing energy infrastructure to get our products to markets in an environmentally sustainable manner and working collaboratively are priorities of Western Premiers. Enhanced market access is essential for ensuring that Western provinces and territories receive full value for their resources.

Premiers agreed that in order to continue to seize available opportunities, Canada must further diversify its energy export markets internationally while ensuring continued fair and open access to North American energy markets. Premiers also discussed domestic energy interests, including the movement of oil from west to east; the need to improve integration of electrical grids throughout the West and North; and the importance of reducing remote communities' reliance on diesel. Premiers emphasized Canada's responsibility to continue to transition to a lower-carbon economy.

Growing International Trade and Investment

Canada is a trading nation and western provinces and territories make a significant contribution to the nation's economy through their international trade and investment activities.

Securing market access with the United States, Canada's largest trading partner, is vital. Premiers are concerned by the growing number of states considering Buy American procurement restrictions and calls for new fees at the Canada-US border.

Amendments to US Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) regulations in May 2013 will worsen discrimination against Canadian livestock and do not bring the US into compliance with its international trade obligations. Premiers support the federal government's ongoing efforts to resolve the COOL issue, including retaliatory trade measures if necessary.

International initiatives such as the *Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement* (CETA), the Trans-Pacific Partnership and bilateral negotiations with India, Japan, and Korea are important free trade initiatives which must be concluded. Premiers appreciate the role provinces and territories have been able to play in CETA negotiations and look forward to their successful conclusion. Western provinces and territories encourage the federal government to extend this successful approach to other negotiations.

Premiers emphasized the important role foreign investment can play in supporting economic growth in the West and agree jurisdictions must cooperate to ensure access to foreign markets. Premiers agreed on the importance of regional coordination for economic development and strong cooperation between federal, provincial, and territorial governments in evaluating and making decisions on matters such as determining the net benefit of investment opportunities under the *Investment Canada Act*.

Protection from Bullying

Premiers discussed bullying and cyber-bullying and its impact on Canadian youth. New technologies can accelerate or amplify bullying and our laws must reflect this reality. Provinces and territories are responsible for education and Premiers are leaders in promoting an inclusive and diverse society. They shared work underway on the prevention of bullying and cyber-bullying and support for healing among victims. Premiers noted that work continues to identify gaps in the *Criminal Code*. They commend the leadership of Western Justice Ministers and their colleagues, as well as new efforts by the federal government, all of which would provide new deterrence and rehabilitation tools.

Disaster Management

Premiers called on the federal government to take steps to put a Canada-wide Public Emergency Alert System into operation, building on the system pioneered in Alberta. To accomplish this, Premiers intend to work collaboratively with broadcasters as the support of broadcasters is required for implementation.

Premiers also called on the federal government to maintain its support levels to help provinces, territories and local governments deal with future natural disasters.

Premiers look forward to the fulfillment of the federal government's 2011 commitment to establish a new, Canada-wide disaster mitigation initiative, separate from other national programs. Premiers caution, however, that they would not support a plan to finance the new program by scaling back federal disaster assistance levels. Premiers also noted that serious inadequacies in emergency management in Aboriginal communities remain and cooperation among governments is essential to improve services in these communities.

Improving Water Quality

Premiers discussed the importance of coordination across jurisdictional boundaries to protect water quality. Premiers agreed to explore ways to improve the exchange of information and best practices to address water quality challenges across watersheds, such as the Manitoba-led Lake Friendly Accord.

2014 Western Premiers' Conference

Premier Aariak confirmed that Nunavut will host next year's Western Premiers' Conference

- 30 -

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