



FOR RELEASE
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COMMUNIQUÉ

Driving the Canadian future with a Northern Vision

WHITEHORSE—Territorial premiers met in Whitehorse for the 11th annual Northern Premiers' Forum on May 9 to 10 to further their work to create a strong and vibrant North.

Premiers believe in the power of a forward-looking pan-territorial vision and remain dedicated to working together to build a strong, vibrant North that creates opportunities for northerners and benefits all Canadians. At their meeting, they committed to review and renew *A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Canada*, taking into consideration emerging areas of interest for the territories.

Expressing the interests and insights of northerners is more important than ever, given growing national and international interest in the North.

Infrastructure

Premiers acknowledged Canada's recent announcement of the New Building Canada Plan and reiterated the importance of base-plus, predictable and flexible funding for territories.

Transportation

Transportation infrastructure is essential for enhanced and sustainable northern economies. Partnerships with Canada are essential for improving transportation infrastructure so that territories can continue to compete in the global economy.

Energy

Cost-effective energy systems, as well as cleaner alternatives, are the backbone of healthy, sustainable communities. The expense of powering with diesel impedes economic development across the North by driving up the cost of living and the cost of doing business.

The availability of hydropower is essential for attracting industrial scale projects to the North. Expanding northern transmission infrastructure aligns closely with the vision presented in Canada's Northern Strategy.

Premiers will ensure that northern interests are represented in the Council of the Federation's Canadian Energy Strategy, including the importance of open access to southern and international markets to allow territories to import and export energy resources.

Housing

Premiers recognized the significant federal investment in housing to date. They also acknowledged the work of territorial housing ministers in developing partnerships towards long-term solutions. An innovative, flexible approach to funding will allow territories to address individual needs. Housing is necessary to support the economic and social development of the North and there is limited capacity for the three territorial governments to unilaterally respond to the housing needs of their citizens and economies.

Housing is a major factor in the health, wealth and well-being of Canadians. Continued investment in housing in the North will contribute to the development of vibrant communities where people are healthy and able to realize their potential.

Connectivity

The North's economic potential is not limited to its natural resource base. Enhanced communications infrastructure will diversify and strengthen northern economies and attract investment.

Enhanced connectivity will benefit northerners by improving program and service delivery and by increasing innovation opportunities. It will also enhance programs including tele-health, online learning and e-commerce. Territories are currently taking steps to strengthen fibre link and other communications infrastructure. Additional investment is necessary to ensure northerners have services comparable to southern jurisdictions.

Premiers encourage the federal government to continue its efforts to support northern connectivity through initiatives by Infrastructure Canada, Industry Canada, CanNor and other departments. This includes advancing work for rural and remote communities through Canada's Digital Economy Strategy.

Our Arctic coast

The development of Arctic port infrastructure and coastal access advances sovereignty, protects environmentally sensitive waters, and promotes safe, healthy and prosperous communities.

Accordingly, premiers encourage the federal government to make the necessary investments in infrastructure for Arctic ports and coastal access facilities to ensure that Arctic marine shipping, especially Arctic community re-supply, is conducted in a safe, reliable and environmentally friendly manner.

Increased traffic and demands for safe shipping has accelerated the need for comprehensive charting of territorial waters.

Premiers recognize that increased Arctic traffic has created greater need for a coordinated and timely search and rescue response. This requires a greater northern presence of search and rescue personnel and infrastructure and enhanced training for first responders.

Healthy sustainable communities

Skills training

The territories' economies are expanding rapidly which means northern residents need to be prepared for current and future labour market opportunities. Premiers agreed that it is important to ensure northern people benefit from northern jobs.

Territorial, Aboriginal and federal governments are working together and with industry, local businesses, educators and other labour market stakeholders to develop a northern workforce that can participate more fully in the labour market and maximize the benefits of employment opportunities. Canada's Aboriginal people represent untapped potential for Canada's economy. Premiers' priority is to ensure northerners have the necessary skills and job readiness to fill the high wage jobs resulting from this economic expansion.

Skills training is essential in territorial growth and Premiers look forward to receiving more detail on recently announced federal changes to skills training programs. They emphasized the importance of retaining the flexibility to ensure programs meet the needs of northerners. As an issue that is important across Canada, they anticipate further discussion with colleagues at the summer Council of Federation meeting.

Mental wellness

Mental wellness is an integral part of health for residents in all three territories and in the circumpolar Arctic. Premiers committed to working together to ensure that northerners have access to effective and timely mental wellness treatments. Premiers also expressed support for the Arctic Council's work on mental wellness and hope that this will be a focus of Canada's chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

Climate change adaptation

Dramatic impacts of climate change are already occurring and vary widely in nature and magnitude across Canada's North. Premiers emphasized the importance of adaptation strategies.

Territorial climate change officials have completed several projects from the Pan-Territorial Adaptation Strategy which will help increase northern resilience to future changes.

These climate change adaptation projects align with the territories' Northern Vision, the Federal Northern Strategy and the adaptation work of the Arctic Council.

Arctic Council

Premiers are looking forward to showcasing the North through the work of the Arctic Council, within Canada and within the circumpolar world.

While territorial priorities may vary by jurisdiction, premiers are well aware of the many responsibilities they share with the circumpolar world. As elected leaders of public governments, Premiers will work with Canada to formalize their roles as representatives of northern Canadians.

Premiers support Canada's chairmanship theme 'Development for the People of the North' and the sub-themes: Responsible Resource Development, Safe Arctic Shipping and Sustainable Circumpolar Communities.

The eyes of the world are on the Canadian North and the territories are looking forward to working with Canada on projects that have concrete outcomes for northerners.

Before the forum, premiers had a successful meeting with representatives of the indigenous peoples' organizations that have Permanent Participant status in the Arctic Council: Chief Joe Linklater, international chair of the Gwich'in Council International, and Council of Yukon First Nations Grand Chief Ruth Massie, who represented the Arctic Athabaskan Council. Premiers and Permanent Participants agreed to work more closely together to improve communications, ensure common priorities are addressed and to showcase the North under Canada's Arctic Council chairmanship.

Devolution

Sustainable resource development is a primary economic driver that provides important job and

business opportunities throughout our territories. Devolution allows our residents to help shape the future of their land and governments and share in the economic benefits that result.

The provinces and Yukon manage their own land and keep a share of the revenues from resource development. The people of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut should also have that authority.

Premiers urged the federal government to reach an agreement-in-principle with Nunavut as soon as possible.

To find out more about the Northern Premiers' Forum visit www.anorthernvision.ca.

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