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## COMMUNIQUE

For Immediate Release  
June 27, 2023

Western Premiers' Conference

### **Western Premiers Focus on the Economy, Affordability and Future Prosperity**

WHISTLER, B.C. – Premiers of Canada's Western provinces and territories met in Whistler to discuss approaches to diversify and strengthen their shared economy, and opportunities to build future prosperity.

Premiers discussed the ongoing wildfire crisis and the serious threat catastrophic weather events pose to communities, the economy and critical infrastructure. They will continue to work together, and with the federal government, to support communities and ensure adequate resources are available to keep people safe and reduce threats to homes and livelihoods.

Western Premiers had productive discussions on many shared priorities including: strategic infrastructure and corridors; climate action and sustainable development; energy security; immigration; labour markets and mobility; Arctic security and sovereignty; and community safety.

Action is required to address the challenges facing Western Canadians. They expect governments to take fair, respectful and constructive steps to improve affordability and position Canada for economic renewal and prosperity. This includes addressing critical fiscal and infrastructure challenges in the North.

Western Premiers noted Canadians are best served when the uniqueness of each province and territory is recognized. The federal government must respect provincial and territorial jurisdiction, and federal action must complement regional and local priorities.

### **Strategic Infrastructure and Corridors**

Western Premiers are committed to working together to create and improve strategic infrastructure and have agreed to identify opportunities to enhance trade corridors to help increase the flow of vital goods across the country and to international markets. Nation-building infrastructure, such as ports, roads, airports, telecommunications, energy and digital and community infrastructure, is essential to economic growth and connecting people and communities. Reliable corridors and efficient port operations support global food and energy security while providing economic security for Canadian families. Improved efficiency will help

address the ongoing affordability crisis as well as advance Canada's strategic interests including Arctic security and sovereignty.

The federal government must collaborate with provinces and territories on future infrastructure needs. It must also improve project approval timelines while reducing red tape to address ongoing project delays. Communities are experiencing unprecedented inflationary pressures and cost overruns on existing projects due to supply chain issues and input costs. Provinces and territories are urgently seeking details on how these pressures will be addressed and what replacement for the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP) will be forthcoming. On June 15, Canada's Premiers wrote to the Prime Minister to reiterate provinces' and territories' shared priorities on infrastructure funding and policy in the absence of federal direction on a program to replace the ICIP. Western Premiers call on the federal government to respect the principles for the next phase of federal infrastructure funding that were articulated in that letter.

### **Climate Action and Sustainable Development**

Global action is critical to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Provinces and territories have taken and continue to take actions to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Addressing climate change requires collaborative action on adaptation and mitigation strategies. Provinces and territories will continue to adapt their strategies to address their local needs and priorities, as well as to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. Western Premiers call on the federal government to engage with provinces and territories collectively and individually on supporting provincial and territorial adaptation and mitigation strategies and on timely, long-term funding sufficient to implement these strategies.

Geopolitical factors amplify the challenge and opportunity of a transition to lower-emissions energy sources and renewables. International cooperation, such as exporting low or zero emitting Canadian LNG, hydroelectricity, uranium and hydrogen can play a role in reducing global emissions. Premiers renew their call on the federal government to support emission credit trading across international borders and work with provinces and territories to finalize the rules under Article 6 to ensure they receive credit for reductions resulting from actions in their jurisdictions, as a means to support emissions targets.

Forthcoming Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAA) changes by the federal government must be advanced in close collaboration with provinces and territories, and not shift risk and costs to provinces, territories and municipalities. The renewed DFAA should be accessible, efficient and flexible so that it supports Western Canadian communities affected by disasters.

## **Energy Security**

Canada has an important role to play in global energy security, including through the provision of traditional energy sources, such as oil and gas, LNG, uranium and hydroelectricity, and emerging technologies and solutions such as hydrogen and renewable fuels.

Canadian energy products need to get to Canadians and to international markets. The energy sector will continue to evolve and adapt to new technologies in search of new low to zero-emitting fuel sources. The federal government must respect the jurisdiction of provinces and territories, and work with them to reduce emissions while they continue to develop existing and future energy sources. Significantly increased federal investment is needed in Western provinces and territories, commensurate with investments elsewhere in the country.

Western Premiers call on the federal government to work with them to secure international and domestic market access and to invest in the energy and electricity infrastructure needed to realize the region's economic potential, including accelerating support for generation and transmission infrastructure. Premiers expressed concern that the federal Clean Electricity Regulations are unattainable and unaffordable for some jurisdictions given current technologies and timelines.

Western Canada has the opportunity to become a reliable source and supplier of critical minerals and rare earth elements for Canada and its international partners. Western Canadians are already benefiting from development of copper, nickel, zinc, uranium, potash, molybdenum, lithium and helium, and future critical minerals extraction and processing will continue to generate economic prosperity. Western Premiers call on the federal government to ensure the accelerated approval processes it identified in Budget 2023 are implemented in a timely manner.

Western Premiers discussed the federal Clean Fuel Regulations, the proposed Clean Electricity Regulations, and the oil and gas emissions cap. They call on the federal government to ensure federal climate policies recognize early and ongoing action by provinces and territories in these areas. Premiers affirmed that electricity and energy regulation is the exclusive jurisdiction of provinces and territories, and are taking action to reduce emissions. Federal policies must not infringe on their authority and must recognize their unique needs and situations.

Premiers discussed the impacts of these federal policies including overlap, affordability and inflationary impacts, feasibility and attainability.

## **Immigration**

Immigration is critically important for supporting Western Canadian prosperity and vibrant communities.

Provinces and territories are best positioned to understand their labour markets and local needs. Western Premiers call for continued expansion of provinces' and territories' roles in economic immigration through continued growth of the Provincial and Territorial Nominee Program, and for the federal government to engage provinces and territories as full partners in

Canada's immigration system. To ensure successful integration, provinces and territories are committed to working closely with the federal government to align planned immigration levels with provincial and community capacity.

Western Premiers call on the federal government to accelerate its efforts to improve processing times for provincial nominees and other immigration streams so that the immigration system is more fair, timely, and responsive. Federal funding for settlement services is insufficient and should be enhanced and broadened. Also, it is important that interested jurisdictions have the opportunity for a larger role in settlement service delivery.

Western Premiers emphasized their commitment to supporting displaced Ukrainians. They noted that through the current Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, the federal government is not providing sufficient funding and support. They urgently called on the federal government to establish an improved program with a new funding partnership, particularly given the July 15 deadline for international applications to the CUAET.

### **Labour Markets and Mobility**

All provinces and territories are experiencing the effects of a nationwide labour market shortage, particularly in the health care sector.

Western jurisdictions are committed to exploring opportunities for streamlined registration practices and will collaborate to remove barriers for workers trying to become licensed to work in their occupation of training.

Employment and training supports are important for a strong labour market. Western Premiers urge the federal government to work with provinces and territories on the renewal of Labour Market Transfer Agreements (LMTAs) to ensure long-term, stable federal funding. Premiers also discussed the federal government's plans to modernize the Employment Insurance system and shared perspectives on potential changes, including employment benefits.

### **Arctic Security and Sovereignty**

Recent events regarding foreign or unknown aerial and marine incursions into the Canadian Arctic have underscored the overdue need for national attention to Arctic security.

Federal partnership and investments supporting Arctic security and sovereignty need to be informed by the needs and interests of Northerners and build operational capabilities in the North and with the North.

The North holds natural resources critical to Canada's future and a clean economy. Western Premiers call on the federal government to make the dual-use investments that bolster Canadian security and sovereignty, and that will also support economic opportunities in the North and foster strong, resilient Northern communities.

## Community Safety

Premiers are committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of Western Canadian communities. Each jurisdiction is undertaking initiatives to combat crime, invest in mental health and addictions supports, and improve safety, particularly for vulnerable communities, including addressing racialized and gender-based violence, and pervasive violence against Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people.

Western Premiers urge the federal government to engage closely with provinces and territories in its development of First Nations policing legislation.

Western Premiers have advocated for changes to strengthen Canada's bail system. Premiers are deeply disappointed that the proposed amendments to the *Criminal Code* have not been passed. It is critically important that the federal government prioritize and pass the amendments to improve the bail system and target repeat violent offenders and serious offences committed with firearms and other weapons. Western Premiers are committed to protecting Canadians from violence, addressing both urban and rural crime, and working with the federal government to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the correctional system. Policing is a key component of public safety and Western Premiers call on the federal government to work with provinces and territories to address chronic RCMP staffing shortages including in specialized units. They also call on the federal government to address the growing problem of privately made firearms, including "ghost guns" made with 3D printers.

In the wake of recent tragedies affecting communities and police officers, Western Premiers are committed to prioritizing seamless policing systems that protect the public and first responders.

Western Premiers support local governments advocating for federal financial support of the retroactive costs associated with the latest RCMP collective bargaining agreement and expect the federal government to consult with provinces and territories regarding future collective bargaining agreements that create financial obligations for provinces, territories, or municipalities.

The Yukon was confirmed as host for the next meeting of Western Premiers in 2024.

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