

SPEAKING NOTES

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on behalf of the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status
Indians
at the

Advantage North – Resource Development and Northern Transportation Conference

Whitehorse, Yukon
May 29, 2007

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Good morning. I am very pleased to be speaking to you today on behalf of the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians.

Minister Prentice has asked me to pass on his regrets that his schedule prevents him from addressing this Conference. He has also asked me to extend his congratulations to the Western Transportation Advisory Council for bringing together so many experts who can address the wide range of practical issues critical to the future development of the North's vast stores of mineral and oil and gas resources.

Introduction

As the organizers of this Conference see so clearly, transportation is a key enabler of the North's resource development. We need safe, efficient, reliable transportation infrastructure and services in all three territories to facilitate exploration activities, and to deliver the construction materials and skilled labour force required to build mines and pipelines. When it comes to the actual production, we will need safe, secure transportation infrastructure to get the North's vital resources to markets throughout North America, and indeed, the world.

Over the next three days, speakers at this Conference will examine some of the enormous challenges we face in realizing this transportation goal for Canada's North. These include the challenges posed by global warming and the climate change that is already severely affecting the North, as well as the high costs of building infrastructure in the three vastly different terrains of the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

In the next few minutes, I will be highlighting for you what the Government of Canada is doing to help address these challenges. But first I want to give you a clear picture of the Government's overall approach to Northern issues — an

approach that is founded on partnerships with the three territories and productive relationships with all stakeholders. And these stakeholders include Northerners, Aboriginal groups, private companies and regulatory boards.

Partnerships and Resource Development

The Government of Canada welcomed the release on May 26th by the three territorial leaders of their Northern Vision for building a "more prosperous, sustainable and secure North." That vision highlights the need for Moving Forward in Partnership "within the territorial governments, with the federal and provincial governments, with northern Aboriginal governments and organizations, with non-governmental organizations and with the private sector".

The Government of Canada shares this commitment to continuing to work in partnership and cooperation to develop the North's natural resources and create jobs and prosperity for Northerners and all Canadians.

When Prime Minister Harper was here last August he said that his tour was, and I quote, the, "highlight of my summer." He said that "Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories are poised to lead the North into a new era. An era of rapid growth, improving social conditions and growing economic independence." While he was here, he stated that the "North's time has arrived". Why? Because "never have its resources been in greater demand, never have prices for northern commodities been so strong, never have Northerners been so united in their desire for real jobs and real economic progress."

As everyone at this Conference is aware, the North holds a significant percentage of Canada's energy resources. The Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Canadian Arctic Offshore area hold an estimated one-third of Canada's conventionally recoverable resources of natural gas and one-quarter of the remaining recoverable light crude oil. Yet only a tiny fraction of the North's energy resources have been tapped. The remainder represents an immense opportunity for exploration and development investment for generations to come.

To make the most of this opportunity, the Government of Canada believes that all interests—economic, social and environmental—must be accommodated. As I said a moment ago, we need a collaborative approach with all stakeholders in order to realize this vision. And effective consultation with Aboriginal governments and groups who may be affected by a project is an integral part of the review and approval process.

This is the approach that underlies the Mackenzie Gas Project, which is without doubt the largest economic opportunity in the history of the North.

Assuming this project proves to be economically feasible and satisfies environmental and regulatory requirements, it will have the full support of the Government of Canada. It is the Government's duty to safeguard sensitive ecosystems and protect the public interest. By adopting a balanced approach to

the development of northern pipelines and other major resource development projects, these goals can be achieved.

Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation

The Government is also pursuing a collaborative approach to address the new reality of climate change and the challenges it is presenting to the environment, to traditional ways of life and to natural resource economies. These impacts pose risks for the health and safety of all peoples living in the North, as well as for infrastructure and natural resource development.

The Government of Canada continues to support Aboriginal and Northern communities and organizations in engaging in activities related to climate change. These have focused on programs supporting sustainable energy management and energy access, as well as gathering and communicating information on climate change impacts. We are now preparing to develop and implement action plans to reduce the risks posed by climate change in the North.

International Polar Year

We expect that the new knowledge uncovered by Canadian and international scientists through the International Polar Year initiative will bring environmental, health and economic benefits to Canadians in the North, and across our nation. Indeed, this new knowledge will have an impact on all nations, given the global effects of climate change.

As you know, Canada is taking a leading part in International Polar Year 2007–2008, which was officially launched on March 1st. This is the largest-ever international program of coordinated research and observations focused on the polar regions, and it involves more than 60 countries and thousands of scientists.

Canada played a leading part in ensuring that this International Polar Year would be the first to focus on the human dimension of polar science activity and put the people of the Arctic at the centre of the initiative. The Government of Canada has committed \$150 million towards a strong and innovative program in support of Canadian involvement and participation in this major international event.

International Polar year is a great opportunity for Canada to collaborate with other nations to generate valuable information to help us protect our environment and make the right choices for mitigating the impact of climate change on the North and its peoples.

And in that regard, I want to emphasize that the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal people living in the Arctic will be a critical component of all International Polar Year projects. Moreover, Northerners will be engaged not only as participants and leaders in the planning and implementation of science and research activities, but also in the delivery of the projects and in the specialized training and communications activities needed to support them. The various International Polar Year projects will provide opportunities for the

people living in the North to develop a broad range of new skills, as well as introduce new technologies and open up economic opportunities.

These new skills that Northerners and Aboriginal people acquire will be instrumental in helping to build a stronger and more flexible workforce in the North.

Regulatory Systems

I want to turn now to another important component of the Government's approach, and that is addressing the regulatory processes that currently exist and that sometimes present challenges for resource development.

The present regulatory system has been criticized for being overly complex, time-consuming and inefficient. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is therefore working with various stakeholders in a number of fora to ensure that the North has a modern, integrated and responsive regulatory system in place for the 21st century.

An effective regulatory system will foster investor confidence, promote economic prosperity and ensure that the system is at peak efficiency.

Settled land claim and self-government agreements will continue to be respected, and the Government of Canada will continue to work with the signatories to those agreements to identify ways the system can be implemented to the benefit of all parties.

Land claim settlements

The Government of Canada is also accelerating its efforts to negotiate Aboriginal land claims and self-government agreements, because they clear a path to stronger governance and to new economic and social opportunities. The Yukon is a leader in that area, with 11 self-governing First Nations.

Land claim and self-government agreements also help to provide the resources and certainty that stimulate investment.

Infrastructure Investments

I would like to conclude my remarks this morning by highlighting for you some of the ways that the Government is working to support new and enhanced infrastructure in the North.

In December 2006, for example, Canada's New Government contributed close to \$1.2 million to improve Nunavut's airport runways. This funding recognizes that Nunavut has particular infrastructure needs and that airport transportation is the territory's principal means of public transit.

In Budget 2007, Jim Flaherty – our Minister of Finance – announced \$175 million over seven years for the three territories to help build the modern infrastructure fundamental to the future of the North, including roads and highways.

The Budget also strengthened the Territorial Formula Financing to reflect the special circumstances and higher costs in the North, providing an additional \$115 million this year.

And under the Canada Strategic Infrastructure Fund, the Government of Canada is providing over \$80 million towards key highway infrastructure in the North, including the Northwest Territories' "Corridors for Canada" program, and improvements to the Alaska Highway in the Yukon.

As I believe my remarks have made clear, the Government of Canada is determined to make practical, tangible progress in enabling the growth of healthy, stable, prosperous communities in the North, as well as sustainable development, environmental protection and an improved standard of living for Northerners.

This improved standard of living of course includes the transportation infrastructure that will enhance the quality of life in all northern communities, and facilitate the resource development so crucial to the future prosperity of the North and the entire nation.

I want to wish you all a highly successful and productive conference.

Thank you.