

FOR RELEASE  
May 6, 2016

## **Western premiers focus on jobs and communities**

*Joint news release*

VANCOUVER—Western premiers met in Vancouver over the past two days to discuss ways to build future prosperity in Canada's western provinces and territories.

The West continues to be an essential economic driver for Canada. The annual Western Premiers' Conference is an opportunity for western provincial and territorial leaders to set priorities and offer constructive leadership on the national stage.

During the conference, western premiers discussed how to strengthen the economy and position the West to remain globally competitive. They found shared ground on energy and resource development, climate action, immigration and international trade. They agreed on the importance of building prosperity through partnerships with Indigenous governments, Indigenous development corporations and Indigenous entrepreneurs. Premiers also agreed on the importance of supporting communities in times of crisis, by ensuring adequate resources and funding are available to predict, prepare for and respond to wildland fires, floods and drought.

"I want to thank my provincial and territorial colleagues for bringing their strong western voices to the table for the Western Premiers' Conference," said Premier Clark. "Together, we will continue to work towards building a stronger, more prosperous Canada."

The western premiers have been meeting regularly since 1973 to discuss common issues and strengthen and diversify their shared economy.

-30-

A backgrounder follows.

Media contact:

Stephen Smart  
Press Secretary  
Office of the Premier  
Province of British Columbia  
250-952-7252

## **Backgrounder**

Western premiers met in Vancouver over the past two days to discuss ways to build future prosperity in Canada's western provinces and territories.

Western Canada's energy and natural resources have been the driving force behind the growth of Canada's export economy in the 21st century. Continued action is needed to ensure that western Canadians, including Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs, can compete and win in the increasingly competitive global marketplace.

Ensuring that western provinces and territories continue to grow and diversify their economic opportunities will strengthen both the western and the national economy. A fragile global economy, coupled with the imperative of protecting the environment and addressing climate change, presents new challenges and opportunities for the entire western Canadian region.

## **Partnership with the Federal Government**

Canada's governments need to work together to build the economy. Western premiers noted the federal government's increased engagement with provinces and territories on a wide range of files, and stressed that such engagement must be based on shared leadership that includes meaningful collaboration, recognizing the unique needs and expertise of jurisdictions, and respecting areas of provincial and territorial responsibility. Western provinces and territories will continue to be active, constructive partners in intergovernmental cooperation to improve opportunities for Canadians.

Canadians count on their governments to safeguard the quality of their health care systems. However, upcoming changes in the growth formula for the Canada Health Transfer may challenge the ability of provinces and territories to ensure sustainable and quality health care services for all Canadians. Western premiers look forward to immediate discussions with other first ministers and quick progress on renewed financial arrangements in support of Canada's health care systems. Premiers also discussed disparities in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Closing these gaps will require sustained federal commitment in cooperation with Indigenous Canadians to address both immediate health care needs and underlying factors.

## **Energy and Resource Development**

Western Canadians are proud of the region's abundant and diversified mix of natural resources. western resources provide a

sustainable and reliable supply of energy while contributing to economic growth and prosperity.

Achieving greater market access for the West's diverse energy resources is a shared priority of all western jurisdictions. Western premiers reiterated their agreement on the importance and urgency of moving Canada's resources to market. When resources are transported in a responsible, timely, predictable and sustainable way that is informed by science-based environmental assessments conducted within existing jurisdictional frameworks, all Canadians benefit through long-term economic growth and job creation. Premiers also discussed the ongoing federal review of the National Energy Board, and called upon the federal government to work cooperatively with the provinces and territories on changes to the National Energy Board and environmental assessment processes to ensure a regulatory regime that is effective, timely, and predictable, and does not put Canadian industries at a competitive disadvantage.

Unlocking Western Canada's natural resources will require both infrastructure to bring goods to market, and a timely, efficient and effective permitting process. Premiers encouraged the federal government to preserve the principle of substitution in environmental assessment. Without substitution, parallel federal and provincial assessments can lead to inefficiency and delays. Substitution is a tool for maintaining assessment standards while reducing duplication.

Western premiers also discussed their collective commitment to sustainable resource development, and shared information on their respective initiatives to foster responsible and sustainable economic growth. Premiers acknowledge that the oil and gas industry will continue to be a major driver of economic growth and an important fuel source for Canada, and will continue to be vitally important to the livelihoods and futures of families across Canada.

Moving towards cleaner and renewable energy sources will open up economic opportunities and help improve long term energy reliability and resiliency. Premiers also reinforced their interest in reviewing potential opportunities to increase the capacity of inter-jurisdictional electricity inter-ties, noting that improved grid connections will be an important link to increased market access and growing demand for Canada's energy resources, and the associated economic growth that will follow for all Canadians.

Premiers recognized that, without a devolution agreement, Nunavut is limited in developing its resources and fully contributing to the Canadian economy. Premiers expressed support for Nunavut's desire to acquire control over its lands, waters and resources through an agreement with the federal government in the months ahead.

## **Climate Action**

Western premiers discussed their continued commitment to the Vancouver Declaration, and ongoing work to develop a Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

Western premiers agreed that for Canada to make a difference globally, we must pursue a range of actions, including technological innovation, adaptation measures and emissions reductions. The North is seeing significant impacts already and adapting to these changes is placing significant burdens on northern communities and governments. Western premiers affirmed their support for strong action, and agreed on common approaches within the framework in several specific areas of common interest.

- **Reducing methane emissions.** Reducing methane emissions is an important step in meeting Canada's greenhouse gas emissions targets. Western premiers are committed to working collaboratively with each other, industry, and the federal government to determine the best methods of reducing these emissions. Actions to achieve methane reduction targets must be flexible, to enable industry to respond where actions are most cost-effective and to maintain competitiveness. Western premiers urge the federal government to ensure consultation with provinces and territories in advance of international agreements in areas of provincial responsibilities.
- **Decreasing remote communities' dependency on diesel.** Offering remote communities solutions to access cleaner or renewable energies and transition from the use of diesel can help to improve health, strengthen local economies, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air contaminants. Through the Canadian Energy Strategy, provinces and territories are working together to improve access to affordable, clean, renewable and reliable supplies of energy in off-grid communities. The federal government has a key role to play to support provinces and territories in these efforts, including funding supports.
- **Grid expansion and infrastructure.** Expanding and improving access to electricity grids across the Western provinces and territories would facilitate improved access to renewables such as hydroelectricity, solar and wind. Federal support for western grid expansion and infrastructure improvements, including through the development of improved inter-tie infrastructure, would help support this goal.
- **Resilient infrastructure.** Managing the risks associated with a changing climate requires updated assessments of the hazards that communities, key assets, infrastructure and critical services are already experiencing today and will experience in the future.
- **Low carbon and alternative fuels.** Addressing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation requires investment in vehicle electrification and transition fuels such as biofuels and natural gas, including new infrastructure, retrofits for existing vehicles, and market access for new vehicle purchases.
- **Energy efficiency.** Enhancing energy efficiency helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, improve energy security and save money. Western provinces and territories are taking individual actions to promote energy conservation, and are working together through the Canadian Energy Strategy to find opportunities to enhance and coordinate energy efficiency codes and standards.

Premiers also discussed the importance of innovation and acknowledge the need for flexible federal funding arrangements that support clean technologies which can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Building Western Prosperity with Indigenous Partners**

Western premiers discussed the importance of industry and provincial/territorial partnerships with Indigenous governments, communities, development corporations and entrepreneurs. Such partnerships can increase opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the economy, to the benefit of individuals, Indigenous communities, businesses, surrounding communities and the entire Canadian economy. Having shared examples of local success stories, premiers agreed to continue to promote awareness of the positive value that such partnerships bring to the economy. They asked their ministers to support further sharing of such information among the business community and among Indigenous

communities.

Premiers urge the federal government to fulfill its constitutional obligations to Indigenous peoples, including implementation of self-government agreements and modern treaties.

Premiers look forward to the meeting with National Indigenous Organization leaders that Premier Pasloski will host in July, including discussion of Indigenous people's participation in the Canadian economy.

### **Immigration**

Western premiers discussed the importance of immigration to the western Canadian economy. Despite recent economic challenges due to low commodity prices, economic immigration remains a vital tool for meeting specific labour market needs and generating economic growth. In the medium and longer term, economic immigration will be even more important. The West is a driver of job creation, and western Canada will continue to need people to fill these jobs, including skilled immigrants.

Western premiers support the federal government's intention, expressed in its 2016 immigration levels plan, to increase refugee resettlement and family reunification. Premiers welcome these new Canadians. It is critical that supports are in place to ensure that refugees make a successful transition to life in Canada. Premiers discussed the challenges that education and other social services are facing welcoming the growing numbers of Syrian refugees. To ensure the best possible start to their new life in Canada, premiers called on the federal government to meet its commitments with regard to settlement support. This will include funding to support the successful integration of Syrian learners into Canadian schools, and to ensure that language training is easily accessible to refugees and newcomers of all ages.

Western premiers agreed that the 2017 levels plan should focus on increasing economic immigration. This must include lifting the caps on the Provincial and Territorial Nominee Programs, which are best placed to meet provinces' and territories' labour market needs.

Western premiers look forward to continuing to work with the federal government to ensure that immigration levels meet the needs of provincial and territorial economies. Levels planning for economic immigration should be evidence-based, to ensure the number of economic immigrants is adequate to meet demand. Western premiers call on the federal government to continue work with provinces and territories to develop a framework for joint, evidence-based levels planning in time for 2017.

### **Employment Insurance**

Premiers appreciated the extension of Employment Insurance benefits in 12 identified regions that have experienced sharp and sustained increases in unemployment rate. However, premiers are concerned that there is no mechanism for adding other regions to the list based on new unemployment data that becomes available during the one-year term of these measures. This approach is not acceptable and will not meet the urgent needs of families. Premiers agreed that the federal government needs to review eligibility and payment timing again within the next three months to ensure that workers and their families get the support they need.

### **International Trade and Market Access**

Western premiers discussed the importance of international trade and the need to expand access to new and existing markets for western Canadian products and services.

International trade agreements help drive Canada's economic competitiveness and prosperity. Western premiers called for the federal government to work with the EU to bring the Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement into force without undue delay. The federal government must also be prepared to ratify the Trans Pacific Partnership as soon as possible.

Western provinces and territories account for more than 63 per cent of Canada's total exports to Asia. Western premiers discussed the need to deepen relations, trade and economic cooperation with the Asia Pacific region. Canada must act quickly relative to competitors such as Australia, New Zealand and Japan to take advantage of agreements with key trading partners. Western premiers called for more free trade agreements, including bilateral agreements with India, Japan, and China. They emphasized the need for these trade agreements to be comprehensive and achieve meaningful market access. They also called on the federal government to pursue opportunities with countries of Southeast Asia such as Indonesia and the Philippines.

For western Canada's goods and services to have a clear path to international markets, the federal government must also enhance its ability to provide timely services to exporters, address foreign non-tariff barriers, and coordinate its trade promotion activities with provinces and territories.

Our largest trading partner, the United States, continues to be critically important to Canada's international trade success. Western premiers discussed the expiry of the Canada-U.S. Softwood Lumber Agreement and urged governments on both sides of the border to negotiate a new agreement that will bring needed stability and predictability to our lumber industries.

Our international reputation with customers and trading partners hinges on an efficient and effective air, rail, road, marine and pipeline transportation system to move our raw materials, goods and services quickly and reliably to world markets. Western premiers are committed to working together with federal, provincial and territorial governments and the private sector to invest in a safe, reliable and effective transportation system for the benefit of all Canadians. In particular, western premiers called for increased federal investment, in cooperation with western provinces and territories and the private sector, in gateways and transportation corridors to support jobs and achieve current and future export targets.

Premiers agreed that federal infrastructure programs must follow a "base plus per capita" formula that will allow more strategic investments in northern jurisdictions.

Western premiers feel the recently released *Canada Transportation Act* Review Report provides a blueprint for enhancing

aspects of Canada's transportation system, including strategic transportation infrastructure. They welcomed the announcement by the federal government of a comprehensive engagement process to inform the development of a long-term transportation agenda. Premiers expressed appreciation for the federal government's recent announcement of its intention to extend temporary measures while the federal transport minister considers the report's recommendations.

Western premiers called for federal funding under the New Building Canada Fund–National Infrastructure Component to focus on western transportation infrastructure needs, including investments in key strategic corridors, including the North. They called on the federal government to work closely with western provinces and territories to ensure that Canada's transportation system is capable of supporting and enhancing western Canada's position as a reliable global supplier of goods and services. Premiers recognize that all of Canada depends on western Canadian infrastructure to get goods to market in fast growing Asian economies.

### **2017 Western Premiers' Conference**

Premier Pasloski confirmed that Yukon will host next year's Western Premiers' Conference.

*News Release #16-177*



Stay up to date with the latest Yukon government news by subscribing to our RSS feed here:  
<http://www.gov.yk.ca/news/rss.html>. Or follow us on Twitter @yukongov.