



THE GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
& THE INSTITUTE FOR 21ST CENTURY QUESTIONS,
MARKING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF GLOBAL BRIEF MAGAZINE

PRESENT

A NATIONAL MINI-CONFERENCE

TOWARD A PLAN

STRENGTHENING CANADA'S POSITION IN THE ARCTIC



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ALONG WITH THE RESURGENCE OF ASIA, THE OPENING UP OF THE ARCTIC will be one of humanity's greatest challenges and adventures this century. Canada is way behind all other Arctic states in mapping out our Arctic future, strengthening our overall Arctic position, and positioning ourselves for success in this strategically significant region at the intersection of several continents. Time is of the essence, as is national seriousness.

On July 26, 2019, Northwest Territories Premier Bob McLeod and the Institute for 21st Century Questions co-hosted a national mini-conference at the famous Faculty Club in Toronto to ask what is Canada's plan for the Arctic and whether or not we can be term-setters for our own future and for the entire Arctic region.

The event, which also marked the 10th anniversary of Global Brief magazine, brought together a number of public figures and leading thinkers to discuss how Canada can develop a plan for nation-building projects to strengthen its position in the Arctic. In addition to Premier McLeod, participants included Nunavut Premier Joe Savikataaq, Jean Charest, Martha Hall Findlay, Peter MacKay, Irvin Studin, Fred Lazar, Jennifer Spence and Wilfrid Greaves.

Premier McLeod's call for a national plan for the Arctic opened the conference proceedings.



PREMIER BOB McLEOD

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

Thank you, I am pleased to see you all here today. I am looking forward to a good discussion about the growing importance of the Arctic at the international level and what that means for Canada as a nation and as a global actor on the geopolitical stage.

Before we get started, I would like to thank the Institute for 21st Century Questions and Dr. Irvin Studin for organizing today's discussion on this very important topic. The future of the Arctic is not simply a matter for the North, it is a matter of national concern. That is why we need to be having conversations like this across Canada, so that all Canadians develop a common appreciation of the enormous scale and urgency of the pressures – and of the opportunities – before us in the north of our country.

I would also like to thank Jean Charest for taking on the role of moderator today. As the originator of Quebec's Plan Nord, Mr. Charest certainly knows firsthand the kind of sustained effort and attention that it takes to successfully develop remote regions of our country, and will bring an interesting perspective to our discussions based on his experiences at the provincial, federal and international levels.

I also want to acknowledge Nunavut Premier Joe Savikataaq, who is here with us today. As Canada's only two Indigenous Premiers, Premier Savikataaq and I have worked closely together to raise the profile of our home territories at the national level, including bringing our call for northern nation building to our colleagues at meetings of Canada's Premiers and Western Premiers earlier this month.

The Arctic has always been an important symbol for Canada. We like to think of ourselves as a northern nation, with a leadership role in the Arctic and a clear ability to set policy and determine what happens in the region. Stories like those of the Franklin expedition and the Lost Patrol are woven into our history curriculums and people in every corner of the country identify with familiar Arctic images like the inukshuk, polar bear, and Aurora Borealis.

But what do Canadians really know about today's North, and how useful are these popular beliefs and images for helping address the opportunities and challenges our country faces right now in the modern Arctic?

Does this received wisdom of what the North is and means to this country actually help us to address present challenges and opportunities? Or do conventional notions, in fact, constrain our thinking and hamper our ability to design and implement realistic, practical plans for this important part of our country?

As the effects of climate change increase access to the Arctic, the global geopolitical context for the region is changing. With enormous untapped opportunities for shipping, research and resource development, many countries are looking to pursue their own national interests in the region, including economic and security interests.

Canada has no guarantee that the interests of these other state actors coincide with its own interests and priorities. Nor can we be certain that existing rules, agreements and international institutions are still up to the task of reconciling and settling competing interests in the Arctic space – in what is effectively Canada's own backyard.

Generations of Canadians and their governments have grown used to thinking of the Arctic as “up there somewhere”. They have been content to let the Arctic take care of itself, secure in the belief that it is a remote and isolated place which only the local people are interested in. This is a mistake – one that could have significant national and international consequences for Canada.

Global powers like Russia, the United States, China, and leading European states are moving fast to extend their influence and control in the Arctic through massive investments, increased marine traffic and partnerships with traditional and non-traditional allies to advance Arctic projects and positioning.

Countries like these are ramping up their Arctic presence and level of activity within their borders, and across the circumpolar world. This is an effort to both secure opportunities for themselves and to influence the international rules and policies that will set the terms for what happens in the Arctic.

Russia, for instance, sees the Northern Sea Route as an essential maritime opening for its country and has the infrastructure to back up that vision, including a fleet of 20 icebreakers capable of traversing the Northern Sea Route and more than a dozen ports including two deep water ports in their Arctic. Not content to sleep on that advantage, they have also committed to increasing investments to attract more shipping traffic through the Northern Sea Route.

China released a whitepaper on its Arctic strategy last year, and has been investing heavily in infrastructure around the world and certainly has its eye on Arctic shipping and research. They were recently in discussions with Greenland about investing in three airport projects and have their own nuclear icebreaker under construction. They have one polar research vessel in service and a second one expected to enter into service this year.

The United States may be our closest ally and trading partner, but we should not assume their Arctic interests will always align with ours, and we should be prepared to think and act for ourselves. Despite the 1998 Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on Arctic Cooperation, the United States has started to renew assertions that the Northwest Passage is an international waterway, rather than internal Canadian waters. Legislation proposed last year by Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski, the Arctic Policy Act, and the Shipping and Environmental Leadership Act, may be seen as a renewed will in the US to set the terms for the Arctic.

These moves are not happening by accident. They are the result of deliberate government planning and decisions, often at the highest executive levels, intended to enact national policy in the Arctic.

In the face of this international activity, I think it only makes sense to ask: “where is Canada”?

If Canada wants to be taken seriously by other countries in the Arctic space, it needs to shake off its current complacency and start to think seriously about what is going on in this region. If we, as a nation, want to make sure we have the ability to set and implement policy in the Arctic, we need a serious plan for nation building projects that will strengthen our national position and leadership in the Arctic and which demonstrates, both at home and abroad, our serious intention to remain a leader in the North.

That plan must be informed by a clear understanding of international intentions for the Arctic, as I have just outlined. It also needs to take into account current environmental realities in the region.

While the debate in much of the world around climate change is about how to prevent it from happening, people need to understand that, for the north, it is already a reality. The Arctic has already warmed.

Even if the world meets its Paris climate change targets, there is no changing the fact that reduced sea ice cover right now means there is more shipping traffic through the Arctic Ocean than there ever has been and previously inaccessible resources are now accessible.

These dynamics will not be easily or quickly reversed. A national plan for the Arctic needs to be a plan for the Arctic as it exists today and will continue to be in the future, not as it once was, as we might imagine it to have been, or as we hope it might be again.

I also think it is important that the residents of Canada's three Northern territories, including its Indigenous residents like myself and Premier Savikataaq, have a leading say in determining Canada's plan for the Arctic. We are the ones who live there. We are the ones who are repeatedly affected when decisions are made for us, rather than with us. We are an obvious partner when discussions about what happens next take place.

What might a true nation-building plan for strengthening Canada's position in the Arctic look like? I'd suggest that our national plan needs to be built on three elements: leveraging the geographic advantage represented by the three territories, ramping up Canada's northern presence, and increasing Canada's knowledge about the north.

Deliberate, planned investments to position the territories as an international trade and transportation hub, including designating them as a special economic zone, could help extend and secure Canadian influence in this strategically significant region.

Canada's North is closer to key markets in all the major global trading blocs, including Europe, Asia and Russia than most other regions of North America. Yellowknife is just over 6,600 kilometres by air from Moscow, compared to the almost 7,500 kilometres between Moscow and Toronto. Iqaluit to Oslo is 3,900 kilometres, compared to almost 6,000 from Toronto, and a 10,500 kilometre flight from Toronto to Beijing would be reduced to 6,600 kilometres from Inuvik.

The circumpolar sea route can cut as much as 20 days off the time it takes to reach Asia from Europe via ship. Other countries know this and they have already been making moves to secure control over these routes, both through their active use and by advancing claims over their status as national or international channels.

From the Mackenzie River delta, a trade route through the Beaufort Sea and Bering Strait to Tokyo would be 3800 nautical miles. That shaves off 500 nautical miles from the trade route between Vancouver and Tokyo and a staggering 1300 nautical miles from the route between Russia's Yamal Peninsula and Japan. Canada should be leveraging this comparative proximity to these international markets and investing significantly in transportation infrastructure in all three northern territories. Growing and expanding territorial airports can make them a major trans-shipment point for goods moving between Asia, North America and Europe, especially if there is supporting investment in connecting infrastructure like roads and railways linking us to southern Canada.

Similarly, investments in deep water ports and marine facilities along Canada's Arctic coast can help to capture trade that is already travelling the polar route and which is sure to increase in coming years, as well as tourist and scientific traffic that is also sure to grow.

Another area Canada will need to look at as it considers what it wants to achieve in the Arctic in the coming years is its physical presence. Simply put, Canada needs to be in the Arctic in a very major way – through demographic, physical and political resources – if it wants to have a say in what happens in the Arctic.

People sustain economies and implement national policy, but with only 115,000 people spread across all three territories, Canada simply does not have the population or physical presence to turn the North's resource and trade potential into national wealth and prosperity.

Right now, the three territories account for 0.5% of Canada's GDP. Russia, on the other hand, with two million people living there, generates around 11 percent of its GDP in its Arctic region.

It is hard to achieve the economies of scale that can truly drive growth and prosperity when our population is a sliver of the population in the rest of the circumpolar world.

Our small population also limits our ability to even know what is going on in the Arctic right now. What is our current capacity to monitor the Arctic coastline and shipping with limited people and assets?

How long will it take Canada to even learn of a maritime or environmental incident, and then effectively respond to and manage it? What effect would such a delay have on the Arctic, its people and its environment?

Finally, Canada needs to know the Arctic, not just know about it, if it wants to have a meaningful say in decisions about the Arctic in coming decades.

As a northern nation, Canada should make it a priority to ensure that more of its citizens have an opportunity to experience the Arctic and learn what it really means to be "northern". Policy and decision makers need to have experience in and understand the territories, where they can gain the direct, first-hand knowledge and experience to make good evidence, based decisions. Government policy makers need to be headquartered in the territories if they want to truly understand the geopolitical, economic and environmental dimensions of northern policy and decisions.

Knowing the Arctic also means significantly ramping up Canada's scientific research capacity and Arctic academic infrastructure. If Canada wants to understand how climate change affects the North and how to adapt to it, we need significant investment in scientific research programs and facilities to support that.

We recently saw how important Arctic science can be when the federal government filed its submission on Canada's extended continental shelf with the United Nations earlier this year. This submission was the culmination of years of work by scientific, technical and legal teams from Global Affairs Canada, Natural Resources Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. My government certainly welcomed this submission from the Government of Canada, which is a great example of the kind of deliberate effort that needs to go into strengthening our national position in the Arctic.

If we want thriving territorial economies, it only makes sense to educate the next generation of business and civic leaders here, including professionals like engineers, doctors and lawyers who will support sustainable Arctic communities.

The Arctic is one of the last remaining regions of the globe where the essential spheres of national interest and term-setting have yet to be determined. It is also a zone of huge economic, transportation and scientific opportunity for the countries that are ready to take advantage of it.

Considering that the Canadian Arctic links across the Arctic Ocean to Russia, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the United States, we should be the major player with the ability to decisively set the terms for the Arctic -- but only if we make a concerted and deliberate effort to build on the advantages we already have in our three Northern territories.

That plan needs to be bold, and it needs to be ambitious, but it is not without precedent. Almost 150 years ago, the Government of Canada embarked on a major nation building project when it made the visionary decision to build the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Born out of a desire to physically unite the far flung regions of a country that spanned a continent, the Canadian Pacific Railroad connected eastern markets to western resources and gave our new nation another route to Asia – crossing what was then the Northwest Territories.

Western economic development and growth flourished in the wake of the railroad, giving birth to provinces that still contribute significantly to Canada's GDP today.

While the specifics may have changed since 1871, the circumstances today are not so different, with powerful international neighbours pursuing their own economic and political ends on the borders of a sparsely populated region of Canada.

Faced with similar pressures, it is time for Canada to undertake bold new nation building projects in partnership with the territorial governments and Northern Indigenous governments that will strengthen the ties that hold our country together and allow all Canadians to benefit from the opportunities in Canada's North.

Deepening and extending Canada's understanding of the Arctic is critical to developing a successful national plan that will position our country to achieve its international goals in the North. Today's discussion is an important step in that direction.

As the world's attention continues to shift towards the actions and politics of the circumpolar north, Canada's need for a meaningful Arctic plan is only going to become more important. I look forward to hearing from each of our panelists today as they help us better understand the various dimensions of the challenge facing our country and the opportunities for creating long-term national success. ●



PREMIER JOE SAVIKATAAQ

NUNAVUT

The Arctic is at a crossroads – not that we have all that many roads in Nunavut. Our land, our culture, our traditions, and our language are all in flux.

We're not sure where this will lead us. But we do know that we have to adapt, as we have been for thousands of years. It's what Inuit do in the face of adversity.

A few weeks ago in Saskatoon, I spoke with Premier McLeod and Premier Silver about the changing Arctic. In many ways, all our jurisdictions are experiencing great shifts. But as we all know, the Arctic is vast – so from the lush, warmer climate of the Yukon in the West, to the barren, stark beauty of Nunavut in the East, we are very, very different. I'd like to take this time to inform you all a bit about the realities of Nunavut – and by default, a whopping 21 per cent of Canada's entire landmass.

Nunavut is a place of great potential and opportunity – certainly untapped, frequently misunderstood and often misrepresented.

Here is what I know, as a life-long resident of Nunavut, and now as its Premier: Nunavummiut are struggling. Struggling with the cost of healthy food, access to adequate healthcare and with the most basic services most Canadians take for granted every single day. Things like housing, access to mental health and addictions treatment, education and training, power transmission and transportation corridors, fibre optic and connectivity. Life expectancy for Nunavummiut is 71.8 years, which is almost 10 years lower than the Canadian average.

Our infant mortality rate is three times higher than the rest of Canada and our tuberculosis case rate is 50 times the national average. A staggering 62 per cent of Nunavummiut over 12 years old are tobacco smokers, compared to 18 per cent of Canadians of the same age.

Nunavut Inuit struggle disproportionately with mental health issues and face high rates of addiction, abuse, and suicide as a result of rapid social transformation, forced relocations, forced attendance of residential schools, and chronic underfunding of key programs and services. Suicide was declared a public health crisis in our territory in 2015. Let that sink in for a moment.

In our communities, it means that nearly everyone has been personally impacted – often repeatedly – by the devastation of loss and hopelessness. It's too much. It's too hard. We must do better to support one another.

Hardships are also affecting our land. Nunavut feels the effects of climate change more than any other jurisdiction, even though we emit almost no greenhouse gas emissions. We are the first to be affected by climate change, and our communities are changing and suffering because of that.

The permafrost layer is melting and could destabilize many of the buildings in our communities. This would render many of our homes and workplaces unsafe and burden homeowners, businesspeople and governments with massive costs for repairs.

Similarly, the rapid transformations to the tundra and the Arctic Ocean will further impact our ability to access the land and marine species, leaving the livelihood of our hunters, our fishers, our tourism outfitters, our seamstresses, and our artists in jeopardy.

We need to find ways to mitigate climate change in our communities, but we are entirely reliant on diesel fuel at the moment. I realize this must be almost incomprehensible to many of you. But until the federal government can get us off diesel, we are in a holding pattern.

Protecting our environment requires collaborative support from partners and stakeholders. We must push forward on key priorities such as climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, comprehensive drinking water and waste management systems, and expanded monitoring programs to gather data on and understand changes to our wildlife and our lands.

It's time the rest of Canada understands the great disparity between southerners and northerners. To do this, the federal government – any federal government – needs to commit to direct, strategic investments to meet our urgent needs.

Any and all infrastructure investments will naturally flow back to the rest of Canada, as we are not a manufacturing-based market. It's clearly a win-win situation for all of us, and one that is necessary for the Arctic to participate fully in the Canadian economy, and finally realize a true Canadian standard for all citizens and families.

It's 2019 and our country – possibly the greatest country in the world – is still not embracing an equal standard for every Canadian.

Canada is not all privilege and opportunity. We face very real challenges. Too many Indigenous and northern Canadians face inequity and barriers. Every Canadian should understand the divide between thriving in the South and surviving in a Northern community. And once understood, we should all work to eliminate that divide.

Nunavut communities aren't given the same standard as most Canadian cities and villages. A boil water advisory in Pond Inlet or Whale Cove, or anywhere in Canada, is simply unacceptable. No one would stand for a long-term boil water advisories in Toronto or Montreal or Calgary, so why is it acceptable anywhere else? We need to stop pretending Northern problems aren't Canadian problems and fix them, once and for all.

Fostering success in the Arctic is necessary in nation-building. It is, in fact, the only way to fully achieve it. We all know how much work needs to be done to ensure we can realize reconciliation. As an Inuk, I know how very important this is.

As you may be aware, Nunavut celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. 20 years of growth, of lessons learned, of finding our way and of creating our own path. On this milestone, I want you all to know that we are hopeful, innovative and ready to succeed. Nunavut's economy is strong. Our gross domestic product, was \$2.7 billion in 2017, and has grown annually every year since 1999. According to the Conference Board of Canada, our GDP will continue to grow by an average of 4.6 per cent annually between now and 2025. This puts us well above the Canadian average, and higher than any other territory or province.

But we need investment, infrastructure and firm funding commitments to realize our potential. We want our fellow Canadians to help us close the unfair gaps each of our communities face every day.

Canada has long positioned itself as the idealized, romanticized North. But this perception simply does not exist without the Arctic. So, here we are, at that crossroad...

Are we devoted to a true North, strong and free? Is Canada ready to commit the resources, funds, time, energy and patience to make itself an Arctic nation, in every sense of the word?

The Arctic and its people are ready. We are resilient. We are vibrant. We are ready to take on new challenges and opportunities. We are committed to responsible development. And we are here to succeed and lead the way for our future generations.

The take away is this – a strong Canada needs a strong Arctic. This is a very simple, very real fact. And the time to act is now. Thank you. ●

