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CONSERVATIVES STEAMROLLING NORTHERNERS: NDP

Bevington calls for Northern Leaders Summit

OTTAWA - The Conservative government is shutting out the North, says Dennis Bevington, the Member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories. He is calling together northern MPs from all political parties to discuss the problem. Bevington held a press conference on Parliament Hill to highlight how ordinary northerners are being shut out of major decisions relating to the economy and the environment.

Bevington called on Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Jim Prentice to approve the recent decision by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board to reject an application to open the Thelon Basin to uranium mining.

Bevington, who represents the Western Arctic, spoke about how his fear that Minister Prentice will ignore the Board's decision because heavy-handed Conservative government negotiators have forced the Akaitcho First Nation into withdrawing land claims on sacred land in the Thelon Basin. In a briefing note to Minister Prentice, uncovered through an NDP access to information request, the federal negotiator reports their success in getting the Akaitcho First Nations to not select the land. The negotiator states this was done because "this addresses Canada's significant interest to allow the continuation of uranium exploration in the basin."

"I'm frustrated and angry that the Akaitcho people have been strong-armed into to give up their rights to sacred land," said Bevington. "I'm now concerned that the minister will just override the Board's decision in favour of an international mining corporation. If the people of the North do not want uranium mining in the Thelon the minister to respect their position."

"I sat on the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board and most of the problems were caused by federal interference, particularly the lack of support for land use planning and respect for the spirit and intent of these boards," said Bevington. "The way to make changes is to consult with northerners, not force changes from the top down."

Bevington is calling on all northern legislators from the municipal, territorial, provincial and federal levels of government to gather in Yellowknife this summer for a Summit of Northern Leaders. He says the one-day meeting is open to elected members from across Northern Canada, regardless of political party and will focus on addressing this issue and others. "We have to reach across party lines to have the Northern voice heard Down South," concluded Bevington.

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