

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 25, 2008

HARPER'S MILITARY FOCUS IGNORES NORTHERN ENERGY, SOCIAL, FIRST NATIONS & INUIT ISSUES: NDP

NDP leader Jack Layton, MP Dennis Bevington and NDP candidate Michael Byers urge Harper to focus on pressing northern issues

YELLOWKNIFE, VANCOUVER AND OTTAWA – NDP leader Jack Layton, NDP MP Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic) and NDP candidate and arctic sovereignty expert Michael Byers today are urging Prime Minister Stephen Harper to stop ignoring crucial issues in Canada's north.

“Harper's one-dimensional, militaristic approach to arctic sovereignty leaves many urgent northern issues unaddressed,” said Layton. “It is unacceptable for Harper to come to the north for a photo-op and not announce federal investments in much-needed infrastructure, like a deep water port for Nunavut's capital, new money for housing, or a real commitment to fight climate change whose effects are immediately apparent all across the north.”

Layton supports Bevington's call for the Conservatives to put an end to the legalized robbery of windfall profits from the Norman Wells oilfields.

“Last year, Norman Wells yielded \$125 million to the federal treasury while oil was at \$70 per barrel. With prices presently soaring at \$100 per barrel, the Conservative coffers will be overflowing with cash that rightfully belongs to the people of the NWT,” said Bevington.

“These windfall profits should go into a special infrastructure fund for expansion and improvements to the territory's transportation system,” said Layton.

Byers also noted that Harper has failed the north when it comes to funding crucial social programs. In October 2006, the Harper Government cut the \$17.7 million Adult Literacy Program which provided an essential service in providing First Nations and Inuit with the ability to read and thus access government services, employment opportunities and the Internet.

“The Harper Government has focused its Northern Strategy on strengthening Canada's military presence in the North, spending billions of dollars on new warships rather than addressing fundamental social and economic needs,” said Byers. “It's time the Conservatives invested in the people who use the north, so they don't lose their ability to become economically sustainable. That's the use it or lose approach supported by the NDP.”

The Harper Government has also failed to implement the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, refusing to address the recommendations of the 2006 conciliation report - specifically with regard for the need for funding for bilingual Inuktitut-English education. As a result, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is suing the Harper Government in court and the Government is fighting back instead of seeking to negotiate a solution.

For more information, please contact:

Tara Kearsey, office of Dennis Bevington: 867 444-0230

Dave Weatherall, NDP media officer: 613 295 6826

Michael Byers, NDP candidate, Vancouver Centre: 604-561-3049