

**Weathering The Storm**  
**A Discussion Paper for Consultation**  
*Dennis Bevington M.P.*

**January 2009**

## *Weathering The Storm*

Despite all that has been going on in Ottawa, the volatile global economy continues to be the main issue facing Canadians in this new year.

As the sole Member of Parliament for this tremendous territory, which contains such potential mixed with challenges, I will continue to work with all of you on a plan for the Northwest Territories that recognizes our territorial government, Aboriginal governments, our communities, social agencies, local economy and businesses, along with Multinational corporations that look to the north for major resource development opportunities.

I will work hard to be Ottawa's voice for all these disparate interests. Many of the things I propose will resonate with the goals that each group has and can lead to a sense of common purpose in the North. The policies and investments by the government of Canada in the NWT must work for the people of the North first and foremost. Investments in the North benefit all of Canada. All the provinces benefit from northern investment, the reverse is rarely the case.

The economy in the NWT will continue to be impacted by various factors. Reductions in commodity prices are slowing down mining operations, fiscal uncertainty has derailed resource exploration, regulatory complexity affects investment timing, and a lack of northern skilled labour raises the difficulty of any project.

The high cost of Northern living is causing our NWT population to shrink. The Federal Government must further increase the Northern Residents Tax Deduction to a level which provides real relief from the high cost of living for all Northerners. The ten percent increase put forward in Harper's last budget was welcomed, but wasn't even close to what Northerners need or demanded. An increase from its current maximum of \$6,000 to \$9,000 would be a real improvement.

Greater and more effective incentive programs must be forthcoming for improving the energy efficiency of our homes and businesses across the country and in the north. We are still dealing with much of our physical infrastructure of buildings and support systems that were designed at a time when energy costs were low and projected to stay there. The uncertainty that now exists in the fossil energy supply and pricing, along with the environmental imperative of green house gases means that we must move very quickly to improve the performance of existing use.

This is a stimulus that can be activated quickly, guaranteeing a positive productivity improvement. The Government of the Northwest Territories continues to be actively

interested in moving in this direction. A greater partnership with the Federal Government and the territories and provinces has to be on the horizon.

I recognize concerns in the NWT and across the north about sun setting Federal housing programs that have assisted to a great degree with the need for affordable housing. The federal budget must address these needs for the North as well as across the whole country.

These three priorities can greatly assist the people of the NWT, stimulate local business in each community, especially in the small scale construction sector. Northerners are well positioned already in these areas to provide training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurial development.

### ***Building a Green Future.***

The Government of the Northwest Territories continues to identify a number of exciting and effective projects for renewable energy. These include a hydroelectric expansion on the Taltson River with a transmission extension to the Slave Geological Province to assist our mining industry. Two mini hydro sites for small communities, a wind development project in the Beaufort Sea area and a major transformation from heating oil to biomass throughout the NWT. Reducing the energy costs of Northerners will help to lower the overall high cost of living faced by Northern Residents.

This last effort can tie directly to the proposed incentive package from the Forest Industry Association, with its emphasis on bio-energy and would be a good prospect for green and economical energy right across northern Canada. The federal budget should offer up matching dollars to spur territorial and community investment in viable projects. An allocation of 20 million per year over the next three years would be appropriate for the NWT.

### ***Vital Transportation Linkages***

There is a real need to invest in transportation infrastructure across the NWT and in the Mackenzie Valley in particular. The capacity in our local economies, including our First Nations to participate in these infrastructure projects is strong. Our Territorial Design and Engineering sector has considerable expertise in Northern infrastructure issues and the GNWT has a well developed action plan for implementation. Advancing "Building Canada Funds" in a more aggressive timeline with more flexibility would serve to immediately open up projects already advanced in planning.

Priorities in transportation infrastructure should include: the upgrading and hard surfacing of existing highways, the extension of the all weather road from Wrigley to Norman Wells in the short-term (with the long term objective of completing the highway all way to Tuktoyaktuk), and the development of an all weather link from Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk, and improved road access to Tli Cho communities. All of these projects open up economic opportunities, reduce the cost of living and make businesses more viable.

Infrastructure work on roads will build our local businesses to a point where they will be competitive with equipment, a skilled work force and an adequate cash flow to engage in major projects like the Mackenzie Gas Pipeline, which your government has showcased as a national priority. Industrial planning will lead to a prosperous future in the NWT.

***Making the Regulatory Process Work***

This has attracted a lot of concern from industry, business associations and your government. The best response I believe has already been forwarded to the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs from Michael Miltenberger the territorial Minister of Environment and Natural Resources. Minister Miltenberger's letter delivers the correct political development and outlines straightforward steps to improve delivery of environmental assessments, licenses and permits. The message for the Federal Government is clear: don't look at solutions to these bureaucratic problems that limit or degrade the future autonomy of northerners to manage their lands and resources.

The NWT continues to be a unique jurisdiction in Canada and will remain unique when it achieves autonomy. It will have shared jurisdiction between aboriginal, territorial and federal institutions. That is the basis of many of our settled land claims and has been foremost in all of our constitutional efforts over many years.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Dennis Bevington', with a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Dennis Bevington