



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
Office of
Dennis Bevington MP
Western Arctic

A Northern Strategy?

*Let's make sure our
Northern ideas are
heard loud and clear!!*

A discussion paper

Recently, there has been much discussion about how to best develop Canada's North. With very little consultation with Northerners, the Conservative government has put forward what it thinks should be a strategy for the North. Their strategy has four elements:

- protecting our arctic sovereignty from potential international interest in the opening Arctic ocean;
- encouraging social and economic development and regulatory improvements that benefit northerners;
- adapting to climate change challenges and ensuring sensitive arctic ecosystems are protected for future generations; and
- providing northerners with more control over their economic and political destiny.

In late July, three conservative ministers presented what they claimed was their "Northern Strategy", this effort was simply a repackaged version of these points and previously announced promises, vague on most points and heavily focussed on the issue of Arctic Sovereignty through military force.

So it appears that their main objective with this presentation is to make political points with southern voters.

Comments from northern leaders to this latest pronouncement have been less than positive. Premier Floyd Roland comments in News North of August 03 were "it just goes to show that there's still a large gap that exists between the federal government's is' their understanding of our issues and what's key to us in trying to develop our economies and our political development."

Head of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) Mary Simon spoke out on the lack of attention to the sustainability of northern communities. ITK pointed to several areas where the Conservative announcement could be strengthened including: "...establishment of timelines for the elimination of gaps in basic well-being (housing, education, physical and mental health) between Inuit in the Arctic and Canadians in the South; additional investments, beyond those announced Sunday, in housing, education, including Inuit language, culture and knowledge, and health infrastructure; commitment to the full and fair implementation of all modern land claims agreements, and a willingness to reform land claims implementation policy along the lines recommended by both the Land Claims Agreement Coalition and the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples..."

On August 5th, University of British Columbia professor Michael Byers wrote in a column in the Ottawa Citizen:

“Today, in the face of a spiralling deficit, a number of Harper's Arctic projects have been delayed.

This June, the navy's project management office told potential contractors that the "letter of intent" phase for the Arctic Offshore Patrol Ships had been postponed indefinitely. In July 2009, CBC News reported that the Northern Watch Technology Demonstration Project, which involves trials of underwater and land-based sensors along the Northwest Passage, had also been suspended. And a full year after Mr. Harper's announcement that NORDREG would become mandatory, the necessary regulatory amendment has not yet been made.

Although the Northern Strategy does not mention these delays, it makes assertions that -- if credible -- would render them less important. The document states the Northwest Passage is "not expected to become a safe or reliable transportation route in the near future" and that the disputes with the United States are "well-managed and pose no sovereignty or defence challenges for Canada."

However, recent satellite imagery indicates that the Northwest Passage will be open again this September, the fourth time in four years. It offers a route between East Asia and the Atlantic Seaboard that is 7,000 kilometres shorter than the current one through the Panama Canal, saving time, fuel and transit fees.”

The three Territories in 2007 created “A Northern Vision: A Stronger North and a Better Country”. Central to that vision were commitments to a North where:

- Self-reliant individuals live in healthy, viable communities;
- Aboriginal rights have been successfully negotiated and implemented;
- Northerners are the primary beneficiaries of northern resource development;
- Northern traditions of respect for the land and the environment are cherished;
- Strong, responsive governments make decisions and take actions that are anchored in the principles of responsible, sustainable development;
- the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people is preserved, promoted and able to flourish and where all citizens celebrate their diversity;
- Northern governments have the tools and authority they need to manage their own affairs; and
- The territories are strong contributing partners in a dynamic and secure Canadian federation.

The Harper government's appointee, Neil McCrank has recommended changing the system of land and water regulation set-up through various Aboriginal land claim agreements. He has recommended either re-opening the settled agreements or to make changes which would turn community boards into administrative agencies.

He did identify some of the issues that resonate with northerners, such as getting land use plans in place, reducing bureaucratic red tape and building regulatory board capacity.

In December of last year the NWT's Minister of the Environment, Michael Miltenberger sent a letter to Indian Affairs and Northern Development Minister Chuck Strahl, clearly outlining a number of practical and reasonable ways to improve the regulatory process. These recommendations were:

- giving the Government of the Northwest Territories the authority to make appointments to environmental boards;
- elimination of delays in decision making by the federal minister under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act; and
- Completion of land use plans.

The Dene Nation Assembly this year passed an unanimous motion to engage in a constitutional process to create a new system of governance in the NWT by 2015. How this would work out is still to be determined, but any such changes will need to balance Aboriginal governments' rights with Northern Public Government.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has called for devolution (the transfer of ownership and control of non-renewable resources from Ottawa to the NWT) as the best way for the territory to advance. While this debate has been ongoing for decades, it is no less important today.

In fact, with the slowdown in the economy, today is a good time to resolve these outstanding issues, before the next expansion takes place.

This spring, I worked to get the issue of northern development discussed at the House of Commons Standing Committee for Aboriginal affairs and Northern Development. A number of meetings were held with a variety of witnesses from the Federal bureaucracy, Northern governments and from industry. Aboriginal governments have yet to be heard. The committee has also yet to hear from ordinary Northerners. The committee plans to have more hearings in the fall, and to bring up a report to Parliament on its findings. These findings must include the thoughts and concerns of all Northerners.

Transcripts of what the committee has already heard are available on my website www.dennisbevington.ca . Please take the opportunity to review them to see what is being said.

The Conservatives have shown little regard for what legitimate and democratic views Northerners have about direction for the future. It is essential to our progress that our views are respected.

Please send me your ideas and thoughts on this important subject.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Dennis Bevington', written over a light blue rectangular background.

Dennis Bevington MP
Western Arctic