

# From the House

By Dennis Bevington MP Western Arctic

## Let's not re-start the Cold War in the Warming Arctic

The Arctic with its rapidly melting ocean is the focussed area of the globe in this new century. With its potential shipping routes, fisheries, land and sea bed resources, the Arctic holds prizes that now resonate on an ever smaller and crowded Earth.

On the environmental side, the changes that are occurring in the polar region have implications for all countries. Understanding the pace and extent of polar warming can assist in planning for the profound alterations to our societies as Climate Change moves forward. We already see the effects in North America on how our jet stream, the high altitude air flow, is changing weather patterns. Europe knows that escalating ice melt in the Arctic will have a profound impact on the Atlantic Gulf Stream, their major climatic influence and worldwide, nations fear the impact of rising water levels.

Everyone has a stake in what is happening in the Arctic and up until very recently, cooperation and collaboration were the bywords for Arctic interaction. This wasn't always the case.

Prior to end of the Cold War, confrontation, secrecy and massive expenditures on surveillance and military were the standard practise. With the end of communism in the 90's a great thaw began in international relations visa via the Polar Regions. Canadians played a large role in this, first by founding the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Regions and then, with the active participation from groups like the Inuit

Circumpolar Conference, we stepped forward in building an institution for arctic collaboration, the Arctic Council.

The Arctic Council has been a model for partnerships of all Arctic Nations and Indigenous Peoples and "observer" status to the Council is sought by countries from around the world.

Regardless of whether conflict was on in Iraq or Georgia, Afghanistan, Chechnia, Libya or Syria, international cooperation in the Polar Regions has moved steadily along, peacefully and progressively. Countries had agreed to utilise the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to settle maritime boundaries. A search and rescue treaty was signed among all the nations. Both commercial and environmental multi-lateral issues were being advanced steadily.

But something different is happening now.

One might put it down simply to the crisis in the Ukraine, but it actually began last year. After Prime Minister Harper, in a candid interview with the Globe and Mail, said that he was not interested in international cooperation in the Arctic, only sovereignty.

"The Antarctic model is absolutely and completely unacceptable to the government of Canada and to the people of Canada. We want to make sure that [this] kind of thinking is not part of any ... department of the government of Canada."

The ensuing events in the Ukraine have given an opportunity for this brash statement to play out as the Chair of the Arctic

Council, Minister Leona Aglukkaq, has boycotted an important meeting in Russia on Climate Change factors. As well this week it was revealed that the face to face meeting of the Arctic Council in Iqaluit this summer has been cancelled - supposedly because of a lack of agenda.

Canadians need to watch how this attitude going to play out going forward. There is much at stake and a confrontational attitude should not be the approach we are taking in our part of the world.

Is Canada's two year chairmanship of the Arctic Council to lead to its diminishment?

Is that what the Prime Minister wants?