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## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release  
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Western Premiers Conference

### **WESTERN ECONOMIC AGENDA TO DRIVE CANADA'S 21ST CENTURY ECONOMY**

**VANCOUVER** – Premiers have agreed on a comprehensive economic agenda for western Canada that will drive the national economy forward with increased investment and job opportunities.

Citing the transformational impact of the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games on Canada's pride and confidence, the Western Premiers Conference agreed that this same spirit and vision will guide their efforts to strengthen Canada's economic recovery.

The agenda includes the following key priorities: Trade; Labour Market; and Innovation and Investment.

#### **Trade**

We live in an open trading economy. Open trade is essential to our quality of life as Canadians and a key ingredient of a prosperous Western economy.

#### **Energy**

Western Canada's energy production currently accounts for over 21 per cent of the region's GDP and more than seven per cent of Canada's GDP. Currently, western Canada accounts for: 91 per cent of Canada's oil production; 94 per cent of Canada's natural gas production; 99 per cent of Canada's coal production; 27 per cent of Canada's hydro-electric production; 15 per cent of Canada's wind generated electricity; and 100 per cent of Canada's uranium production.

Western Canada is a true energy powerhouse. As a dependable, responsible and secure source of energy, our exports account for billions of dollars of economic activity and thousands of jobs across Canada.

Global energy demand is expected to continue to grow, creating significant new export opportunities for western Canada energy products. Bringing energy to market – whether by pipeline, rail, through transmission lines and a western power grid – is an important aspect of seizing economic development opportunities.

Premiers agreed on the importance of increasing opportunities for inter-provincial and international trade in clean energy. This requires enhanced east-west/north-south infrastructure to meet future national and global energy demand throughout Canada, across North America, and from the Asia Pacific.

Western Premiers will continue to cooperate on energy supply and export initiatives to the United States and will undertake a mission there in the coming year.

## **Open Skies**

Western Canada is an international crossroads. It is essential that we reinforce that strategic advantage. The lack of Open Skies agreements is currently costing our economies hundreds of millions of dollars and thousands of jobs.

This goes beyond transportation. It is about the West's ability to attract investors, trade, international students and tourists. For example, a single Open Skies Agreement signed in June 2009 with South Korea is projected to create \$200 million in tourism activity in Canada alone.

Lack of agreements is holding Western economies back. Premiers signed an Open Skies Declaration asking the federal government to aggressively pursue reciprocal international air service negotiations and liberalize existing restrictive agreements. This will provide opportunities for better air services, increased flight options, greater efficiencies for airlines, increased competition and reduced prices for consumers, and jobs for Canadian citizens.

Premiers also encouraged the federal government to expand the Transit Without Visa Program to maximize air opportunities for international carriers.

## **Labour Market**

We must continue to develop our human resources in Canada so that Canadians can compete and prosper in the 21st Century.

## **Immigration**

There is currently a skilled-workers shortage throughout Canada that can only be addressed through a long-term immigration strategy focused on labour market needs. As business and investment confidence rebounds, demand for skilled workers will only increase over time. Provinces and territories are best positioned to deliver on specific and immediate regional market needs and ensure the right skills are available at the right place and at the right time. However, the federal government is introducing a cap constraining western Canada's ability to attract skilled workers.

The Provincial Nominee Program has been a success, supporting economic recovery by helping Western economies meet their needs for skilled labour. Premiers urge the federal government to eliminate the cap on the Provincial Nominee Program, and commit to work with provinces and territories on establishing immigration levels.

## **Aboriginal Participation in the Workforce**

Western Canada is home to 64 per cent of Canada's growing Aboriginal population and youth compose 32 per cent of the national Aboriginal population. There are direct links between education, jobs and economic development. Increased Aboriginal participation in the workforce is key to Canada's future success.

For a prosperous Canadian economy, Canada needs to invest in Aboriginal youth from early childhood through K-12 schooling as well as post-secondary skills and training.

Premiers agreed to continue to work with the federal government and Aboriginal communities to improve education quality for pre-school and K-12 students. Increased Aboriginal graduation rates and greater participation in advanced education will lead to positive results for all Canadians.

Premiers agreed that to achieve this goal it will be critical to reduce barriers facing Aboriginal people, respect Aboriginal language and culture, support strong families, and ensure adequate federal funding and infrastructure for Aboriginal education.

### **Innovation, Investment and Jobs**

In today's rapidly changing world, the need for more focused, timely and effective collaboration is more important than ever.

Citizens must also have the skills and technologies they need to seize opportunities in the 21st Century economy including the green economy. Green jobs are paving the way to future prosperity. They include jobs in advancing new technology, life sciences, work in agricultural, manufacturing, research and development, administrative, and service activities that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality.

Premiers directed Ministers responsible to report back in advance of the 2011 Western Premiers' Conference on challenges facing western Canada's labour market. Ministers should also identify ways of improving collaboration to support economic diversification, innovation and the new economy, including improving partnerships with the region's colleges and universities. In addition, Premiers asked Ministers to partner with post-secondary institutions to build centres of training excellence and avoid duplication in specialized programs.

### **One Project – One Environmental Assessment:**

It is essential that all major projects in our provinces and territories require a comprehensive and scientifically sound environmental assessment process.

In western Canada, billions of dollars in projects and thousands of jobs are tied up by the duplicative environmental assessment processes – without improving environmental protection. Many of these projects have already gone through provincial environmental processes that require the same or higher standards to be met.

Premiers welcomed the progress the federal government has made to enhancing existing processes but agreed more work needs to be done. Western Premiers urge Canada to implement a one project–one assessment approach to reduce wasteful duplication and delays. An effective process lowers risks for all critical economic development projects in the west.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Yukon has a single assessment regime with fixed timelines for industrial and government projects.

Premier Floyd Roland was pleased to extend an invitation to the premiers to join him in the Northwest Territories in 2011 for the next Western Premiers' Conference.

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A backgrounder is attached.

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