

THE NORTH

ARCTIC INFRASTRUCTURE FUND
‘a good start,’
BUT CLARITY NEEDED
ON PROJECTS

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BEFORE IT
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LIVING IN CANADA’S
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FACE DISTINCT
SOCIAL, CULTURAL, AND
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THE NORTH Policy Briefing



Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Rebecca Alty, left, and Indigenous Services Minister Mandy Gull-Masty, pictured Aug. 7, 2025, scrumming with reporters after the Métis Major Projects Summit in Ottawa. 'The all-season roads, ports, highways, and other trade-enabling infrastructure we build through the fund will spur growth and better connect northern and Indigenous communities to the Canadian economy and the world,' says Alty about the Arctic Infrastructure Fund. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Arctic Infrastructure Fund 'a good start,' but clarity needed on projects and dual-use priorities, say experts

Pierre Leblanc, a retired colonel and former commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic, says \$1-billion won't be near enough.

BY JESSE CNOCKAERT

The federal budget's proposed \$1-billion for transportation projects in the Arctic came as welcome news to experts on infrastructure and defence in Northern Canada, but some have questions about how far those funds will really go, and what the government's priorities are when the supported projects must be "dual-use."

"Whenever a government promises something is dual-purpose, it generally tends to be oriented towards the politics of it—of meeting whatever the political need of that particular environment is," said Rob Huebert, a professor in the Centre for Military Security and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary.



Rob Huebert, a professor in the Centre for Military Security and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary, says, 'I've become quite a cynic whenever anyone says 'dual-purpose,' Photograph courtesy of Rob Huebert

"We're going to be putting in all this new money for security in the Arctic region. So, does the infrastructure—first and foremost—inform that development, or is that a secondary consideration? That's one of the things I'll be watching [for] when the practical ramifications are announced. In other words, what are we actually doing with the money?"

Among the major announcements in the Liberals' Nov. 4 budget is a proposed \$1-billion



Kent Fellows, an assistant professor in the department of economics and the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, says, 'There's much less guidance on what the federal government's priorities are' regarding the Arctic Infrastructure Fund. Photograph courtesy of Kent Fellows

over four years to Transport Canada for an Arctic Infrastructure Fund (AIF), which will invest in major transportation projects in the North that have dual-use applications for civilians and the military. These can include airports, seaports, and all-season roads and highways, according to the budget document.

Huebert told *The Hill Times* that his biggest question regarding the AIF is what types of projects will it support, and whether

security considerations will be at the forefront in the planning for these projects.

Prime Minister Mark Carney (Nepean, Ont.) announced back in June that Canada, along with allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, agreed to invest five per cent of annual GDP on defence by 2035. That pledge will be divided into an investment of 3.5 per cent of GDP on core military capabilities, with the remaining 1.5 per cent invested in defence and security infrastructure, including air and sea ports, telecommunications, emergency preparedness systems, and other dual-use investments intended to serve defence and civilian readiness.

"I've become quite a cynic whenever anyone says 'dual-purpose,'" said Huebert, who questions whether Canada's five-per-cent investment will be focused on actual security initiatives.

"You say it's dual purpose, but is the security consideration the issue that is leading it? Or is the security [aspect] sort of like, 'Oh, we just built a road, and now we can say that because the military can move on that road that helps us fulfill the 1.5 per cent?'"

Huebert said that Canada has a bad habit of talking about money first, and then coming up with a plan to spend it afterwards.

"Is it a matter of the government just wants to be seen spending money to meet the 1.5 per cent of NATO, or are we sitting down and actually coming up with a serious plan that the infrastructure serves?"

Huebert argues that the total \$81.8-billion announced in the budget for defence funding, much of which is earmarked for Canada's Arctic, is too little too late, in a Nov. 25 article in *Maclean's*.

"Every single time we've ever done anything in the Arctic and gotten serious about it, there's always cost overruns," he told *The Hill Times*. "I suspect that once you get going, there will be a very clear need to advance whatever monies are being put forward. But it comes back to the question of, what is the overall plan?"

AIF shows feds 'shifting centre of gravity' towards defence in the Arctic: Leblanc

Kent Fellows, an assistant professor in the economics department and the School of Public Policy at the University of Calgary, told *The Hill Times* that the AIF is a good idea and shows Ottawa is taking the Arctic seriously, adding that improving trade infrastructure in the North leads to economic benefits for all of the country.

Fellows said there are not currently many details on projects or the feds' specific direction other than broad strokes about northern infrastructure.

"One of the things that we often miss with these is we don't get a really good sense of the federal government's objective here. There's a bit of messaging on that, and obviously they talk a little bit about the kind of proposals that they're looking for and applying to this funding, but it's very much a decentralized view of infrastructure development," he said.

"What the federal government is saying is, 'You tell us what your priorities are, and then we'll tell you if those align with our priorities, and we'll give you money if they do.' But there's much less guidance on what the federal government's priorities are," he added.

Pierre Leblanc, principal of Arctic Security Consultants and a retired colonel and former commander of the Canadian Forces in the Arctic, told *The Hill Times* that the AIF indicates the government is "shifting the centre of gravity" towards defence in the Arctic. He argues that current global threats to Canada's national security, including from China, are possibly the worst he's seen.

"Even during the Cold War, it was a sort of a stable situation, with both parties agreeing to not do the mutual destructive actions. It was two roughly equal adversaries that produced a sort of a stable situation," he said.

"China, many years ago, wasn't so much of a threat, but I think China has removed its smiling mask and is now acting in a much more coercive manner, not only with Canada and other countries like Sweden, Australia and so on, but with the communities surrounding the South China Sea."

Leblanc said that AIF's \$1-billion won't be near enough. As an example of the high costs for infrastructure projects in the Arctic, he pointed to the Mackenzie Valley Highway, a proposed all-season gravel road in the Northwest Territories, which could cost as much as \$3-billion over three years of construction. The highway would extend year-round road access north of Wrigley, N.W.T., opening up a more reliable route of resupply and emergency services for some of its communities, as previously reported in *The Hill Times*. The highway would also make some of the territory's natural resources available for extraction, and if built in full, provide

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University
of Manitoba

BISONS CONNECT COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE NORTH

A hunter tracks caribou across thinning ice without a way to call for help. A radio fails, disconnecting an Arctic community. Connectivity can mean life or death in the North. That's why Dr. Philip Ferguson is working with remote communities to develop satellites and drones that deliver reliable internet. This technology can also detect wildfires, support farming and strengthen communication networks province-wide.

THE NORTH Policy Briefing



Paul Inngaut, Nunavut Tunngavik vice president and chair of the Infrastructure and Housing Advisory Committee, holds a press conference in West Block on Oct. 30, 2025, to discuss four Inuit-led major projects and their inclusion in the government's infrastructure projects of national interest. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

Most forgotten voices: taking the well-being of Inuit communities seriously

To keep the Arctic sovereign and keep up with the national defence, Canada must invest in the people of the Arctic.

NDP MP
Lori Idlout

Opinion



Inuit inspire me every day. Be they hunters, seamstresses, elders, youth, and so many more. Yet, they are the most forgotten voices when it comes to making policies and decisions regarding our wellbeing in the Arctic. Simply because their skills and talents do not fit within the squares, checkboxes, and math of bureaucracies, Inuit wellbeing and abilities are never really considered. In this Parliament, there are four Arctic Liberal MPs, yet all we see are Liberal tactics to exploit their

lands. The question we must ask about their lack of effectiveness is whether those Arctic Liberal MPs are raising their voices for Inuit at the cabinet table, and if they do, are they being ignored?

I was raised during a time when Canada had already asserted its sovereignty over the Arctic. I remember as a mother to my first-born child, going seal hunting with my child's dad and extended family. When I say in Inuktitut, *Qulangiisiiq*, Inuit will know that we went seal hunting during a specific time of the year. For Igloodik, that was around middle of April to end of May. The seal breathing holes in May on the ice are everywhere. There were stretches of puddles, as the ice was slowly melting in the 24-hour daylight.

On that trip, Ujarak had a niksik (a wooden instrument with a metal hook), and others had rifles. During that time in the 1990s, most women would wait at the qamutik (sled), while the men were seal hunting. I remember Marie-Lucie yelling to Ujarak, "*taika!*" (over there!) Ujarak, was not at the seal breathing hole, had to run and jump over quite a distance. I remember wanting to

swoon over him when he caught the seal. In those moments, he became the equivalent of superman to me. A hero with great skills. That seal tasted so good! The freshest I ever had.

Fast forward to today, about 30 years later, my nephews took me seal hunting by boat. I was so proud of them, specifically, because they were taught these skills by their dad (my brother) and by people of Igloodik. I was especially proud given that my brother was not taught by our dad, but rather the community. Our dad had died by suicide before my brothers could be taught to hunt. Yet, my young nephews knew everything: They knew where the shallow spots to avoid; where favourite spots of the seals were; and how to butcher the seal once caught. They had proven that while Canada's genocidal policies had such devastating impacts, Inuit are still able to pass on their skills, knowledge, and expertise. Inuit have a worldview, a value system, and decision-making processes that are foreign on our own lands.

The wellbeing of Inuit communities in the Arctic must be taken seriously. We must ensure

that decision making in Arctic sovereignty includes Inuit. Why? Because, to date, Inuit suffer the worst social indicators. We are labelled, we are judged, and we are oppressed to the point that we put each other down. Lateral violence is rampant. Too many are jailed because they do not have the coping skills to do otherwise. Too many are suffering from addictions. Too many have not overcome the intergenerational trauma that we are forced to endure. Our expertise is not used regarding policies and budgets.

I am thankful that the Carney government has made it abundantly clear that their priority is Arctic security. We do need to be protected. We know there are threats to our environment, safety, health, and the future of our children and grandchildren to live as Inuit is not guaranteed. What the Liberals fail to recognize is that their Arctic security policies are also a threat to Inuit well-being.

Arctic security and Canada's obligations regarding defence should not be developed without the voice of the Inuit experts. Some of the people that I grew up with are now Canadian Rangers,

search and rescue volunteers, and they are teaching about Inuit worldview. I know that their expertise can be used to keep the Arctic secure. In fact, without it, the Arctic is likely less secure for the lack of their traditional knowledge. Perhaps, as I posed earlier, the Carney government does not appear to listen to its Arctic MPs.

From what I have seen in the legislation and in this year's federal budget, the Liberal government only wants to exploit the Arctic. To keep the Arctic sovereign and keep up with the national defence, Canada must invest in the people of the Arctic. Right now, Inuit are dealing with astronomical grocery prices, the highest level of poverty and food insecurity in the country, mouldy and over-crowded housing, and high unemployment. Canada must invest in infrastructure that supports the basic needs of the people of the Arctic which would allow Inuit to thrive economically by creating revenue opportunities based on their strengths.

We need more success stories like that of my nephews knowing how to hunt and fish on the land. The Inuit culture is integral to Arctic Security and Sovereignty and this government needs to learn that lesson. Will Prime Minister Carney finally listen to his four MPs?

Lori Idlout is a Canadian politician who has served as an NDP MP for the riding of Nunavut in the House of Commons since 2021. Before her election, she practised law in Iqaluit with her own firm, Qusagaq Law Office.
The Hill Times



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Arctic Infrastructure Fund ‘a good start,’ but clarity needed on projects and dual-use priorities, say experts

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another connection to the military facility at Inuvik and the Arctic Ocean.

“There’s a lot of ... winter roads that are connecting a number of the communities along the Mackenzie River. But the last leg of it is the most expensive one because now you’re into a lot of crossings of water, and you’re into permafrost country, meaning that the road construction is going to be very expensive, and it’s also going to be expensive to maintain,” he said.

Another transportation corridor currently proposed for the Arctic is a 230-kilometre all-weather road stretching from Yellowknife, N.W.T., to a port in Grays Bay, Nunavut.

Leblanc argued that it would make sense economically for Ottawa to support that project because it could accelerate mining in the areas.

“[Canada’s] competitive advantage is really in resources. It’s not

in manufacturing ... but mining generates a lot of wealth. It generates royalties for the government to then redistribute this money into social programs, it creates a lot of very high-paying jobs, and we can become the provider of choice of critical minerals to all our allies, especially in Europe, because I’m starting to discount the U.S. as a real ally,” he said.

Inuit must ‘be full partners’ in these projects: McCuaig-Johnston

Margaret McCuaig-Johnston, a senior fellow at the University of Ottawa’s Institute for Science, Society and Policy, and Graduate School of Public and International Affairs with expertise on Canadian defence policy and Arctic foreign policy, told *The Hill Times* that the AIF is long overdue, adding that “we need to use it or lose it,” when it comes to the Arctic.

“I think the \$1-billion announcement is very welcome for military

purposes as well as for the local communities. Having said all of that, the Canadian government needs to ensure—and I have no doubt that they will—that the Inuit communities be full partners in the development of these projects. And I don’t mean consultation—I mean full partners,” she said.

“This, I think, is a beginning. This is not the full budget that will be required, but it’s a beginning. In future budgets, we will see additional investments, I have no doubt.”

McCuaig-Johnston said it will be key to include an “innovation dimension” in the AIF for research and development.

“The budget talks about dual-use projects, but when you’re talking about innovation in that context, you can really see the opportunities for synergies between scientists and engineers who have already been working in the North to really drive new military applications,” she said. “And I think it’s important to see that synergy, rather than the expression ‘dual-use.’”

NDP MP Lori Idlout (Nunavut), told *The Hill Times* she appreciates the inclusion of the AIF in the budget, but called it “nowhere near enough.”

“Hopefully there will be a move towards making it some kind of permanent program, so that there’s some kind of assurance that people from the Arctic will always be able to draw upon it to fill those major gaps that exist in the Arctic,” she said. “There’s been such a huge under-investment in the Arctic that any larger amount would have been preferable.”

Idlout said that the Arctic’s needs extend beyond infrastructure.

“We do need more investments to help make sure that we have better health care, that we have more people getting trained to enter the trades, that we have a better education system so that we’re graduating students that can become contributing members of society, and there hasn’t been sufficient funding to address the many basic needs in the Arctic,” she said.



“I think right now, there’s too much emphasis on only defending the Arctic and not enough on helping with Arctic sovereignty and investing in the people.”

Ryan Ness, research director of adaptation with the Canadian Climate Institute (CCI), also called

the AIF a good start, adding that he suspects the infrastructure gap in the North is significantly larger than \$1-billion.

“There’s a lot of catching up to do. It’s going to require haste, but also that engagement with northern communities and rights holders to make sure they’re the right investments—that they’re oriented as much to community benefit as they are to our defence and national security objectives,” he said.

The CCI released a report in June 2022 that examined the costs of climate change on northern infrastructure. According to the report, the climate in Northern Canada is warming three times faster than the global average, and the resulting permafrost thaw, more frequent and damaging extreme weather, and unpredictable snow and ice conditions are amplifying existing infrastructure problems in the region.

An emailed statement from Crown-Indigenous Relations Min-

ister Rebecca Alty’s (Northwest Territories) office said the fund is an example of the government’s broader efforts to empower Canadians through the strengthening of the economy and the creation of new opportunities.

“The all-season roads, ports, highways, and other trade-enabling infrastructure we build through the fund will spur growth and better connect northern and Indigenous communities to the Canadian economy and the world, catalyzing private investment in the process,” said a spokesperson through the statement to *The Hill Times* on Nov. 27.

“At the same time, we are providing the Canada Infrastructure Bank with an additional \$10-billion a year to help finance projects across the country and investing \$51-billion to support municipalities in building essential infrastructure through the Build Communities Strong Fund.”

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The Hill Times

Facts about Infrastructure in Northern Canada:

- Sixty-eight communities across the North can only be reached by air year-round, and many other northern communities rely heavily on air travel for emergency medical care, food, and essential supplies. Most northern airports consist of one gravel runway and do not have the required equipment for planes to land when there are cross winds or poor visibility.
- Northerners do not have access to the same quality of infrastructure services as other people in Canada. For example, housing insecurity is higher in Northern Canada than anywhere else in the country; most Northerners lack dependable health and transportation infrastructure; and many communities do not have access to high-speed internet.
- In the past 50 years, the average global temperature has increased by 0.8 degrees Celsius. In that time, Canada’s average temperature has risen 1.7 C—and the North has warmed by 2.3 C, roughly triple the rate of the global average. Furthermore, the North faces unique climate-related hazards such as permafrost thaw and changes to sea ice conditions that could have devastating effects on northern communities and livelihoods.
- More than half of winter roads in the North could become unusable in the next 30 years as temperatures warm. Permanent roads are also cracking and collapsing because of permafrost thaw.



Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Source: *Due North*, a report on the costs of climate change to infrastructure across all of Northern Canada, released by the Canadian Climate Institute in June, 2022.

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THE NORTH Policy Briefing

Why the North needs telecom before it gets nuclear

Northern Canada depends almost entirely on a handful of satellite providers. Satellites are vulnerable to jamming, cyberattacks, congestion, and foreign interference.

Tyson Macaulay

Opinion



Reliable power in the Arctic isn't a luxury, it is a matter of survival. Yet, northern communities and industrial sites remain overwhelmingly dependent on diesel, a fuel that is expensive, polluting, and remarkably fragile as the backbone of an entire region's energy system. In some parts of the Arctic, diesel accounts for up to one-third of

all imports by value, arriving by barge or winter road along supply chains that climate change has made increasingly unreliable.

A single large mining operation can spend over \$10-million annually on diesel fuel alone. Over the lifespan of a major mine, that is half a billion dollars literally burned to keep generators running. For remote communities, the situation is even more precarious: fuel shortages, late barges, or disrupted winter roads can quickly become life-threatening.

This is the context in which small modular reactors (SMRs) have captured national attention. Their promise is real: long-lasting, emissions-free baseload power that could anchor Arctic development and community energy independence. But adopting SMRs comes with a fundamental shift in risk. While diesel relies on transportation, SMRs rely on something even more sophisticated. Something the North does not yet have.

SMRs require telecommunications.

Modern SMRs assume remote monitoring, diagnostics, and operator support. They depend on continuous, secure, high-assurance data links that are every bit as critical as the reactor hardware itself. Unfortunately, the telecommunications systems in the

North are not built for that level of responsibility. Before Canada deploys SMRs, three conditions must be met: resilience, security, and sovereignty.

1. Resilience: SMRs need more than one pipe in the sky

Northern Canada depends almost entirely on a handful of satellite providers. Satellites are vulnerable to jamming, cyberattacks, congestion, and foreign interference. If one link fails, an SMR cannot simply "wait a few hours" for service to return. Nuclear operations demand redundancy—two or three independent pathways, including:

- Multiple satellite constellations
- Terrestrial fibre or microwave where possible
- Distinct routing paths not controlled by the same entity

Projects like Telesat Lightspeed and the proposed Kivalliq Hydro-Fibre Link could form the backbone of northern resilience. But these remain future promises. Until resilient connectivity is in place, SMRs cannot operate safely in the Arctic.

2. Security: nuclear power requires quantum-safe networks

A reactor's remote operation is only as secure as the encryption

protecting its control link. Today's remote-access systems use "classic" cryptographic algorithms that quantum computers may break as early as 2030.

Canada's National Quantum Strategy is clear: quantum-enabled cyberattacks could compromise utilities and national security. A compromised SMR link is unthinkable. Attackers able to deceive human on-site operators, inject or alter data in-transit pose risks far beyond typical industrial threats.

SMRs therefore require:

- End-to-end quantum-safe encryption
- Cryptographically agile systems upgradeable as standards evolve
- Supply-chain assurance to prevent foreign tampering

Without quantum-safe security, deploying SMRs in remote regions would be reckless.

3. Sovereignty: Canada must control the infrastructure

Even if northern networks become resilient and secure, Canada faces a final challenge: control.

Today:

- 50 per cent of Canadian-to-Canadian internet traffic detours through the United States or Europe;

- 100 per cent of this country's content delivery networks are foreign-owned; and

- U.S. and European Union providers fall under laws that grant them lawful access to any data they manage anywhere in the world.

This is unacceptable for systems that support nuclear operations. Canada cannot run SMRs through networks routed or governed by other nations.

This country needs sovereign telecommunications routes; Canadian-domiciled routing, and ideally Canadian-owned satellites and fibre. Without sovereignty, communications can be intercepted, throttled, altered, or disconnected during geopolitical or commercial disputes.

The order of operations is clear

SMRs could reshape the future of northern Canada. But the telecommunications they depend on do not yet exist at the required standard.

This is not a chicken-and-egg dilemma. It is arithmetic: Telecommunications first, SMRs second.

Until Canada builds networks that are resilient, secure, and sovereign, nuclear power in the Arctic will remain an aspiration—not a safe reality.

Tyson Macaulay is the deputy director of the National Centre for Critical Infrastructure Protection, Security and Resilience at Carleton University.

The Hill Times

Canada's Arctic is the next frontier for growth, security, and reconciliation

Investment in the Arctic is not only an economic decision, but also a security imperative. As climate change reshapes global shipping routes and other nations assert their presence in the region, Canada simply can't afford to be a bystander in its own backyard.

Pascal Chan

Opinion



Canada is one of the few countries in the world that truly can call itself an Arctic nation,

yet our North has remained more of a national symbol than a key region for establishing our place in the world. Despite being vast, resource-rich, and geopolitically vital, it has unfortunately been chronically neglected and underdeveloped by successive governments of all political stripes.

This is perhaps not surprising, as two out of three Canadians live within 100 kilometres of the southern Canada-U.S. border according to Statistics Canada, while the three territories of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut combined only account for approximately 0.3 per cent of the country's total population.

That said, the tide is slowly turning. With the passage of the *One Canadian Economy Act*, new commitments in the 2025 federal budget, and Prime Minister Mark Carney's push to fast-track major projects, perception of the Arctic has shifted from northern challenge to national opportunity, and the moment to invest is now. This could be Canada's opportunity to lead in the global energy transition, secure critical mineral supply chains, strengthen sovereignty, and advance true economic reconciliation, but

unlocking this potential requires decisive, coordinated action.

Canada's North holds some of the world's most important untapped resources, including critical minerals essential to industries such as clean technology, defence, and advanced manufacturing. Global demand for resources is skyrocketing, and this country has what the world needs, but without infrastructure such as roads, rail, ports, and high-speed connectivity, these resources could remain stranded.

Supporting Arctic development goes well beyond mining; it's about building strategic trade corridors that connect communities, create jobs, and open new paths to global markets. It's about finding more reliable sources of energy, reducing emissions, and improving quality of life for northern residents. It's about dual-use infrastructure that serves both civilian and military needs, reinforcing our sovereignty in a region where geopolitical competition is intensifying. It's about creating inclusive economic opportunities that strengthen communities.

The tabling of the federal budget signalled the government's

intention to invest in the region through a new Arctic Infrastructure Fund and major investments in critical minerals. While it was certainly a step in the right direction, these commitments must be the start of a sustained and coordinated national effort, rather than one-off announcements.

As we move forward, it should also be underlined that economic reconciliation is foundational and not optional. Inuit and Indigenous communities are not stakeholders; they are rights-holders and partners. Partnership must go beyond consultation to include equity, skills development, business opportunity for Indigenous-owned firms, and long-term benefits embedded in every project. Governments have attempted to push into the Arctic in the past, making many mistakes, not least of which was failing work with Inuit communities.

Further to this, investment in the Arctic is not only an economic decision, but also a security imperative. As climate change reshapes global shipping routes and other nations assert their presence in the region, Canada simply can't afford to be a bystander in its own backyard. Building all-season roads, ports,

and energy corridors is as much about defending sovereignty as it is about driving economic growth.

Canada has the resources, and now it appears to have the policy momentum and the accompanying vision; what we need is urgency. The federal government's recent moves, while encouraging, must be matched by a clear, long-term Arctic strategy that accelerates permitting, aligns federal, territorial, and Inuit and Indigenous priorities, all while mobilizing private capital and the Canadian business community alongside multi-year public investment.

Mining projects in the Arctic are an essential component of community building. Done right, working hand in hand with Inuit communities, they can serve as an anchor and usher in a new era of sustainable development supported by clean energy, modern infrastructure, and inclusive governance. They can position Canada as a global leader in responsible resource development while delivering lasting benefits for northern communities.

The Arctic is no longer a distant frontier. It is the future of Canada's economy, security, and reconciliation. It's time to take "True North" from branding to nation building.

Pascal Chan is vice-president of strategic policy and supply chains with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

The Hill Times

Policy Briefing THE NORTH

Living in Canada's Arctic North: why federal investment matters

The Arctic is warming three times faster than the rest of Canada, and that affects everything from permafrost stability to polar bear habitat. Inuit knowledge, passed down for generations, helps us understand these changes and adapt.

Solomon Awa

Opinion



IQALUIT, NUNAVUT—Canada's Arctic is far more complex and far more connected to the future of our country than many realize.



Local governments in the North and the Arctic work hard to deliver essentials, but costs are high, writes Solomon Awa, mayor of Iqaluit. Photograph courtesy of FCM Media

Just last week, I was out on the water in my boat. In November, the sea ice should already be forming, but this year it has not. Even though unpredictability is part of life in the Arctic, climate change is reshaping our environment and ways of life. That's why planning for the future is so critical.

The Arctic is warming three times faster than the rest of Canada, and that affects everything from permafrost stability to polar bear habitat. Inuit knowledge, passed down for generations, helps us understand these changes and adapt. That knowledge must be part of national planning. Inuit have lived and thrived here for millennia, and their knowledge is essential to the Arctic's future.

At the heart of that future are our communities. Iqaluit is Nunavut's largest city, home to nearly 9,000 people. It is a hub for health care, air travel, and services in the eastern Arctic. We host trade shows and mining symposiums that bring companies from across Canada to showcase opportunities in the North. Our community is vibrant and welcoming, but the challenges we face are unique.

Our shipping season is short, and when it ends, bringing in essential materials gets harder and more costly. Even building a road is not simple. Iqaluit is located on the Canadian Shield, and this often means we're required to blast rock and haul gravel before laying a single pipe. These realities make planning

and budgeting far more complex than in southern communities.

These aren't just local hurdles, but national priorities. Without federal investment, the cost and complexity of building Arctic infrastructure could stall progress for years.

Challenges around climate, housing, and infrastructure shape Canada's ability to assert sovereignty in a region where global interest is growing. Strong communities are the foundation of a strong Arctic presence. And a strong Arctic begins with strong, healthy, and thriving communities. That means reliable infrastructure such as roads, water systems, and digital connectivity. It means ensuring that families have safe homes and access to essential services.

Local governments in the North and the Arctic work hard to deliver these essentials, but costs are high. A single broken piece of heavy equipment can delay services for months because parts arrive only by sealift. Planning for growth, like the 500 new housing units Iqaluit needs, requires predictable funding developed in partnership with the federal government.

And now more than ever, this partnership matters. Investing in the North and Arctic is an investment in Canada's future. When local governments and the federal

government work together, we can build the infrastructure that sustains communities and strengthens Arctic sovereignty, as the recent announcement of the major hydroelectric project on the Kuugaluk River shows.

Projects like this don't just power homes; they power opportunity. They make it possible for businesses to grow and for families to thrive in a region that is vital to Canada's future. When we invest in the North, we invest in energy security, economic growth, and a stronger Canada.

It's about building in ways that reflect the North's realities. That means broadband that connects communities, housing that withstands Arctic conditions, and climate adaptation rooted in Indigenous knowledge.

The North and Arctic are not distant frontiers. It is home to families, culture, and opportunities. It is also where Canada's strength begins. If we want a sovereign Arctic, we need to invest in the people who live here and the infrastructure that sustains us. Every runway, road, and water system we build there reinforces our strength in the Arctic. Sovereignty isn't abstract—it's lived through infrastructure and services that keep communities strong. Local governments are key to this vision.

Solomon Awa is the mayor of Iqaluit, a board member of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and president of the Nunavut Association of Municipalities. He lives in Iqaluit with his wife and children.

The Hill Times

Serving the whole North is of national importance

The Canadian North should not have to stand in line, lobbying for support for a handful of small projects.

Ken Coates

Opinion



Canada's current plans for natural resource and infrastructure development talk a lot about the North, yet perpetuate a pattern of genteel neglect.

The cover of the Nov. 4 budget document features an Arctic icebreaker, combining the extension of Canadian sovereignty in the Far North, the push for resources and investments in northern infrastructure. The Canadian North has seen this play before—and is still waiting.

This sounds ungracious and unkind, and it is. The budget has set aside large sums in many areas of importance to the North. The \$1-billion Arctic infrastructure budget sounds impressive and, in financial quantum, it is. The extension of the MacKenzie Highway to Inuvik would, by itself, require more than half of the infrastructure funds. The region needs hundreds of billions of dollars to meet urgent infrastructure needs. Connecting the Yukon to British Columbia's electrical grid—a worthy undertaking—would require many multiples of the current Arctic allocation. Any incremental money is welcome, but the current plan is, at best, a small start.

The government speaks, with passion and an open wallet, about enhancing the nation's Arctic defence capabilities. But most of the spending will be with southern and international technology and defence firms, and most of the personnel will be based in the South. The Far North will have to be content with a small number of multi-use facilities, several forward operating stations, and

an expansion of the Canadian Rangers. The military investments will, likely, bring only small-scale changes across the Arctic, even as the country's ability to defend the Far North increases dramatically.

Ironically, the provincial North stands to be the primary beneficiary of the Carney government's resource and infrastructure initiatives. The potentially most impactful projects are in the area: the Northwest British Columbia LNG plants, the railway and port plan focused on Churchill, Man., and the anticipated expansion of Alberta's oil and gas sector. Northern Manitoba, to emerge as the keystone to Canadian prosperity.

When ancillary potential projects are added in, the economic future of the provincial North looks promising. There are proposals for new mines in northern Manitoba, a pipeline linking Alberta to Churchill, more icebreakers for Hudson Bay, another pipeline from Northeast British Columbia to the coastal LNG plants, an electrification and road project to link Manitoba's hydro plants to the poorly served Nunavut communities, an export

port on James Bay, an energy corridor connecting Alberta and Ontario, and a multi-generational mine near Timmins, Ont.

In contrast, the list of projects under serious consideration in the territorial North is surprisingly slight. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories see great potential in the proposed Grays Road and Port project to unlock the mineral potential of western Nunavut and the Eastern Northwest Territories. The Yukon electrification project would help the territory and reduce its reliance on imported diesel fuel. There is serious discussion of a hydro plant to serve Iqaluit. But few Arctic initiatives have captured the government's attention as yet.

The current conversation about northern development shines light on a little-discussed aspect of contemporary Canada. This country is incomplete. Most Canadians who live within a few hundred kilometres of the Canada-United States border have comparable levels of government-funded infrastructure and public and private-sector services. Prince Edward Island may not be as wealthy as Calgary, and rural Quebec does not have the same support as Vancouver, but southern Canadians are well looked after.

The North lags well behind. Energy supplies are costly and not always reliable. The road systems of Nunavut and Northwest Territories are limited; many

communities are accessible only by air and boat. Internet infrastructure requires attention. Billions of dollars are needed to bring northern housing, local roads, water distribution systems, recreational facilities, hospitals and medical centres, and airports up to national standards.

The Canadian North should not have to stand in line, lobbying for support for a handful of small projects. The Canadian Norths—provincial and territorial—need only a single project: a national commitment to work, over time, to bring regional infrastructure and services up to national standards. This laudable goal could galvanize the country, focus government investments, motivate Canadians and start the process of completing Confederation to the benefit of the people of the North.

Ken Coates is a former a professor of Indigenous Governance at Yukon University and, before then, the Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation in the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. He is also a distinguished fellow with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute in Aboriginal and Northern Canadian issues. Coates works extensively on the economic development of the provincial and territorial Norths and has written about comparative circumpolar public policy and Arctic security.

The Hill Times

THE NORTH Policy Briefing

Women entrepreneurs in the North face distinct social, cultural, and geographic obstacles

Rosalind Lockyer

Opinion



Women's equality got a boost in this year's federal budget with the government's commitment to provide stable funding of \$660.5-million over five years to the Department for Women and Gender Equality.

Now the government needs to give its Women Entrepreneurship Strategy a similar shot in the arm so it can address funding and policy shortcomings impacting women business owners in Canada's North.

Women entrepreneurs in the North face distinct social, cultural and geographic obstacles. Eliminating them will require innovative federal funding and policy approaches that recognize the unique realities they face.

PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise Canada recently brought together women business owners and self-employed women in Yukon to discuss challenges and how to solve them.

The meeting was part of round-table discussions that PARO is holding in cities across the country—including Whitehorse, Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, and St. John's—to find ways to help women entrepreneurs thrive. We will be issuing a report on our findings next year.

Participants in Whitehorse identified key social and cultural barriers that hinder their ability to access business financing.

Too often they come up against policies that do not fully appreciate what women's entrepreneurship looks like in practice.

Many women entrepreneurs in the North run small businesses or are self-employed, working in the arts, consulting, social enterprises or wellness work—ventures that often fall outside eligibility criteria for traditional grants and loans.

Many work part time while juggling caregiving responsibilities for their children or aging parents, putting them at a disadvantage when applying for funding that often favours full-time businesses able to quickly scale up.

The extensive documentation required for grant or loan applications is often too onerous for small business owners who

operate their business part time or have solo ventures.

A strong cultural and emotional aversion to loans—arising from a history of systemic racism in financial institutions—also discourages Indigenous women entrepreneurs from submitting applications.

Women in Yukon spoke about fear of being denied loans, concerns about credit history and feeling uncomfortable being tied to rigid repayment timelines given the unpredictability of both family life and cash flow.

Many also pointed to systemic biases in society that still do not take women-owned businesses seriously—seeing them as just a hobby not worthy of funding.

Women entrepreneurs in the North must also contend with significant geographic hurdles, including the high costs of living and doing business there, limited access to suppliers, longer distances to markets, limited training and mentoring opportunities and difficulties accessing basic infrastructure like housing, education and health services.

Finding ways to better support women entrepreneurs—including those in the North—is vital to Canada's economic prosperity given

that they generate over \$90-billion in annual revenues and employ almost one million people.

In Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, women-owned businesses account for about 23 per cent of all businesses, providing vital services and contributing to the territories' economic bottom line.

Eliminating barriers to help them thrive will require revising funding systems so that they reflect the way women actually build and sustain businesses in the North.

Eligibility criteria for measuring success in funding decisions must be expanded beyond scale and staffing numbers to include qualitative indicators like social impact, community engagement and wellness outcomes.

The types of businesses eligible for grants must be broadened to include consulting, solo-venture wellness, education and part-time businesses.

Government loans and grants must be redesigned to make loan repayments less rigid and increase non-repayable grant options.

Grant reporting requirements must be simplified to reflect the capacity of small business owners and allow for narrative

and impact-based reporting—like stories or outcomes—rather than only performance metrics.

More educational resources should be offered through a Women's Business Learning Hub that provides low-cost or free training in areas like financial literacy, digital marketing and legal business basics.

There also needs to be an online portal that provides easy access to tools, templates, recorded training and grant application guidance, with resources specifically designed for self-employed and Indigenous women.

Women entrepreneurs should be full partners in developing these supports.

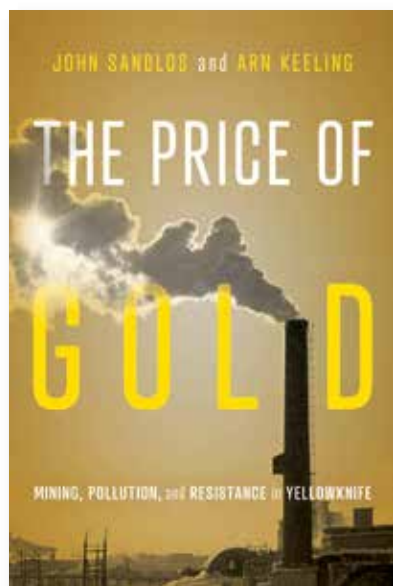
Women entrepreneurs in Canada's North are not asking for handouts. They just want systems that work for—not against—them.

It is time for the federal government to adopt innovative funding and policy solutions that recognize and respond to the realities of women entrepreneurs in the North.

Rosalind Lockyer is founder and CEO of PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise-Ontario, PARO Canada and board member for Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC).

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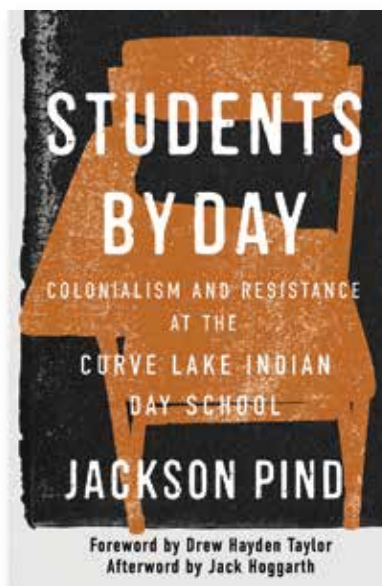
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