

*Towards Northern Manitoba Economic Prosperity*

*Brief to  
The Honourable Cameron Friesen, Minister of Finance*

*By*

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*Monday, October 24  
Thompson, MB*

The economic potential of northern Manitoba is enormous. The region has world-class economic resources such as mining, forestry, electrical generation, agriculture and tourism that are the envy of other provinces and countries.

The North and the raw materials it possesses remain a focus for business and government and, as all provinces across Canada realize: there is unprecedented opportunity for investment, development and wealth creation.

To enter this “new era” the focus of communities and governments must turn to prosperity and economic growth, to building skills and efficiency, and to developing productive, sustainable relationships.

Northern Manitoba has no shortage of raw materials; what we need is investment (capital) and skills (labour) to reinvigorate and propel our economy forward.

This requires a broad combination of human and financial capital, expertise, skills, and infrastructure. Northern and Aboriginal people must be trained and educated in order to fully participate in the northern economy.

All stakeholders, including governments, industries, communities and businesses have a role to play in ensuring that the conditions and supports are available and aligned with a broader vision of a better North.

We need to focus on:

- infrastructure limitations – internet, road, rail, airports, etc
- a coherent skills development strategy
- a long-term plan for regional economic prosperity with a focus on jobs and wealth creation
- a shared vision for northern Manitoba
- development and recruitment of required expertise

To achieve this:

- Northern and regional interests must be aligned with the focus on creating wealth and opportunity, growing the local job base, improving the service economy and engaging all stakeholders; that is: northern Manitoba must improve its attractiveness for investment dollars and for people.
- Northern Manitoba must have a coherent, relevant education and training system aligned with the economic strategy to ensure that northern people have the skills they need participate in the economic development of the north.
- Northern Manitoba must strengthen its transportation infrastructure – rail, roads and airports;
- Northern Manitoba municipalities/communities need to have the tools to build vibrant, safe communities that are excellent places to live, work, play, and raise a family.
- Northern Manitoba must develop new ways to facilitating regional coordination and cooperation.

Issues

### **1. Shared Vision**

We must develop/enhance forums and networks for business, industry and communities of interest, including aboriginal, rural and urban communities to work together to create a shared vision for northern development.

A shared vision for economic prosperity for the north will require a higher order of cooperation and expertise than currently exists. Government and agencies – such as chambers of commerce – must take the lead and provide the forum and resources to initiate this conversation.

## **2. Improve the climate for investment**

Investment dollars go where they are wanted, where they can generate a return and where they can be easily deployed. Investment in Northern Manitoba is constrained already by geographic and transportation, and infrastructure issues. The attractiveness of a region for investment dollars is conditional on a number of various and intertwined factors including:

- regulatory environment
- political stability
- infrastructure
- taxation
- availability of labour/skills

We need to look at each of these issues, and make changes where necessary, to improve the attractiveness of our region for business and economic development.

## **3. Get Serious about Skills Development**

We must get serious about skills development, not just short term “capacity building” but long-term action to educate, train and recruit the professional, technical, managerial and trades skills the north needs to develop economically and socially. This will require a fundamental strengthening of the current educational system in the north.

- 4. Support and Encourage the Sustainable Development of our Resource Sector and;**
- 5. Bring Coherence and Clarity to the Regulatory System**

Northern Manitoba's past, and its future, are linked to the resource industries. While diversification is key to any economic strategy, so too is building on existing strengths. Northern Manitoba's industries are world class, and there is strong demand for our minerals, forest products, and energy. Now more than ever, we need clear resource development policies and protocols, mutually beneficial partnerships with First Nations, and a strong and transparent regulatory framework. The exploration and development process has been frustrated by a lack of coherence and clarity of the regulatory protocol. Lack of resolution on land tenure issues, and unresolved issues on resource revenue scare off investors and result in a perpetual "lose/lose" dynamic. An adversarial environment further limits progress. Governments must facilitate dialogue, joint planning and understanding and commit to providing a clear, coherent regulatory environment.

**6. Understand Aboriginal People ARE the Solution**

Aboriginal people want economic inclusion and social justice. Changing demographics mean a growing, young, more connected generation of young people demanding a place in the northern economy and society.

This may be the single most pressing issue facing our province – a growing population in a region where jobs and opportunity are declining. The effects of this dynamic are well documented and discussed and there is no one, single strategy that will resolve the poverty or remediate years of discrimination. However, one component of building healthier communities and alleviating poverty is to ensure a good education aligned with regional economic opportunities.

It is time for a new paradigm and thinking where all stakeholders in the north can "grow together."

7. **Support First Nations Economic and Business Development:**

Northern Manitoba First Nations must be supported to develop and sustain local businesses and industries that match the needs of the northern economic drivers of mining, forestry, tourism and hydro development. Developing capacity in the areas of business and organizational development, commerce, entrepreneurship and governance must be a key priority.

8. **Support Research, Development and Innovation:**

Innovation isn't just about new things, it's about challenging existing ways of thinking and breaking down outdated, stale dated concepts. We need to create a northern innovation council. This will be an organization comprised of Business, Academic, Community, and other representatives with a mandate to provide advice and recommendations on regional innovation, workforce development, and other economic issues. It will provide a link to provincial policy development and ensure northern priorities and issues are at the forefront. The Council will create enhanced partnerships to revitalize the north. A Community Research and Innovation Trust Fund should also be established to support research and innovation in areas vital to community development. Industry, business and governments would be called upon to provide sufficient resources.

9. **Attract and Retain Key Professionals to Northern Manitoba:**

Recruiting and retaining professional personnel such as physicians, engineers and tradespeople to live and work in northern Manitoba is a key challenge. Working in collaboration with local communities, chambers of commerce and regional health authorities, a Northern Manitoba marketing and recruitment office must be created to support the recruitment efforts of northern employers. A key action will be to market Northern Manitoba as a great place to live, work and play.

**10. The Role of the University:**

People, with the right vision, with a platform, mandate and resources to accomplish the above must be enabled. Typically, the creation of new knowledge, the development of skills, the distribution of information and the creation of strategic and entrepreneurial partnerships are in the mandate of our post-secondary institutions. These institutions are established to drive economic and societal change. The guiding principle is to create a nexus of talent, opportunity, discovery and support.