

SPEAKING NOTES

August 27, 2008

Drin Gwizii, Sha Gwich'in kut

Introduction

Mr. Prime Minister, it is my honour and pleasure to welcome you to the Gwich'in Settlement Area, to Inuvik and to the Mackenzie Delta. Your visit here this week is very important to us, as it should be to all residents of the North and to Canadians. You are here to deliver a vision that the Gwich'in share; a northern economy that is bustling, governments of the north sharing in the wealth of our lands, people building viable and prosperous businesses and communities that are sustainable. A North that is strong and free, people engaged, involved and consulted, a Canada that is sovereign and respected in all its lands and waters.

Project Support

Mr. Prime Minister, the Gwich'in would like to state the following so that there is no confusion about our position on certain projects that we feel will lend itself to assisting in sustainable and long term economic growth for our participants. It goes without saying that these projects and initiatives will have social challenges and environmental concerns. However by working together, providing proper financial and human resources to those responsible for approval, by respecting and implementing the full terms of treaties and land claim agreements and engaging through consultation the people who are affected, we will be able to achieve the beneficial results we want.

The Gwich'in supports the:

1. Mackenzie Valley highway including an all weather road connecting Inuvik to Tuktoyuktuk
2. Mackenzie Gas Project and Pipeline
3. Improved Community Infrastructure
4. Geo-mapping Project

Mr. Prime Minister, in supporting these initiatives, the Gwich'in will want to have our businesses involved and where possible provide services to those companies leading the Projects.

I can assure you that we are prepared to work with industry, aboriginal, northern or southern businesses to complete these projects.

Our history shows that we are capable of negotiating fair agreements, building successful business partnerships and we intend to continue this practice.

Presentation to Prime Minister Harper, 27 August 2008

Transportation Corridor

As a matter of planning for the future, the Gwich'in recommends that a transportation corridor be established down the Mackenzie valley so that decisions can be made about the type of transportation projects being proposed.

Supporting Private Entrepreneurs

The objective of the Gwich'in is to ensure that participants and Gwich'in private entrepreneurs share in the economic opportunities and that we build a vibrant business sector. They need our support, our help and our encouragement. We can do this by working together so that private business can receive financial support and planning advice so that they are capable of taking full advantages of present and future opportunities. The Gwich'in recognize that the small business sector is the driving economic catalyst in Canada, around the world and we should recognize that small business will assist and take over the duty of creating jobs. Governments should not be in the job creation business, but rather be of assistance to those that are generally responsible for this.

I would like to state that in the North and in aboriginal communities, Government financial support is not considered the last resort for funding, but in many instances the first, last and only support. While this is not a normal scenario for business in many other parts of the Canada, this is a fact in aboriginal communities and for that matter aboriginal business throughout Canada. We have to accept this fact and work together on finding ways to encourage and support aboriginal business development and the private entrepreneur. I can say from my own experience in business it is very hard to find the financial resources to build or help grow a business. It is easier for Tribal or Regional owned corporations since they can utilize and access to land claims compensation and politically, they have the connections to get the support from governments that they need. This is not so for the private entrepreneur and small aboriginal business. We need to change this and I trust that your historical positions on business and present policy position will provide the impetus to address this matter.

Very shortly, the Gwich'in will make public a significant change to its business policy where there will be no categorization or preference given to any business owned by the Gwich'in Development Corporation or held in trust by the Gwich'in Tribal Council. Simply put, there will be no A or B listed companies, all Gwich'in businesses will be treated equally and fairly.

Toward A New Engagement of the North: Northern Political and Economic Accord(s)

As an Experienced Aboriginal leader in Canada, I strongly recommend that a national political and economic accord be established between Canada, the Provinces/Territories and aboriginal peoples. It is important that there be a clear agenda set to deal with key matters related to aboriginal peoples of Canada including aboriginal economic growth and prosperity.

Presentation to Prime Minister Harper, 27 August 2008

It would also make sense that there be a political accord that would guide the relationship of Canada, northern and aboriginal governments. The political accord should not simply be an exercise in political posturing but rather a mechanism to address key issues and provide a proactive vehicle to bring resolution to key matters. The Political/Economic Accords should also include an accountability framework so that all involved can show results or identify problems that must be solved. This accord could form the foundation of a lasting political and economic relationship and ensure that the peoples of the north and affected governments are fully engaged, consulted and have a vested interest in the development of the north, benefiting from economic prosperity and wealth sharing. An Accord will show our people in the North that as leaders we are prepared and capable of working together to ensure proper management of the environment while promoting sustainable and lasting development.

Land Claim Implementation and Accountability

After 16 years since the signing of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement I would like to talk to you about true accountability, with a Gwich'in twist. Now is the time to accept and remedy of the failings that have plagued our Federal-Territorial-Gwich'in relationship. And this task is crucial to the proper implementation of the Gwich'in Final Agreement. To get where we need to go, we need as well a clear, accountable performance based audit of how Canada is now serving northern Aboriginal peoples and in our case the Gwich'in. I know that your government is quite keen on audit and evaluation assessments to guide policy. So I merely ask that the same focus be given to where we have been since our new Treaty was signed, 16 years ago, in order to guide us on our path together towards Gwich'in self-sufficiency.

Such an approach – must be based on an un-biased but critical eye towards performance results and good governance which can only serve us well and provide accountability and fiscal confidence to Canadians, northern residents and the Gwich'in. Whether it is the Auditor General who carries out this task, or a third party chosen by mutual agreement, the results can only inform us better in how we collectively plan to govern our mutual obligations for the betterment of the North's environment, cultures, economy and security.

We know that together we face many challenges; we have all been down this road before but past experiences has prepared the Gwich'in to meet these challenges with a renewed vision for a collaborative and prosperous future.

Regulatory Approval Processes

Mr. Prime Minister, there has been much concern expressed about the approvals process for projects and permits in the NWT and many have complained about the speed by which the Mackenzie Gas Project Review Panel has conducted the hearings and review.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to remind everyone that while even I have complained about the process, it is the first time that the review process has been involved in a major project such as the Mackenzie Gas Project.

Presentation to Prime Minister Harper, 27 August 2008

To suggest that it has failed is a bit premature and prejudging.

I want to be part of a leadership that will improve the process. But when you hear people or industry complain about a process and the need for accountability one wonders if the issue is process or result.

I was part of the team that was involved in the design of the process and the whole objective was to have a single window approach to managing and approving projects. I would recommend that prior to making any changes that we go back to the original objectives and determine if the objectives were met by the legislation or we need to amend the legislation to meet the objective.

I can say that I am pleased with the work of the Boards and agencies in the Gwich'in Settlement Area. The Staff and process works very well, but like all processes they take time to build, gain knowledge and develop expertise.

I am prepared to look at the recommendations of the McCrank Report but I would not be supportive of getting rid of regional Boards that are carrying out their tasks properly responsibly and expeditiously.

Resource Revenue Sharing and Devolution

The Gwich'in supports and recommends that a negotiation framework be established to address resource revenue sharing and devolution this would include, but not limited to:

- a. parameters for the negotiation process
- b. scope of negotiations
- c. agenda, funding and timetable of the negotiations
- d. parties
- e. subject matters

The negotiations process must involve and include aboriginal governments as parties in the negotiations.

We know that together we face many challenges, we have all been down this road before but past experiences have prepared the Gwich'in to meet these challenges with a renewed vision for cooperative and sustainable future.