



For Immediate Release

Infrastructure, workforce development, and energy top of mind in Northwest for Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario

January 22, 2015, Thunder Bay, ON – The people of Northwestern Ontario say the high cost of energy, aging infrastructure, and challenges with workforce development are the top issues that continue to plague the region. Throughout December and January, Northern Policy Institute has been collecting feedback across Northern Ontario to help build the Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario. Northern Policy Institute president and CEO, Charles Cirtwill, said that this process provides an important opportunity to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities facing Northern Ontario.

Northwestern Ontarians have yet to fully seize this opportunity. To date, Northern Policy Institute has received feedback primarily from the Thunder Bay district and few responses from other districts.

The feedback collected so far lists the high cost of energy as one of the primary challenges facing the region. A respondent from Thunder Bay wrote that the high cost of energy is hindering not only Northern Ontario's global competitiveness, but the entire nation's. While energy costs are primarily dominated by the provincial government, the federal government still has a role to play, and as the respondent writes: "Canadian global competitiveness is at stake."

Another top issue was infrastructure, particularly roads and highway-twinning. Other respondents pointed to a lack of infrastructure development to aid in the mining and forestry sector. But that is not the only challenge holding these sectors back. Respondents highlighted an ongoing disconnect between available training and available jobs, particularly for First Nations communities. These issues are closely linked, as people responded that better infrastructure and innovation can help First Nations and forestry and mining initiatives throughout the region.

"It is no surprise that infrastructure and energy are some of the key issues being talked about so far," says Cirtwill. "Northwestern Ontario has often felt the pinch from high energy prices, seeing many mills close as a result. The region has also seen how a lack of infrastructure spending can stall major resource development projects like the Ring of Fire. But this is not the whole story. We are encouraging other communities and districts throughout the region to have their say as well. We want to know what opportunities and challenges exist in Kenora, Dryden, Ignace, Sioux Lookout, Fort Frances, Atikokan, Fort Severn, Rainy River, Red Lake. This is your chance to make your voice heard – to help inform the people who will make the policies that will impact you."

Consultations will be ongoing until January 31, 2015. The people of Northwestern Ontario are encouraged to have their say. The discussion paper, *A Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario*, and the online comment form are available on the Northern Policy Institute website at www.northernpolicy.ca.

Background: The Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario is a collaborative effort between The Mowat Centre, The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, and Northern Policy Institute. In October, 2014, The Mowat Centre released its discussion paper, *A Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario* during the 2014 Ontario Economic Summit.

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According to the discussion paper, the purpose of the Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario is to: “define clearly the challenges and opportunities facing Ontario, develop a common vision and agenda on key economic issues, inform public dialogue, outline policy options that could be pursued by the federal government, and inform platform development by political parties in the lead up to the federal election.”

The feedback that is collected will be used to complete the Federal Economic Agenda for Ontario with an intended release in the spring of 2015.

Media Interviews: Northern Policy Institute President and CEO, Charles Cirtwill, is available for comment. To arrange an interview, please contact:

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About Northern Policy Institute:

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario’s independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our Operations are located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario’s capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.

About The Mowat Centre:

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy think tank located at the School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Toronto and Ontario’s non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy.

We undertake collaborative applied policy research, propose innovative research-driven recommendations, and engage in public dialogue on Canada’s most important national issues.

Our policy areas of expertise are intergovernmental economic and social policy, state transformation, energy policy and not-for-profit policy.

About The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity:

The Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity is an independent, not-for-profit organization that deepens public understanding of macro and microeconomic factors behind Ontario’s economic progress. We are funded by the Government of Ontario and are mandated to share our research findings directly with the public. The Institute serves as the research arm of the Task Force on Competitiveness, Productivity and Economic Progress.

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