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R09-0183

July 31, 2009

Re: Update on the Northern Growth Plan

Dear northerners,

I am pleased to provide an update on the development of a Growth Plan for Northern Ontario – an initiative I am co-leading with the Honourable George Smitherman, Deputy Premier and Minister of Energy and Infrastructure.

The Northern Ontario Growth Plan is a plan that will help us build a stronger, more competitive and sustainable North over the next 25 to 30 years. Minister Smitherman and I want to thank you for your input and let you know that we are driving hard to complete a draft plan for release this fall.

Over the past several months we have been working to consolidate and analyze inputs received from more than 2,500 northerners through 80 meetings, conferences, workshops and technical sessions. We are examining the comments from the Think North conference, as well as incorporating views and advice from a number of reports prepared by external researchers. And we are working across the Ontario government to make sure that this plan is comprehensive in scope and aligns provincial investment and policy priorities with Growth Plan directions.

This Plan will address a spectrum of short, medium and long term directions. Based on what we have learned and heard to date, it will incorporate the following elements:

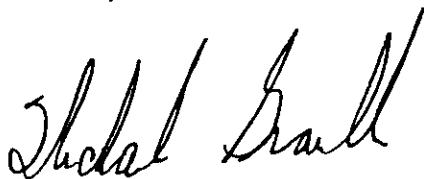
- Northern Ontario's economy will continue to be built upon its mineral, forest, tourism and agricultural resource strengths but will do so through new practices that add value and create diverse opportunities from the solid resource-based industry foundations of the region. It will also embrace and advance the development of emerging clusters such as health research and green energy innovation.
- The North's strength is its people, their resourcefulness and their entrepreneurial spirit. Harnessing these qualities in a collaborative way that involves all residents including Francophone and Aboriginal peoples will be essential for a prosperous region of the future. At the heart of achieving this success is the need to strengthen educational and training capacity.

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- Attracting and retaining newcomers and long-term residents and providing opportunities for youth to make their future in Northern Ontario will contribute to, as well as be reflective of, a growing regional economy.
- Innovation will lead to the commercialization of new northern-based products in emerging industries—bioproducts, health technologies and products, new mineral and metal products, and whole new areas of businesses responding to the green economy—and must be an integral part of a province-wide innovation network responsive to regional opportunities.
- Extensive and available broadband service is an essential enabler of an integrated, collaborative economy that connects all northerners, their communities and industries, and which supports excellent public services and e-business opportunities.
- The North cannot be viewed as one large homogeneous area and consequently zones or corridors in planning for economic development must be considered.
- Transportation is key to ensuring access to markets and developing stronger ties between communities. A multi-modal approach for the future will require concerted and collaborative effort to bring investments into the region, and capitalize on the region's important location as a crossroads for national, continental and global transportation and communications patterns.
- Northern communities and industries will benefit from a green, renewable energy economy that increases efficiency, drives new investments and supports competitive industries.
- Collaboration among northern cities and rural and Aboriginal communities is vital for mutual success, Northern cities act as growth and service centres with concentrations of economic and cultural activity; rural and remote communities make diverse contributions to both the economic and social sustainability of the region.
- Programs that have traditionally supported northern development, such as the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund, will continue and increase in importance as a means of recognizing the unique requirements of this region in support of a strong Ontario. New initiatives will be needed to support a growing economy.
- Federal-provincial coordination will be key to supporting the growth opportunities in the future.

We appreciate the urgency for this plan and look forward, as you do, to the next stage of its development. The release of the draft Growth Plan for Northern Ontario will trigger a phase of extensive public consultation. In meetings that will be organized across the region, northerners will have further opportunity to provide thoughts and ideas on the draft and to shape our final plan.

Sincerely,



Michael Gravelle, MPP, Thunder Bay-Superior North
Minister

c: The Honourable George Smitherman
Deputy Premier, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure