



COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION

REPORT AND DECISIONS

RELEASED FOLLOWING COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION MEETING ON FEBRUARY 23 AND 24, 2004

INTRODUCTION

The Council of the Federation was created by Premiers because they believe it is important for provinces and territories to play a leadership role in revitalizing the Canadian federation and building a more constructive and cooperative federal system.

The Council of the Federation's objectives are to:

- Promote interprovincial-territorial cooperation and closer ties between members of the Council, to ultimately strengthen Canada;
- Foster meaningful relations between governments based on respect for the Constitution and recognition of the diversity within the federation;
- Show leadership on issues important to all Canadians.

KEY INITIATIVES

Premiers made progress on several important initiatives and released the following documents:

- An agreement establishing the Secretariat on Information and Cooperation on Fiscal Imbalance;
- A comprehensive work plan to reduce barriers to trade among provinces and territories.

Premiers also announced the creation of a Council of the Federation Award for Literacy.

WORKPLAN

Premiers released the details of an ambitious work plan and affirmed their commitment to work in the following priority areas in 2004:

On Health Care ...

Council of the Federation members will work to:

- Establish a framework for health reform and a sound financial base to provide sustainable health care;
- Continue to reform provincial and territorial health care systems, including improving public health, acknowledging disparities in rural, remote, and aboriginal health care and strengthening cooperation between governments when public health emergencies occur (e.g., SARS);
- Engage the federal government on the issues of health sustainability and reform;
- Create a website portal focused on promoting health and wellness among all Canadians, including the fitness of young Canadians.

On The Economy ...

Council of the Federation members will:

- Increase public awareness of the need to balance expenditure responsibilities and revenues between the federal and provincial orders of government, including strengthening the Equalization Program, so governments have the ability to adequately fund programs and services for their citizens;
- Promote stronger relations with the United States through a coordinated Canadian intergovernmental strategy;
- Streamline environmental assessment processes to put in place practical solutions that improve the timeliness, certainty and predictability of assessments;
- Work to improve literacy levels in Canada;
- Work to restore international confidence in Canadian agriculture products in the wake of the BSE incident.

On Strengthening the Federation ...

Council of the Federation members will appoint a special committee of ministers to:

- Develop new models for selecting individuals to serve in key national institutions such as the Senate of Canada and Supreme Court of Canada, to ensure that provincial and territorial interests are adequately reflected and accommodated.
- Propose mechanisms for the involvement of provincial and territorial governments in international negotiations and agreements that affect their responsibilities.

On Reaching Out To Young Canadians ...

Council of the Federation members will:

- Establish a new initiative that encourages young Canadians to more actively participate in public policy development and making public service an important part of their lives.

On Helping Those Affected by Emergencies ...

Council of the Federation members will:

- Review emergency response programs and bring forward proposals that can be discussed with the federal government to better ensure people impacted by emergencies get the help they need, when they need it.

OTHER ISSUES

Premiers reiterated the need for Ottawa to conclude fair devolution and resource revenue sharing agreements with northern governments in order to provide them with what other jurisdictions in Canada already have – the authority to generate own-source revenues and control the scope and pace of resource development.

NEXT MEETING

The Council of the Federation's next meeting will be July 28 to 30, 2004 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

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