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NEWS: Nunavut May 22, 2012 - 5:00 am

Ottawa names Nunavut devolution negotiator

Dale Drown, 57, to “examine options”

NUNATSIAQ NEWS

The Harper government breathed new life into the long-dormant Nunavut devolution file May 18 by appointing a veteran backroom political official from Yukon to lead negotiations on the transfer of control over public lands and resources from Ottawa to the Nunavut government.

Dale Drown, 57, a former chief of staff to Yukon ex-premier Dennis Fentie, will serve as chief federal negotiator for Nunavut devolution.

John Duncan, minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, made the announcement in a news release issued just before the start of the Victoria Day weekend.

Drown, in talks with the Government of Nunavut and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. will "examine options" on how to move ahead on devolution, the news release said.

The announcement also suggests Nunavut's lack of capacity will continue to influence the pace of devolution discussions.

In addition to figuring out the next steps, Drown and other parties will "examine how land and resource management capacity can be improved in Nunavut," the announcement said.



Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak, seen here in a photo dating to 2008, launched a public campaign in November 2010 to get devolution talks started with the federal government. With the appointment of negotiator Dale Drown this past May 18, it appears that campaign may have produced a result. (FILE PHOTO)

Though the process started nearly eight years ago, Nunavut's administrative weaknesses have been a big factor preventing the start-up of devolution talks.

And Drown is the first federal official to hold the job title “negotiator for Nunavut devolution”

On Dec. 14, 2004, Liberal Prime Minister Paul Martin promised, as part of his northern strategy scheme, to start devolution negotiations with Nunavut in 2005, with a final agreement in 2008.

"I live in a territory that includes the homeland of Santa Claus. I think Christmas came early this year, 11 days early," Paul Okalik, then the premier of Nunavut, said that day.

But formal devolution talks between Ottawa and Nunavut never got started.

Martin's Liberal government was thrown out of office in January 2006.

The new Conservative government's northern affairs minister, Jim Prentice, got the process going again in November 2006, when he appointed Montreal lawyer Paul Mayer to act as his "ministerial representative" on the issue.

After studying the issue, Mayer produced, in 2007, a highly unflattering report on Nunavut.

Mayer concluded Nunavut is not ready, “in light of the significant challenges identified in this report

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that the GN faces in assuming its current responsibilities.”

He also said people in the mining and mineral exploration business are skeptical of the Nunavut government’s ability to take on more tasks.

“Industry representatives are ‘scared’ of the impact of devolution as they are aware of the many challenges that the GN has not been able to conquer and match since the territory was established and cannot see how it is possible for them to assume more responsibilities,” Mayer said.

But Mayer recognized that the “the devolution train left the station in December 2004” and that Ottawa must live up to its past political commitments.

He recommended a phased, step-by-step approach to Nunavut devolution, and that the first phase should concentrate only on land-based resources, with offshore oil and gas issues left to a later date.

In September 2008, the GN, NTI and the federal government signed a protocol to guide negotiations once they start.

In January 2009, Ottawa named a new ministerial representative for devolution, Bruce Rawson.

But the issue languished, even after Premier Eva Aariak launched a campaign in November 2010 to get talks going again.

Ottawa completed a devolution deal with Yukon in 2003 and in December 2010 reached an agreement-in-principle with the Northwest Territories.




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(15) Comments:

#1. Posted by Peter Brady on May 22, 2012

Until Nunavut is really ready for devolution, which I hope it is at some point, we should all be a bit concerned about rushing this process. As it is we all know the level of administrative competence to make it succeed is not in place. Part of that is a policy problem (racist hiring criteria), part of it is an educational problem (weak incentive to get an education, and a seeming aversion to it in the first place). If the doors were opened to the import of real talent it becomes a much more likely scenario. But they aren't. Nunavut is an insular and closed off little world and until that changes, it's prospective success will always remain an elusive goal, and the subject or endless complaint and argument. It's time to join the modern world. Are you ready?

#2. Posted by ... on May 22, 2012

Very well said peter.
A large part of the weak incentive to attend school is in fact caused by the racist hiring criteria, as a beneficiary who completes merely a grade 10 education will like oust a non-beneficiary with a much larger education base.

#3. Posted by glen matlock on May 22, 2012

Dale Drown, are you kidding me? This guy is a Social Credit/Reform Party hack from British Columbia who would hide out in the Yukon each time he was run off the West Coast. If this is Eva's victory she can enjoy dealing with him because his track record says not many others did. Typical Conservative Party politics of jobs for their boys and northern aboriginal interests be damned. I would hope that Nunatsiaq News would take a hard look at this guy. You could start with the Council of Yukon First Nations. Our "in over her head" Premier might not be so quick to claim a victory after that.

#4. Posted by just sayin' on May 22, 2012

The federal government knows exactly how administratively weak the GN is. It is barely able to maintain basic functions now (look at HSS: No ADM Policy, no Director of Mental Health, soon no Executive Director at the QGH, Keith Peterson seemingly asleep), let alone take on significant additional responsibilities. They haven't been able to recruit a talented senior manager from outside the territory in years.

Two possibilities. (1) A party hack (thanks for the background, #3!) gets a pay-off to be Chief Devolution Negotiator, a process that they then allow to drag on for 20 years. (2) A devolution deal is cut (or imposed) which is primarily to the benefit of the people the Conservatives really care about: the mining industry.

And the billion dollar question: will Patterson be able to convince Cathy T to drop NTI's lawsuit against the federal government as part of devolution deal?

#5. Posted by Tommy on May 22, 2012

Assimilation doesn't work; not living up to your expectations and what you want them to be. Nunavut has to start somewhere and reciting racism just makes you go backwards.

#6. Posted by Troll Hunter on May 22, 2012

