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NEWS: Nunavut May 23, 2012 - 9:47 am

Ottawa, Nunavut revive dormant talks on land, resource devolution

Each government names negotiators

JIM BELL

The federal and Nunavut governments breathed new life into the long-dormant Nunavut devolution file earlier this week, when each named the negotiators who will lead talks on the transfer of province-like control over public lands and resources from Ottawa to the Nunavut government.

"Nunavut's lands and natural resources rightfully belong to Nunavummiut to develop and protect according to their needs and priorities," Nunavut Premier Eva Aariak said May 22.

"Reclaiming the ability to make decisions about how our lands and resources are managed is the next chapter in building selfreliance," she said.



Premier Eva Aariak with David Akeeagok, the Government of Nunavut's chief negotiator for devolution, at a press conference held May 22 in Iqaluit to announce Akearok's appointment to the job. In addition to his negotiating duties, Akeagok will continue serving as deputy minister of the GN's environment department. (PHOTO BY JIM BELL)

At a press conference held that day, Aariak announced that David Akeeagok, a veteran civil servant, will act as Nunavut's chief negotiator for devolution.

Akeeagok will continue serving as deputy minister of the environment department, and will get assistance for his negotiation work from staff within the devolution division at the Department of Executive and Intergovernmental Affairs, Aariak said.

Akeeagok's appointment follows a May 18 announcement from Ottawa that 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 federal 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.

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

On the issue of Nunavut's "capacity," the bureaucratic code for Nunavut's ability to take on more responsibility, Aariak said capacity building will "proceed in parallel with the main negotiations."

Drown is the first federal official to hold the job title "negotiator for Nunavut devolution" and his appointment signals that Ottawa is now more willing than in the past to talk about transferring more responsibility to Nunavut.

Aariak, who launched a public campaign in November 2010 to revive the devolution process, said this may be at least partly attributable to her lobbying on the issue.



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"I have been persistent in approaching my counterparts Prime Minister Harper and Minister Duncan. When I meet with them, this is an area I never miss," Aariak said.

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.

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

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 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.

As for when Drown and Akeeagok will sit down to talk, Aariak said she hopes "to see negotiations start as soon as possible."



(3) Comments:

#1. Posted by Not ready! on May 23, 2012

I don't think our existing Government is not ready to negotiate devolution yet. Its a combination of the weak leadership we have right now and the PC governmet.

With all the broken promises and cut backs from the PC government Nunavut government should not negotiate devolution yet.

Maybe we should wait until after Nunavut elections and the federal elections because right now it would be a brutal combination.

#2. Posted by Peter Brady on May 23, 2012

First off, it's not a 'PC' Government, it's a Conservative Government. Secondly, the chances that any significant changes in the status of the territory will take place under this government are very unlikely, given the length of time it takes to negotiate such deals. This isn't an over night thing, and will probably take years. I also believe that the strength of the deal you get depends on your own bargaining power and what you accept. Like this government or not I don't think demonizing them is that relevant to this discussion. Either way I agree that Nunavut is not there yet, some structural changes need to come first, granted that's the point of devolution.

#3. Posted by Tommy on May 23, 2012

He he he, PC Government.



PUBLIC NOTICE

Nunavut Geographic Names Program

Department of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth (Department of Culture and Heritage)

Notice of Proposed New Place Names and Changes of Official Names near Cambridge Bay, Nunavut.

Applicant(s): Kitikme P.O. Bo

Kitikmeot Heritage Society P.O. Box 2160 Cambridge Bay, Nunavut X0B 0C0 Tel: (867) 983-3009 Fax: (867) 983-3397

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