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PNWER Economic Summit Concludes in Saskatoon calling for immediate ratification of USMCA / CUSMA

SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN — Over 500 Legislators and business leaders from Alberta, British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Yukon, Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington concluded the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) 29th Annual Summit this week in Saskatoon. The attendees included state and provincial legislators, business leaders, and top-tier diplomats. Twenty working groups developed action items to guide collaboration between members from all jurisdictions. Working group topics ranged from trade, agriculture, transportation, energy, invasive species, water policy, workforce development, and disaster resilience, and others. A session on economic development moderated by Sean Wiley of Saskatchewan engaged First Nations and indigenous leaders from Alaska, Oregon, and western Canada to identify best practices and discuss overcoming barriers to indigenous economic development and access to capital.

Larry Doke, MLA Cutknife, Turtleford and presiding President of PNWER said, "Welcoming the delegates from Western Canada and our US neighboring states to my home province was exciting for me, and the level of engagement and significant outcomes by high level legislators and business leaders was exceptional at the Summit. I would like to thank all of those, especially our sponsors, who contributed to the success of the Summit."

The USMC/CUSM Agreement, regional collaboration on accessing Asian markets, and infrastructure development emerged as focal points of the entire summit. An opening panel with three former ambassadors from the U.S. and Canada set the stage for the rest of discussion during the Summit. The ambassadors engaged in spirited dialogue on the current state of affairs of the relationship, but agreed that the relationship is solid and it is groups like PNWER that work day in and day out to ensure that progress continues to be made for both sides of the border. "There is so much about this relationship that is strong, and looking around this room is an example of that," Ambassador David Jacobson, former U.S. Ambassador to Canada.

Premier Scott Moe (Saskatchewan) called for the region to work together to solve some of the pressing issues in infrastructure and transportation. He cited the great work by Larry Doke, PNWER President, and the Montana delegation in keeping the border crossing open at the Port of Raymond between Saskatchewan and Montana. Premier Moe said, "The outcome would have been different without the relationships formed at PNWER." Following Moe, Premier Bob McLeod, currently the longest serving Premier in Canada from the Northwest Territories also addressed the delegates highlighting the need for a more aggressive arctic strategy, given the opening of sea routes in the Arctic.

Tuesday morning featured a robust discussion on building infrastructure for the 21st century and bringing goods to market across Western Canada. "When we think about what PNWER can do, we need to find the policies and actions and activism to link the value of supply chains back to the users of supply chains," said Jim Titsworth of BNSF. A variety of mode operators shared their observations on how we could improve predictable long term financing and a reliable permitting process. "You have to pay attention to land planning because it is a regional and national issue," Robin Silvester, CEO of Port of Vancouver and Representative Gael Tarleton of Washington state emphasized that, "Making a decision to invest in infrastructure is not just a decision, it is a commitment to the future."

The luncheon session on Tuesday focused on capturing Asian markets. Moderator Victor Thomas said "Asia is moving at a speed and scale unlike any other, and the Pacific Northwest has the resources and ingenuity to tap into this market. This is an opportunity for the U.S. and Canada as PNWER to work together to access the Asian region." Delegates were delighted with a visionary talk by the CEO of AGT Foods Murad Al-Katib, and John Stackhouse, Vice President of the Royal Bank of Canada which highlighted the tremendous opportunities the region has in the agriculture sector to feed the emerging economies and growing populations in Asia, as well as the need to incorporate technology advances to improve the agriculture sector and workforce.

Few issues commanded as much attention and urgency as quick ratification of the USMCA/CUSMA, which would modernize the 25 year old NAFTA, and prevent further uncertainty for investors. A panel of former ambassadors, a fellow from the Council on Foreign Relations, and presidents of two national business councils expressed their support for the timely ratification of the deal by all three North American governments. "The voice of PNWER is enormously important. The stakes are very high. Don't assume this [trade agreement] will just get taken care of," Scotty Greenwood.

Goldy Hyder, President and CEO of the Business Council of Canada expressed concern that the Trudeau government had not ratified the agreement before adjournment. Council on Foreign Relations fellow Ted Alden pointed out that the tariffs initiated by President Trump and the Canadian retaliatory tariffs had reduced some of our two way trade by over 20% in the past 12 months, and damaging our integrated supply chains. The high-level calls for ratification followed PNWER's release of a letter to the White House as well as a number of state-level resolutions urging the immediate ratification of the agreement to Congress. The PNWER Delegates reached a consensus to call for Parliament and Congress to ratify the agreement federal elections in both nations.

Minister of Public Safety Ralph Goodale spoke about the importance of the security and border cooperation between the US and Canada, and presided over a listening session where private sector and industry leaders could share their priorities and concerns directly with the minister. He heard from industry leaders on concerns, problems, and solutions to border facilitation issues, including leaders from the railroad, truck, and aviation sectors.

The Summit also featured a number of policy tours where participants had the opportunity to get a hands on experience of leading industry in the province. Senator Mike Cuffe of Montana, incoming president of PNWER said, "I had a chance to tour Boundary Dam 3 with legislators from throughout the region. It was great to see the implementation of the latest CCS technology, and to have our questions answered about how this could be applied in other parts of the world, including my state of Montana."

Following the Saskatoon summit, working groups will continue to coordinate on action items developed during the Summit. PNWER will continue to push for full implementation of the US - Canada Preclearance Agreement which allows pilots for co-located US and Canadian facilities at remote border crossings, enabling 24/7 border crossings between Montana and Saskatchewan. Next July, PNWER members from the 10 jurisdictions will reconvene in Big Sky, Montana, July 19 – 23 to report on a year's worth of progress which was initiated here in Saskatoon.

For more information on the Summit, visit: <http://www.pnwer.org/2019-summit.html>
Contact the PNWER office for additional information: (206) 443-7723.

ABOUT PNWER

The Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) is a public/private non-profit organization created by statute in 1991. Member jurisdictions include Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Washington, and the Canadian provinces and territories of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and Yukon. PNWER's mission is to increase the economic well-being and quality of life for all citizens of the region; identify and promote "models of success; and serve as a conduit to exchange information. For more information on PNWER, visit www.pnwer.org.