



The three-day Meet the North Conference and Trade Show is a great opportunity for business communities from Alberta and across the North to get together.

CANADA'S "TRADITIONAL ROLE" RIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Edmonton event sets stage for world trade, international relations

BY CHRIS O'BRIEN

In May, 2009, the World Trade Centre Edmonton and Edmonton Chamber of Commerce hosted the tri-annual Meet the North Conference and Trade Show.

The three-day event is an eagerly awaited opportunity for business communities from around the Alberta Capital Region and across the North to re-establish their allegiances, source out new opportunities, market their products, and learn from the experts.

For the first time in its 12-year history, Meet the North (2009) extended its vision far beyond the boundaries of regional enterprise.

Under the banner of "Going Global," the conference focused on the affects of northern climate change, the application of new research and technologies, and the vagaries of world economics. Its roster of international presenters included former Canadian Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. Joe Clark.

Born in High River, near the border between Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and the son of a newspaper publisher,

Clark is no stranger to the issues affecting his northern community. At the age of 39, he would become Canada's youngest Prime Minister with a personal appreciation of the North and a vested interest in its people.

"Today there is a wider view in the South," Clark told an attentive audience at Meet the North, "that a large part of Canada's future is tied to our strengths and sovereignty in the North."

While global warming poses a significant challenge to northern ecosystems, it's also creating tremendous potential for long-awaited new economic development.

Scientific expectations of unprecedented access to Arctic energy and mineral resources as well as ice-free northern shipping have captured the attention of national governments and private industry the world over.



As reported in the New York Times, “the Arctic is undergoing nothing less than a great rush for virgin territory and natural resources worth hundreds of billions of dollars.”

Under former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, then External Relations Minister Joe Clark enjoyed what were arguably the greatest successes of his political career.

With one irrevocable principle, the foundation upon which he based his entire approach to international statesmanship, Clark earned the admiration of national leaders literally from around the world.

This principle would become Clark’s legacy in foreign affairs. It was also the primary focus of his presentation at Meet the North.

“Power in the world is changing,” he said, “moving away from what we know as the West and moving toward what we think of as the rest. This shifting of global power is not about anyone’s decline, but rather the rise and assertion of new forces.”

Clark believes the emerging dominance of China in the global race to secure energy and mineral resources and its ability to barter its way into a position of state managed, as opposed to market managed, influence in world economies “underpins the Chinese conviction that this century belongs to them.”

He suggested world governments, predisposed to doing so, have the ability to unify and marshal political, natural, and manpower resources in a manner corporate interests cannot. Bartering roads, universities, and hospitals in return for African copper and petroleum, for example, is how the Chinese cope with potential corruption in their dealings with African governments, he said.

With China, India and the developing world exerting powerful new influences in global trade, Clark underlined the likelihood of persistent new conflicts between new and old, East and West, and developed and developing societies.

It is in this arena, he said, that Canada can and should make its greatest contribution.

“When Canada has been most effective internationally,” he said, “it’s because we have worked hard on our friendship with the United States but also on an independent, innovative role in the wider world.”

“Historically, we have been a bridge between developed and developing nations. That constitutes a material, diplomatic, and commercial advantage for Canadians. Our reputation is as much an asset as our energy resources.”

Canadians aren’t alone in realizing the benefits of that reputation. The fact they enjoy good relations with a trusted mediator is an advantage not overlooked by our neighbours to the south.

“Our reputation in the wider world has been an asset to the United States,” said Clark. “Often, where the U.S. might generate envy or fear, Canada has built partnerships and trust.”

“As the world’s religious, economic, and cultural divides grow deeper, the critical international skills, now and for the foreseeable future, are the abilities to draw differences together, to form alliances, to find common ground, and to manage diversity.”

“These are the genuine qualities and great strengths of Canada. These are what will allow us to be more influential than ever in this new era.”

Clark also believes now is the time to re-assert this particular brand of influence as Canada’s predominant role within the international community.

“The bonus is that these natural Canadian strengths accord very closely with the priorities enunciated by the new Obama administration,” he said.

As the lead off conference presenter Joe Clark served notice, as he set the stage and the standard, that Meet the North 2009 was truly “Going Global.”

To view all Meet the North (2009) presentations on streaming video, visit online at www.meetthenorth.com ▲



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