

Use it or Lose It: The Conservatives' Northern Development Strategy

by Frances Abele

Bruce Doern and Christopher Stoney, *How Ottawa Spends 2011-12: Trimming Fat or Slicing Pork?*
McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011

This chapter is about the Conservative government's policies and actions towards the North since 2006. The Conservative policies are compared to those of earlier Liberal federal governments. They are also compared to the needs and wishes of northerners.

Main findings:

The Conservative government elected in 2006 has paid much attention to the North. It has committed large amounts of funding.

The Conservatives have changed federal policy about the North from what it was under the Liberals.

Prime Minister Harper frequently repeats the slogan "use it or lose it" to explain his government's approach to the North. Since the north is already being used by the people who live there, this way of speaking seems to ignore northerners and their priorities.

The Conservative government treats the North as a territory to be developed in the national interest. To this government, the national interest includes mainly defense and economic development. Most federal spending is in these areas, and the chapter contains some detailed analysis about each.

The North is important to Canada as a whole, but northerners should have a voice about all issues, just as do Canadians from other regions about national decisions that affect them.

The Conservative government has not dealt well with two important challenges facing northerners:

- continued social and political development (improving health and social well-being, devolution, and full implementation of comprehensive claims);
- attempting to slow down climate change, and adapting to the effects of it.

Because the Northwest Territories and Nunavut governments do not have access to resource revenues, federal spending decisions have a bigger impact here than in other parts of the country. What the federal government chooses to make a priority is very important.