

Canadian Collaboration  
By  
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Living in Alaska it is easy to feel isolated from the rest of the country—the Lower 48 can feel far removed and difficult to relate to. But we aren't stuck going it alone. A recent visit by a Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) delegation to Juneau is a clear reminder that we can and should look to our Canadian neighbors. Sure, there are plenty of things that distinguish Alaska from Canada, but we share many of the same challenges and opportunities as our colleagues across the border.

Understanding northern issues has a lot to do with building relationships. Alaska has a long-standing working partnership with the government of Canada and with Yukon in particular. There is great opportunity for strengthened cooperation related to transportation, workforce training, economic development, energy, infrastructure, emergency response and tourism. As numerous Alaska legislators met with Canadian legislators from Yukon, Northwest Territories and Alberta, the degree to which camaraderie and the energy swirled around these issues was striking.

The overriding theme of the visit was to build stronger relationships and collaboration around tangible issues facing. The conversations were specifically targeted toward 1) coordinated and integrated infrastructure, 2) workforce training and economic development, 3) oil spill planning/preparedness and 4) tourism. The value placed on cooperation was evident throughout along with the importance of keeping lines of communication not only open but also vibrant.

When discussing infrastructure in the north, a common refrain was the need to build capacity—roads to resources and easing access to markets via cross-border points of access such as ports. There is a mutual interest in identifying ways to finance integrated transportation infrastructure. There is also a shared concern around reducing the high cost of energy in rural communities. The delegation discussed ways to highlight and integrate best practices and innovative solutions for community power generation.

Workforce training and economic development are priorities for legislators from both Canada and Alaska. These matters are vital for meeting the needs of industry as well as fostering social development. In terms of collaboration, the idea of cross-border mobility and ways to “share” human resources between our two countries was one that seems particularly promising.

It is inspiring to continue learning about and developing these important relationships. The Institute is playing a small role in this. On February 15 we will host a compelling Arctic Policy Forum panel discussion about the 50-year NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) partnership, maritime and aviation issues, and Arctic governance and sovereignty. We’re also helping to host a discussion in March focused on *Putting the “North” in North America: Canada and the United States in the North*. It will be enlightening to learn more about Yukon and Alaska perspectives as well as indigenous and legal perspectives and the circumpolar implications of regulation.

There’s a role, too, for the next generation. Now in its fifth year, the Institute of the North’s Emerging Leaders Dialogue will take place in Whitehorse in May. We’re broadening what has traditionally been a dialogue about important Alaska issues to include young leaders from Canada. Emerging Alaska leaders will be side-by-side with their counterparts from northern Canada to talk about the issues that are important to the peoples of the north. Watch this space for an announcement that includes registration information.

In today’s global economy, it is vital to adapt the lessons we learn from others and to share the unique aspects of our Alaska model. Here at the Institute of the North, we are committed to seeking out and bringing back to Alaska new ideas, best practices and strengthened partnerships. As Alaskans we have an amazing opportunity to develop strategic partnerships and to collaborate across the north. Yes, we’re unique and want to remain that way—but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t have strong partners standing beside us.