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## **Ministers to Meet With Northern Organizations, Partners to Discuss Furthering Regional Economic Opportunities**

Growth, Enterprise and Trade Minister Cliff Cullen and Families Minister Scott Fielding are in Winnipeg today, after weather cancelled a planned trip to Churchill where they were to meet with municipal and First Nation leaders, business owners and the local chamber of commerce to discuss opportunities for the economic diversification of the Town of Churchill and northern Manitoba.

“Manitoba’s new government shares the concerns of residents and business owners in Churchill associated with Omnitrax’s decision to lay off workers at the Port of Churchill and reduce rail service to Manitoba’s north,” said Cullen. “Issues with both the port and the rail line are not new and have resulted in significant commitments of public funds for track and port maintenance, rail line rehabilitation, marketing support and grain shipping incentives. We are pleased to hear that community leaders share our government’s desire for a long-term, sustainable solution for the region’s economic troubles.”

The ministers were joined by a diverse group of Manitobans whose depth of knowledge on the unique issues facing the Town of Churchill will help guide discussions during a day of meetings with the local chamber of commerce, business owners and tourism operators, municipal leaders and representatives from several of the region’s Indigenous communities.

“Meeting in Churchill is an important first step toward rebuilding partnerships in northern Manitoba,” said Chuck Davidson, president and CEO, Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. “While weather impacted our ability to visit the community today, we had productive discussions around identifying economic opportunities that will benefit the region. The ideas and suggestions brought forward today will help develop the foundation for long-term plans to grow northern Manitoba. The next step will be to directly engage the residents and businesses in these impacted communities.”

Travel Manitoba led a panel discussion on the tourism potential of the region followed by a broader discussion of the economy of the north which included representatives from the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, Manitoba Business Council, Frontiers North Adventures, Travel Manitoba, Northern Manitoba Sector Council, Winnipeg Airports Authority, Exchange Income Corporation, CentrePort Canada and Calm Air International.

“Churchill and its attractions are a vital contributor to Manitoba’s tourism industry,” said Colin Ferguson, president and CEO, Travel Manitoba. “Manitoba is well-known as the ‘Polar Bear Capital of the World’, and is growing its reputation for kayaking, snorkelling and swimming with beluga whales. There is tremendous potential to grow tourism in Churchill by increasing visitation from the United States and overseas markets.”

The ministers held a discussion with the Churchill Chamber of Commerce as well as a teleconference with Churchill Mayor Michael Spence and representatives of the town’s council. The ministers then led a discussion with several First Nations representatives from the region.

“Manitoba’s north holds so much untapped potential,” said Fielding. “Our government will soon introduce a strategy that will focus on the north as a region with unique economic and social factors that have been handled for too long on a reactive basis. It is our hope representatives of Omnitrax will follow our lead and will reach out to the communities that are being impacted by their recent decision. Some communication to clarify its future intentions – both on operational activity at the port and regarding the negative effects of reduced rail service – would be a good first step.”