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FENTIE, MURKOWSKI MAKING PROGRESS IN OTTAWA

OTTAWA – Premier Dennis Fentie is pleased with progress made during meetings today.

“Our discussions today went extremely well and we’re able to report significant progress in two key areas,” Fentie said. “These are clearly steps ahead that will benefit the Yukon’s economy and communities.”

Fentie is in Ottawa with Alaska Governor Frank Murkowski for a series of meetings with Prime Minister Paul Martin and several key federal cabinet ministers and industry representatives.

Significant progress was made today during discussions with federal Transport Minister Jean Lapierre towards an agreement on Canada’s participation in a joint feasibility study for building a rail link from Alaska through Yukon and into northern British Columbia .

Early in 2002, US President George Bush signed the Rails to Resources Bill into law. The US Congress has set aside \$6 million for the study and the US State Department has sent a formal letter to Canada asking that it participate.

“Our discussion went extremely well and I’m confident a positive announcement on Canada’s involvement will be made soon,” Fentie said. “We have little doubt that this study will show that the railway will provide some clear benefits to Canada and would give a boost to key industries in the North such as oil and gas, mining and tourism.”

Also during today’s discussions, Fentie and Murkowski agreed to form a joint bilateral working committee to secure port access for the Yukon. This would provide more certainty to industry in the North, as it would guarantee access to Skagway’s deep-water port.

“I’m very pleased that Governor Murkowski has agreed to carry out these discussions in order to ensure that the Yukon has access to this important resource,” Fentie said. “This is a key factor in improving our economy and demonstrating to industry that we’re serious about development in various sectors.”

Fentie and Murkowski also met with US Ambassador Paul Celluci today.

Thursday, they’ll meet with Prime Minister Paul Martin, Deputy Prime Minister Anne McLellan as well as several key ministers including Natural Resources Minister John Efford, Indian and Northern Affairs Minister Andy Scott and International Trade Minister Jim Peterson, Environment Minister Stéphane Dion. Discussions will focus on pipeline issues including securing federal funding for the Aboriginal Pipeline Coalition.

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