

Final

GE Canada Remote Communities Project Launch
Shaping Growth in Canada's Remote Communities

Speaking Notes for Elyse Allan
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Introduction

Good morning and thank you attending this morning.

Today marks the launch of an exciting GE initiative, focused on a fundamental issue for the future of Canada's economy – the economic development of our remote communities.

Throughout our history, remote communities played a dynamic part in this country's economy, from the days of our original trading posts to modern resource industries. Many of these communities have seen ups and downs, and endured period of deep economic stress followed by spells of great optimism.

Sometimes, it's been fashionable to speculate that urbanization and the digital economy will spell the end of remote communities.

But as we look ahead through this century, and around the world, the truth is that our remote communities offer some of the most compelling opportunities for Canadians and Canadian business in the coming decades.

Past discussions about remote communities have centered on what government can do to support remote communities and the lives of those who inhabit them.

What I believe we need to put more effort into, is marrying good public policy with a clear, contemporary understanding of what it takes to draw more business investment into remote communities, and what will make that investment succeed and multiply.

Governments may always play a strategic role in support of remote community development, but in the absence of sustained business investment, government policies will work less well, and cost much more, than need be the case.

In simple terms, it's time to look at remote communities through a business lens. That is the focus of this initiative that GE has decided to invest in.

Through the project we are launching today, we will shine a light on the best practices in communities that have experienced success, and similarly understand the missing factors where investment has been limited or halting.

We will highlight the catalysts for future success, the enabling infrastructure if you like:

- the human resources and education and training needs
- the health services and how best they can be provided
- the innovative financial services solutions to support investment
- transportation infrastructure
- energy systems and next generation options
- water, broadband and a host of others

Our focus will be on highlighting the things that are most needed to spur and shape the way in which Canada's remote communities participate in the 21st century economy.

We want to provoke discussion, and unearth the best ideas across a broad community of interest in business and government – an exploration that should ultimately help shape the next generation of public policy in this area.

I want to be clear that what we are talking about isn't a "feel good" or "do-good" initiative. The ideas that this project will generate aren't going to determine *whether* Canada's remote communities thrive or fail in the future.

There is no end of evidence that many of Canada's remote communities are well positioned in the changing world economy. This is particularly true of those communities that are resource based, or support resource businesses. We want to find the best ways to accelerate and shape growth for national advantage, and international success. This requires innovative thinking and adaptation of technology to meet the needs of remote communities. Such innovation also has the potential to be scaled for world-wide application and help drive Canada's success internationally.

In December, the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, noted that, and I'm quoting: "Economic development in the northern territories holds the promise and potential of providing Canadians with an enormous amount of wealth."

Most of Canada's natural resources – our oil and natural gas, our metals and minerals, our forests and hydroelectric sites, and other untapped resources – are in remote areas. With global demand for natural resources increasing – driven by developing economies – Canada's remote communities are among the brightest spots in our

economy today, and will play an even greater role in *worldwide* economic development.

The primary industries I've mentioned naturally stimulate and rely on other sectors, such as construction, transportation and commercial services. So we see healthy activity on many fronts.

Two Phases: Discovery and Policy

What are we looking to achieve with our initiative?

First, let's explain what we mean by remote communities. For purposes of this project, we defined remote communities as having at least one of the following four characteristics:

- One, limited transportation access by road, air, or rail.
- Two, located three hours or more from a commercial centre.
- Three, limited infrastructure, whether we're talking water, energy, broadband access, health care, schools, or other institutions.
- Four, single resource-based employment.

There are two phases to our initiative. The first is discovery, focused on information gathering and analysis.

We started by sending surveys to several hundred business leaders. We asked about things like the criteria that will help to attract and grow business in remote communities; the underpinnings of successful operations in these communities; and government's role in encouraging investment and economic development.

Phase one also includes qualitative interviews and round table discussions. We'll tap into insight from individuals and organizations with experience directing, investing in, operating and supporting business operations in remote Canada.

Part two of our initiative is the policy phase.

We will conduct this phase in collaboration with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. It will build on the findings of a phase one report, and lead to a final report with policy recommendations, to be presented at the Chamber's AGM in September, and advanced by the Chamber and GE.

Conclusion

To conclude, Canada's remote communities can and will be a powerful force in Canada's next century of economic development. The challenge as we see it is to find the ideas that will accelerate, shape and create more stable economic and social conditions in remote communities. This is nothing less than a great strategic priority for Canada: the choice is whether to simply let growth happen as it will, or work together to ensure that the sum of successes will add up to more for the country, than the individual parts.

The Canadian Federation of Municipalities states that "the north is essential to Canada's identity...and economic development – but somehow we have failed as a country to invest in a long-term vision of its future."

So let's roll up our sleeves and get on with that job.... By figuring out what we're doing right, where we need to do better, and how we can create an enduring foundation for growth in Canada's remote communities. Each of you are invited to participate in the process, on your tables you will find cards with a link to the survey currently underway. I encourage you to complete this survey and encourage others to do so.

I want to thank you for your interest and also thank the Canadian Chamber of Commerce for their partnership in this vital venture.

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