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Editorial: New Frontiers in Northern Economic Development

Ken Coates*

The winter of 2025-2026 has been tough across the North American North, with a combination of lengthy periods of extreme cold, disconcerting global geopolitical unrest, U.S. President Donald Trump's unexpected verbal attacks on Canada and Greenland, and increasing pressure to accelerate resource development in the region.

For northern governments and Arctic peoples, circumpolar political unrest adds to the continuing pressures of climate change, economic marginalization, colonization, challenges to the harvesting economy, cultural loss and revitalization, high costs, and the like. Charting a path forward for the North has become increasingly difficult, particularly as security and defence considerations place growing pressure on northern and national governments to address infrastructure and remilitarization challenges. These are, to put it mildly, difficult times.

CanNor (the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency) plays a vital role in community and regional economic development. Since its establishment in 2009, CanNor has invested millions of dollars annually in personal and business development in the Canadian North. The organization has made impressive contributions to special company initiatives, emerging firms, sectoral initiatives, urgent financial assistance, and other economy-building measures. The *Northern Review* was delighted when CanNor approached the journal to encourage additional dissemination of research on northern economic development. They placed no constraints on the journal and exercised no editorial control or oversight over the special issues. CanNor's support for free and independent academic inquiry and analysis has been exemplary.

The articles in this issue of the *Northern Review* reflect the diversity of opportunities and challenges for improving economic conditions in the Arctic and Subarctic regions. The collection includes studies of the intersection of climate change and economic development, a fascinating conversation about Indigenous

engagement with critical minerals and nuclear waste in the Provincial North, community engagement with renewable energy development, the impact of modern treaties on economic development, the prospects for deep-sea mining in the Arctic, and the continuing evolution of northern oil and gas development. These papers and dialogue expand the CanNor-inspired debate about the economic future of the Canadian North.

At present, the Canadian North has one of the most government-dependent economies in the world. This applies at the personal and family levels as well as at the regional level, which is highly reliant on government spending, particularly investments on public infrastructure and support for food, transportation, energy, social housing, and the like. The resource sector has long been lauded as a key to regional and national prosperity, but the sector has disappointed more often than not. For every medium-term burst of activity associated with something like the diamond mines in the Northwest Territories, there are numerous examples of commercial failure or unrealized or lost economic potential.

The North, and northern Indigenous communities in particular, are looking for greater economic opportunity and for opportunities to expand the private sector. Success remains sporadic and highly focused, with a few bright spots (like Arctic tourism) offset by numerous areas of underdevelopment (including high technology/innovation, Arctic oil and gas in Canada, and the private sector generally). Northern incubators have had small, individual successes, but no grand victories. Furthermore, the size and dominance of government, offering high wages, excellent benefits, and the ability to routinely “raise” the private sector for skilled workers, may actually impede commercial development in the North.

The articles in this collection highlight clear realities. The regulatory and political environment is in flux, most notably from the re-emergence of Indigenous governance. Much of the North’s resource potential remains unknown and underdeveloped. Emergent fields (like deep-sea mining) will press against the margins of regulation. There is an urgent need to engage constructively with northern communities. The economic landscape of the North is changing very rapidly. The *Northern Review* is determined to remain at the cutting edge of regional conversation about the commercial future of the region, just as CanNor, our excellent partner in producing this issue of the *Northern Review*, continues to be a critical actor in the support and encouragement of business and economic development in the North.

*The views and opinions expressed in this volume are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada or the editors of the *Northern Review*.

Éditorial : Nouvelles frontières du développement économique du Nord

Ken Coates*

L’hiver 2025-2026 fut rude pour l’ensemble du Nord nord-américain, marqué par une combinaison de longues périodes de froid extrême, un désarroi géopolitique mondial inquiétant, des attaques verbales imprévues du président américain Donald Trump contre le Canada et le Groenland, et des pressions croissantes pour accélérer le développement dans la région.

Pour les gouvernements nordiques et les peuples arctiques, ce désarroi politique circumpolaire s’ajoute aux pressions continues des changements climatiques, de la marginalisation économique, de la colonisation, des défis à l’économie traditionnelle nordique, de la perte et de la revitalisation culturelle, des coûts élevés et bien d’autres encore. Définir l’avenir du Nord s’avère de plus en plus complexe, particulièrement alors que les pressions croissantes en matière de sécurité et de défense obligent les gouvernements nordiques et nationaux à répondre aux défis d’infrastructure et de remilitarisation. Ces temps sont, pour le moins, difficiles.

CanNor, l’Agence canadienne de développement économique du Nord, joue un rôle vital dans le développement économique des communautés et des régions. Depuis sa création en 2009, CanNor investit des millions de dollars chaque année dans le développement des personnes et des entreprises du Nord canadien. L’organisation a contribué de manière impressionnante à des initiatives spéciales pour les entreprises, les entreprises émergentes, les initiatives sectorielles, l’assistance financière d’urgence et d’autres mesures pour bâtir l’économie. *Le Northern Review* a eu grand plaisir lorsque CanNor a contacté le journal pour encourager davantage dissémination de la recherche sur le développement économique du Nord. L’agence n’a imposé aucune contrainte au journal et n’a exercé aucun contrôle éditorial ou supervision sur les numéros spéciaux. Le soutien de CanNor aux investigations académiques et aux analyses disponibles librement a été exemplaire.

Les articles de ce numéro du *Northern Review* reflètent la diversité des opportunités et des enjeux pour l’amélioration des conditions économiques dans les régions arctiques et subarctiques. La collection comprend des études à l’intersection du changement climatique et du développement économique, une conversation fascinante sur l’engagement autochtone avec les minéraux critiques et