



## Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation highlights nation building priorities at Prime Minister's Summit

July 21, 2025

Old Crow, Yukon

Chief Pauline Frost addressed Prime Minister Mark Carney, members of his Cabinet, and fellow First Nations leaders last week in Ottawa, sharing the key priorities of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation (VGFN) for nation-building during the Prime Minister's Summit.

Earlier this month, First Nations across Canada were invited to attend the Prime Minister's Summit on the implementation of the *Building Canada Act*, a key component of the recently passed *One Canadian Economy Act*. This legislation, which also includes the *Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act*, was enacted by the Government of Canada shortly after the federal election.

The federal government has framed the *Building Canada Act* as a way to accelerate economic growth and infrastructure development by streamlining approval processes for major projects in Canada to support a more sovereign and resilient domestic economy. While the government asserts this will be achieved without compromising environmental protections or Indigenous rights, many First Nations have voiced serious concerns about the lack of meaningful consultation during the Act's development. There are also concerns that the legislation could further reduce consultation opportunities and undermine Indigenous self-determination during its implementation. Leaders at the Summit stressed that the gathering did not constitute formal consultation which Prime Minister Carney also acknowledged.

As a remote, northern, self-governing Nation, VGFN has a unique perspective, which Chief Frost stressed to the Prime Minister, cabinet Ministers and fellow First Nation leaders at the Summit.

"To build the nation and achieve greater sovereignty and resilience, we cannot think only in terms of resource development. We need healthy people, healthy communities, healthy lands, and healthy waters if we are to truly realize the economic potential of the *Building Canada Act*.

Prime Minister Carney is asking for First Nations to be partners in this process, highlighting it as a priority of his government, while failing to acknowledge our priorities.

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, like other Arctic and northern communities across Canada, face unique infrastructure challenges due to climate, geography, and historical underinvestment. Strategic, long-term investment in Arctic infrastructure including in transportation, housing,

energy, and digital connectivity is critical for ensuring a sovereign and resilient Canada. In addition, the federal government must urgently support First Nations emergency response efforts to address wildfires, floods, and the opioid and suicide epidemics that are impacting our communities.

Further, the Government of Canada must move swiftly to implement the new funding methodologies that self-governing First Nations and the federal government have collaboratively developed. These frameworks which support infrastructure, language revitalization, and lands and resources, are critical to honoring treaty obligations, enabling self-determination, and securing Canada's economic future.

In order to truly achieve greater sovereignty and resilience, we must protect and support the well-being of our children. In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that Canada was discriminating against First Nations children and families. Nearly a decade later, the Government of Canada continues to frustrate progress on long-term reform.

We invite Prime Minister Carney and his Cabinet to meet with us, with First Nations in Yukon, and with self-governing First Nations across Canada, in our home communities to gain a better understanding of our governance systems, our challenges, and our solutions. Only through this dialogue can we build a truly sovereign and resilient Canada.”

Chief Pauline Frost

VGFN is currently reviewing the *One Canadian Economy Act* in greater detail and will provide formal comments related to the legislation and its implementation to the Prime Minister in the coming weeks.

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## Background:

- The Government of Canada enacted [Bill C-5](#), the *One Canadian Economy Act*, on June 26, 2025 stating that once implemented it will:
  - Expedite nation-building projects (the Building Canada Act): Streamlining federal review and approval processes to increase regulatory certainty, helping attract capital, strengthening our industries, and moving towards greater sovereignty and resilience while protecting the environment and respecting Indigenous rights.
  - Remove federal barriers to internal trade and labour mobility (the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act): Accepting comparable provincial or territorial regulations, where they exist, as meeting federal requirements for the movement of goods, services, and labour within Canada. This will allow more goods, services, workers and business to move freely across provinces and territories.
- Specific to the Building Canada Act, the Government of Canada has said:
  - It would move forward on consultations with provinces, territories, Indigenous Peoples and private sector proponents to identify nation building projects and implement measures to streamline processes for other projects.
  - The work will be led by the Federal Major Projects Office, a new entity that will be launched in the coming weeks, that will be supported by an Indigenous Advisory Council with First Nation, Inuit, and Métis representatives.
- The Building Canada Act will apply to projects of national interest which have been defined as fitting the following criteria:
  - Strengthen Canada's autonomy, resilience, and security.
  - Offer undeniable benefits to Canada and support economic growth.
  - Have a high likelihood of successful execution.
  - Are a high priority for Indigenous leaders.
  - Have clean growth potential, such as the use of clean technologies and sustainable practices.
- The Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act (YESAA) is not included in the Schedule of applicable statutes under the Building Canada Act, meaning the Act does not impact assessment of projects under YESAA. However, the Building Canada Act does apply to parallel federal regulatory processes that fall outside of YESAA's jurisdiction.