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Revolution or Devolution?: How Northern Ontario Should be Governed

Political barriers stand in the way of Northern Ontario independence, but there are alternative governance models for the region, says a new report released today by Northern Policy Institute.

Dr. David Robinson, Laurentian University economics professor, says that Northern Ontario may not be able to explore full provincial status, but there are other potential structures that fall within the power of the provincial legislature.

According to Robinson, options include granting Northern Ontario legislative powers, creating an elected but advisory Northern Ontario assembly, and the creation of a semi-autonomous district with most of the powers of a province.

The report, *Revolution or Devolution?: How Northern Ontario Should be Governed* also explores the process of devolution and whether this would be applicable to Northern Ontario. Devolution is the statutory granting of powers from the central government of a sovereign state to government at a subnational level, such as a regional, local, or state level and it is already a key pillar of Canada's Northern Strategy at the federal level.

Devolution is a more complicated question for Northern Ontario as the region is already part of an existing province. There are no real serious technical, economic or legal objections to beginning a process of devolution. It is clearly within the power of the province, and is likely to improve governance of the North and, arguably, improve its economic standing.

As Robinson writes, "the alternative for Northerners is to continue to accept the current arrangement and accept declining influence over their own future." The challenge lies in the fact that "Northerners, however, lack the democratic institutions to debate the issue and Southerners have no interest in the project. Clearly if change is needed, it will require a long struggle, first to convince a sufficiently large number of Northerners, then to convince the South."

The release of the report coincides with the growing popularity of an online petition which is calling for Northern Ontario independence. Northern Policy Institute hopes that Dr. David Robinson's full report *Revolution or Devolution?: How Northern Ontario Should be Governed* which is available on our website at www.northernpolicy.ca, will better inform the ongoing debate.

Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern Communities. Our operations are located in Thunder Bay and Sudbury. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.

L'Institut des politiques du Nord est le groupe de réflexion indépendant du Nord ontarien. Nous effectuons de la recherche, accumulons et diffusons des preuves, trouvons des opportunités en matière de politiques, afin de favoriser la croissance et la durabilité des collectivités du Nord. Nous avons des bureaux à Thunder Bay et à Sudbury. Nous cherchons à améliorer les capacités du Nord ontarien de prendre l'initiative en politiques socioéconomiques qui ont des répercussions sur l'ensemble du Nord ontarien, de l'Ontario et du Canada.