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## Will Budget 2020 take the Canadian North seriously?

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The upcoming Canadian federal budget is a critical opportunity to begin implementing [Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework](#).

As we are currently in budgetary consultations, it's timely to assess what to expect from this year's federal budget. It's the first budget since the framework's release last September, and it is coming amid a moment of uncertainty given the minority status of the Liberal government.

The 2019 policy framework presents broad objectives and targets for Canada's Arctic. However, priorities and objectives are missing concrete investments and timelines. The next budget should provide more specific indications on the resources that will be mobilized to reach these objectives and the level of priority attached to Canada's North by this government.

Justin Trudeau's government announced more than \$700 million in new investments in the [2019 budget](#), which covered the broad areas of economic development, education, energy, environment, food security, health, infrastructure and science.

For example, the federal government invested \$26 million to improve the facilities of Yukon College, and set aside \$400 million for Northern transportation infrastructure projects under the national [Trade Corridors](#) program.

Those investments represent only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework has ambitious goals in relation to food security, energy supplies and transport that require action.

It is therefore pivotal to continue on the 2019 momentum. As sea-ice loss intensifies, so will the region's needs.

## Safe, secure, well-defended

Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework sets as a goal that: "The Canadian Arctic and North and its people are safe, secure and well-defended."

But notably absent in the 2019 budget was new spending on military priorities, such as funds to implement Canada's National Shipbuilding Strategy. The CCGS John G. Diefenbaker icebreaker, for example, was supposed to be put into service in 2017, but now [its future is unclear](#).

Funds for modernizing the out-of-date NORAD, as well as North Warning System upgrades or community search-and-rescue initiatives, were absent in Budget 2019. NORAD modernization, for example, requires that the government procure more ships that can operate year-round in the Arctic.

There are [serious questions](#) about NORAD's and the North Warning System's ability to detect stealth drone aircraft, as well as new Russian air-launched cruise missiles. The North Warning System cannot adequately detect hypersonic cruise missiles. Rough estimates of the cost to bring the North Warning System up to par is [\\$11 billion](#), about half of which Canada will have to pay.

The 2020 budget must send a powerful signal about ice breaker and enhanced surveillance capabilities.

Reassurance and concrete measures to push forward the construction of the John G. Diefenbaker icebreaker would prove to be the most significant signal on this front. Dedicated funds for NORAD modernization are a must. Global warming will not make ice disappear in the Canadian Arctic: sea-ice loss will fragment ice formations and make transit more hazardous and unpredictable.

## Healthy, resilient ecosystems

The policy framework asserts that "Canadian Arctic and northern ecosystems are healthy and resilient." But Budget 2019 was light on specific programs to respond to climate change within the northern region, the biggest threat it faces.

It promised to "consolidate federal programs that help reduce diesel reliance in Indigenous, northern and remote communities" without firm commitment. A transition to clean energy is a priority area in the [official pan-territorial Arctic policy from Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon](#), but was met with only isolated projects in Budget 2019.

As the elimination of diesel energy from all Northern Indigenous communities constitutes a campaign promise for the Liberal government, it will be crucial to see concrete investments announced as part of the 2020 budget.

The elimination of diesel by 2030 means substantial funding needs to be mobilized this year to build the clean energy infrastructures required to power Northern communities.

## Resilient, healthy people

The Arctic and Northern Policy Framework also stresses that “Canadian Arctic and northern Indigenous peoples are resilient and healthy.”

On this note, we agree with [Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami](#) that social spending is necessary to support Northern communities: Child-care centres and specialized housing are key priorities and must be funded in the 2020 budget to fulfil this objective.

Canada has announced support for banning heavy fuel oil for ships operating in the Arctic, joining every Arctic country except for Russia. This move has environmental benefits because heavy fuel oil is difficult to clean up in the event of a spill and accelerates global warming, but it could negatively impact shipping in the Arctic region in the short-term.

Since heavy fuel oil is used extensively in the ships that supply Canada’s Arctic communities, [prices may rise](#). It’s imperative that the Trudeau government announces financial measures to offset the financial impact of this measure on Northerners, especially on food prices.

## Opportunity

Trudeau’s minority government has a potential opportunity to win support for initiatives for the North. New defence spending was a cornerstone of Conservative Arctic policy, particularly the construction of the John G. Diefenbaker, and was a promise in their [2019 electoral platform](#).

A Conservative government created the Nutrition North program that subsidizes food prices in the North. Issues such as search and rescue are also highly non-partisan. Projects related to climate change are likely to win the support of the NDP and Bloc, which made the environment cornerstones of their campaigns.

All in all, these measures will not represent insurmountable obstacles and result in fundamental divides that could bring about another federal election.

There was a lot to like in Budget 2019’s Northern promises, as well as in the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework. Budget 2020 is a key moment to implement the policy framework, and ensure that words do not remain simply words.

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