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## **Alberta joins north-south rural development partnership**

### ***Province first Canadian member of nine-state Ports-to-Plains trade corridor alliance***

*Edmonton ...* Strengthened trade relations with key U.S. states in the energy and agricultural heartland and an improved North-South transportation corridor to key markets are among many benefits of Alberta's new membership in the Ports-to-Plains Alliance.

Premier Ed Stelmach welcomed leaders of Ports-to-Plains to the legislature to celebrate Alberta becoming the first Canadian member of the nine-state economic development coalition that aims to improve the gateway to trade between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

Communities along the corridor stand to benefit with improved transportation infrastructure, greater rural development opportunities and collaborative advocacy approaches on issues of mutual importance such as energy and agriculture.

"There may be an international border between us, but given the similarity of our priorities, our challenges and our common rural heritage, the potential of our collaboration is limitless," said Stelmach. "We look forward to a highly engaged partnership in Ports-to-Plains activities."

Alberta has signed a one-year \$125,000 contract with the non-profit, non-partisan, community-driven group that includes mayors, locally-elected leaders, economic development officials, business and other opinion leaders in the, 3,700-plus km economic development corridor between Texas and Alberta.

Stelmach discussed Alberta's potential membership in Ports to Plains during his mission to Texas in December which featured the first Texas-Alberta Summit and meetings with Texas Governor Rick Perry.

Through the partnership, Alberta will strengthen its trade relations with the nine Alliance states, several of which already rank among Alberta's top trading partners: Texas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming. Additionally, the Alliance will enable Alberta to collaborate with other members to better address the challenges and opportunities common to all the communities in the Ports-to-Plains region, North America's energy and agricultural heartland.

Stelmach said Alberta will also leverage the influence of the Alliance to help convince both federal governments of the need to have 24-hour port of entry access at the Wild Horse border crossing.

"Border delays are a trade impediment," said Stelmach. "As Alberta becomes an even greater source of North American energy supply we must ensure that we have a steady flow of goods between our countries."

Tom Martin, Mayor of Lubbock, Texas, led the Ports-to-Plains delegation in Edmonton and welcomed Premier Stelmach and Alberta to the Alliance. "Alberta is the northern anchor of the Ports-to-Plains region," Mayor Martin said. "Tens of thousands of jobs in our region are sustained by trade with the province. Moreover, Alberta is one of the top oil producers in the world. It is only natural that our Alliance would seek out Premier Stelmach to benefit from his leadership and to explore ways to work together to preserve the rural heartland and to promote jobs and development in our rural communities."

Congressman Randy Neugebauer (TX-19), Co-Chair of the Ports-to-Plains Congressional Caucus, and founder of the Ports-to-Plains Trade Corridor Coalition, said, "Throughout the Ports-to-Plains region, our members share remarkably consistent concerns, values and priorities: rural development; the new energy economy; transportation and other infrastructure policies that ensure good connectivity between our farms and ranches, and our natural resources, and the urban consumer. It is gratifying to see our organization evolve in a way certain to make it one of the premier forums for North America's rural communities."

The membership announcement is the culmination of nearly two years of talks between the Ports-to-Plains Alliance, led by President Michael Reeves. "One quality of the rural folks who lead our Alliance is their readiness to work together in hard times, and to share in times of abundance," said Reeves. "I have taken many trips to Alberta in the past few years; every time I stepped off the plane, I felt like I was coming home. We are delighted at last to welcome the people of Alberta to the Ports-to-Plains family."

The approximately 38.5 million U.S. citizens of the Ports-to-Plains region produce much of the United States' energy, more than 40 percent of America's agricultural goods, 14 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, and they account for 20 percent of U.S.-Canada-Mexico trade. Today, the Alliance promotes a broader range of economic goals, all served by a regional intermodal transportation network.

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