

FOR THE RECORD

Rookie appointed federal health minister

It's already safe to call newly minted Member of Parliament Leona Aglukkaq (Nunavut) a history-maker. She's the first Inuk to be appointed to senior cabinet post, having been named federal Minister of Health during Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Oct. 30 postelection portfolio shuffle.

The Conservative rookie shocked political observers by being elevated to such a senior portfolio — with responsibility for oversight of about \$4.73 billion in federal spending — where she is expected to provide a major boost to the profile of Aboriginal health issues.

Aglukkaq's office indicated she is unavailable for comment on her priorities as health minister until after she has completed briefing sessions with her department.

Aglukkaq served 6 years as a hamlet councillor for Cambridge Bay before moving into the territorial civil service, where her duties included a stint as deputy clerk of the legislative assembly and another as deputy minister for culture, language, elders and youth.

She was elected to the 19-member territorial government of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories in the riding of Nattilik in 2004. She was subsequently elected to the executive council

(the Territories' equivalent of a cabinet) and became the minister of finance and house leader. Aglukkaq became Nunavut's minister of health and social services in June 2005 and resigned from territorial politics earlier this year.

Aglukkaq was embroiled in several controversies over the course of her tenure as territorial health minister, including the loss of accreditation by the Baffin Regional Hospital. She also came under fire when nurses who had been hired from abroad failed their registered nursing exams, and took considerable political heat when her deputy minister, Bernie Blais, resigned in a dispute over whether some patients should be airlifted to Winnipeg for treatment, a move Aglukkaq opposed.

The Baffin Regional Hospital lost its accreditation from Accreditation Canada (formerly the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation) on Dec. 31, 2005, after it was found to have too few nurses and maintenance staff, while being run with outdated administrative systems. Among findings was that the hospital lacked an infection-control plan and a human resources plan. In response, the territorial government pumped in \$2.3 million to fund 26 new positions at the hospital. As health minister, Aglukkaq subsequently oversaw the opening of the Qikiqtani General Hospital (after 11 years of development) in Iqaluit as a replacement for the Baffin. — Wayne Kondro, *CMAJ*

Universities and prosperity

Universities perform a third of the research and development conducted in Canada, thereby contributing an estimated \$60 billion to the national economy, according to a report released by the Ottawa-based Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada.

The report, *Momentum: The 2008 report on university research and knowledge mobilization*, released Oct. 21, states that \$29 billion was spent on Canadian research in 2007. The private sector contributed the most (\$13.8 billion), followed by the federal government (\$5.4 billion), universities (\$4.8 billion), foreign sources (\$2.6 billion), provincial governments (\$1.5 billion) and nonprofits (\$850 million).

The commercialization of university intellectual property generated \$54 million in 2006, a 131% increase from the \$23.4 million generated in 1999. Commercialization generates additional wealth for Canada, the report claims, through job creation, increased export sales and local socio-economic development. It is estimated that firms associated with universities employed 35 000 people in 2006 and generated \$7.1 billion in sales.

The report claims that university research is a "critical driver of prosperity and quality of life in Canada." The overall impact of university research on Canada's gross domestic product is estimated at \$60 billion, using an academic model that considers such factors as the commercialization of intellectual property, the higher incomes earned by university graduates and the contribution of academic research to enhanced levels of productivity.

There are 5 "drivers of change" that will impact university research in the future, added the report: heightened recognition of the links between university research and national prosperity, the global race for research talent, the growing costs of research, the increased emphasis on measuring outcomes, and the trend of partnering across institutions, sectors and geographic borders. — Roger Collier, *CMAJ*



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Prime Minister Stephen Harper and federal Health Minister Leona Aglukkaq stroll in Iqaluit, Nunavut.

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