

# *Signs signal we're on the cliff's edge*

**From: Gary Vivian  
President, Aurora Geosciences, Ltd.**

Dear editor,

In his February budget address, Finance Minister Michael Miltenberger stated ominously, "We are approaching the edge of a cliff and our challenge is to ensure that we do not go over."

That was on Feb. 5. Events since then have taken us right to the cliff's edge.

Recently the annual Fraser Institute survey of mining

investors recognized the NWT has embarked on a mineral development strategy to bring investment back into the North and outlined some disconcerting observations including: unsettled land claims and an unruly regulatory regime; land use and water use permitting a nightmare; projects are too easily referred to an environmental assessment, which causes undue and unnecessary delays.

Lack of infrastructure is also a key stumbling block.

Natural Resources Canada followed with its annual release of exploration spending projections, which signals a frightening 54 per cent decline in mineral exploration this

year in the NWT. Then a NWT Bureau of Statistics bulletin published March 18 reported that the NWT population further decreased by 338 persons last year, which will decrease our federal transfer payments.

Add to this newspaper reports that the Snap Lake mine is under threat to shut down over permitting issues, there will be no oil and gas exploration in the Sahtu despite a significant discovery and one of our very few fledgling grassroots exploration projects – for sand at that – was referred to environmental assessment delaying the project by at least a year.

This will add significant regulatory costs not only to the proponent but to governments. And more recently, a worrisome domino effect is the sale of unique aircraft because our shrinking minerals industry spending can no longer afford to keep them here.

As icing on the cake, the Conference Board of Canada's most recent Territorial Economic Outlook confirms that, "The medium-to-long-term economic outlook for the NWT is the weakest of all three territories.

Overall economic growth is expected to be minus three per cent in 2015, and 0.9 per cent in 2016.

Now, there is no denying that exploration is in a slump globally, but the NWT has been in a slump for seven years, when other jurisdictions were basking in investment.

If ever it was time for public and aboriginal government leaders to step forward and state emphatically that they care and that they are taking concrete action, it has to be now. We need to engage and educate the public on the importance mining and oil and gas play in our everyday lives. This has to be done with a responsible and sustainable outlook. We can't afford to wait any longer. The minister was right: "We should not be operating this close to the edge."

Our toenails are all that's holding us back now.

If you care, tell your elected leaders it's time for action. If they don't care, don't re-elect them.