

# Dear Ottawa: looking for traditional Federal vision

"It is inconceivable that all lands north of the 60th parallel, representing 35 per cent of Canada's land area, which we believe contain a great resource potential, will remain as an undeveloped portion of Canada."

Strong words indeed and I wish they were mine. Rather they are the words of former Liberal minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, the Right Hon. Arthur Laing in 1966, as he addressed Canadian Institute of Mining members in Edmonton.

His visionary speech included a very key message: "Very often the discovery of one mine ... will lead to more, but as long as we continue to do nothing to replace that activity during the time allowed, we will continue to experience the social upheavals and personal hardships that result when the resource comes to an end."

Wise words indeed!

Now here we are, 50 years later, apprehensively awaiting a new federal government vision for the North and for our minerals industry. One might expect federal support for the keystone of our Northern economies should come easily. After all, mining continues to make huge strides in Northern and Indigenous jobs and business and in tax and royalty streams to public and Indigenous governments. Industry does this to high environmental standards under land claims based legislation and a co-management system.

Instead, we see announcements that Ottawa has denied funding for game changing road and port infrastructure projects. We see the federal environment minister sticking to her guns that less than 10 per cent of the North is protected, when we all know development

is blocked on over 30 per cent of the NWT alone. We see mineral exploration investment continuing to flat line for the tenth year in a row. And the latest Conference Board of Canada's dire warnings and grim outlook for the NWT economy echoes the minister's prophetic message that if we continue to do nothing, "we will continue to experience the social upheavals and personal hardships that result when the resource comes to an end."

Mining doesn't just happen. Even with attractive rocks and stable and certain legislation, it takes years and millions of dollars of risky exploration to get success. Risky, because only 1 in 1,000 projects becomes a mine (the odds of winning at bingo are better than that) and even when you've got a mine, a drop in the market price can shut you down.

This has always been a risky business and that's why we need governments' support.

In a jurisdiction with great geology and with a mining industry providing some of the greatest socio-economic performance in the country, one hopes the new Federal Arctic Policy might take another strong line from the esteemed former Liberal minister Laing: "I say to you, we welcome those searching for the resource wealth of the North and I mean this not only as a friendly gesture in the hope that your success will make my task easier. Canada must expand and grow and my government, through the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, is endeavouring in many ways to assist private industry on to the road to success."

Over to you, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.



**GUEST  
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