

Upcoming

New North AGM
December 11,
2020, Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

NEW
NORTH

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Monthly-ish Newsletter
October 2020

"Big Honkin'" Now Part of Political Lexicon as SP Defeats NDP in Round One of Electomania 2020

Public servants across Saskatchewan let out an audible groan as the provincial election heralded the conclusion of the writ period meaning that all those happily ignored emails, phone messages and cries for help from people stuck in elevators on Victoria Avenue now needed to be attended to or, if not that, then ignored on the basis of some other pre-text. Take the stairs, for instance.

To public servants the writ period offers a pre-lapsarian glimpse of what government would be like without politicians. For the rest of us, the writ period offers a glimpse of government without government. As with all good things it couldn't last, and we now have a government again, the same one Saskatchewan has had since 2007, for better or worse.

With victory on October 26, Scott Moe has been given an imprimatur by the people of Saskatchewan to lead the province, and signalled, if there was any doubt, that the transition from Brad Wall is well and truly complete. Anyone who felt that the SaskParty's fate hung on the existence of Brad Wall as leader is perhaps facing the much more unsettling fact that the inscrutable will of universe is nothing when compared to the unbelievably efficient, well-funded and unassailable SaskParty machine which is driving them and the future of the province. Would any of us be surprised to see the SaskParty fielding a slate of combine harvesters in 2024?

For the SaskParty not only vanquished the NDP, they lavished in it, booking pluralities in the thousands of votes in the vast majority of rural ridings. The SaskParty was so "on message" that, despite an overall fall in the number of people voting, they increased their percentage of the vote in 29 ridings, winning by even bigger margins than in 2016.

CBC took less than hour after the closing of polls to declare a winner, a show of decency perhaps, because they could very well have declared it after 10 minutes.

The NDP had a gruelling wait to see if their own leader, Ryan Meili, held onto Saskatoon Meewasin, a seat he won in a byelection, and which had been relatively safe for the SaskParty in the last election. In 2011 the SaskParty hit on the strategy of specifically targeting the NDP leader, and in 2016 once again managed to dislodge him, this time Cam Broten in Saskatoon Westview, a seat which now looks safe SaskParty. Will the NDP learn not to put their leaders in swing ridings from now on? By contrast, the SaskParty leader took 80% of the vote in Rosthern-Shellbrook, a ringing endorsement of Moe by his constituents, considering they only liked him enough to give him just 71% in 2016.

The North

Despite being a relatively competitive race, the north stayed with the NDP, with Buckley Belanger winning a 7th term in office, and Doyle Vermette a 4th. Turn-outs were feeble (see inside), resembling a byelection rather than a general election.

Swing to the Right Small But Perceptible

An interesting sign of the times was the relatively impressive showing of the party that most of us thought was a bit of a joke, the re-branded Wexit gang now known as the Buffalo Party.

The BP's came second to the SP's in a number of ridings, mainly those bordering the United States where overall they managed to pick up almost 12,000 votes, virtually all of them likely at the expense of the SaskParty.

This fact would not have been lost on SaskParty strategists and portends a gradual shifting of the SaskParty to the right to accommodate them, such is the nature of the machine.

We can already see the SaskParty's rhetoric including references to the benefits of bringing your own lunch to work and the best places to get tacos after 8.

NewNorth News & Updates

New North AGM, Board Elections, December 11

New North's Annual General Meeting is scheduled for December 11, at the Coronet in Prince Albert. Beginning at 9am and closing around 2pm, the agenda for the meeting will include a presentation of the association's financial statements for the 2019-2020 financial year, an update on our activities from the CEO, a resolution session and open forum, and one or two guest speakers.

As always in a municipal election year, the New North Board elections will take place as well.

We can only have 30 people in the room so we're asking New North members to send one person each from their communities. Our expectation is that communities will make that decision at their first meeting following the municipal elections, and to notify New North in advance using the form that we have sent to communities. The event will be live-streamed on Facebook and a zoom invite can be provided as well.

If any of our members have any questions or concerns about our AGM arrangements, or ideas for how we might do things differently, please let me know ASAP at matt.newnorth@sasktel.net.

Other in-person New North events are postponed until restrictions are lifted and the public health crisis has passed. In the mean, like any organization of our type, New North is continuing to explore the potential for "virtual gatherings," with the likelihood that these will take place beginning in March and every three months thereafter, assuming the epidemic hasn't passed by then.

In March, for instance, as part our northern economic development and jobs creation initiative, New North will be holding an economic development forum to deliver the educational, training and informational material we are putting together as part of the initiative.

Round Three of Checkpoint Grants Open

Around \$500,000 has been spent on checkpoints by the northern municipalities since May, and with cases seemingly on the rise in the province, New North is opening applications to round three of the grant program.

Northern municipalities can access up to \$15,000, 50/50 cost-shared, to cover salaries and other expenses related to checkpoints. The typical monthly cost of checkpoints is around \$30,000 each, which generally consist of up to 4 to 6 staff working 12 hour shifts. In some cases checkpoints operate around the clock.

There is no question in our minds that the actions of community leaders in northern Saskatchewan have

lessened the impact of COVID in the north, and checkpoints have been a largely effective tool—although some will say they are a blunt instrument.

As of writing, there have been just under 450 positive cases in northern Saskatchewan, accounting for about 14% of the provincial total, which is second only to Saskatoon, more than the entire city of Regina, and disproportionately higher, per capita, than any other region, by a considerable margin.

Of the 25 COVID-related deaths in the province, eight are from the north. Testing rates for children in the north are lagging the south by a ratio of about 2 to 1.

New North 2019-20 Financial Statements, Annual Report on Website

New North's embrace of social media such as Twitter and Facebook goes back about five minutes, but we are learning to use it more often and have even taken advantage of the live-streaming options to telecast important events such as the Northern Justice Symposium and more recently the oil change on the New North truck.

Having discovered that we've somehow locked ourselves out of our Facebook account for the 15th time our storming of the social media ramparts will have to wait, but in the meantime, we still have a pretty active website—as long as

your idea of active is searching for the remote down the back of couch.

We've had our Annual Report and financial statements posted there for anyone to pick over and you can always while away an afternoon going back through our newsletters and then writing letters of complaint to the editor identifying the dangling participles.

The New North website is at www.newnorthsask.org. Please "like us" on it, somehow.

From the New North Chair

By Bruce Fidler

The increase in the number of COVID 19 cases in Saskatchewan over the last few weeks has everyone worried. The chances are things are going to get worse before they get better. The experts are saying that the dry cold air, along with the fact that people tend to spend more time indoors in the cold months, increases the likelihood and rates of transmission. Everything that northerners have been saying for months about our elevated risk factors (because of overcrowding and housing shortages and poor underlying health) are in play.

The fact is that the first wave could be child's play compared to what might happen if we, as a people, aren't vigilant.

In New North's view, the ongoing crisis needs a two-handed response. On one hand, residents, leaders and all levels of government need to keep doing their best efforts to prevent and contain outbreaks and the spread of the disease.

A second level of response is also needed. This is the one where we step back and say: "This crisis is an opportunity to recognize and deal with the widespread disparities in health and economic outcomes that make this virus so much more deadly for northern people."

The list of contributing factors is long but not endless. And we can overcome it. The fact is that health and other

indicators have actually improved in the last 10 years, partly as a result of improving economic conditions, a lot of that related to the mines.

As we all know, in the last few years economic conditions have worsened—and now are the worst they have been in decades. This is obviously not just something that northerners have to worry about.

Our worry is that the long-term thinking that is required to deal with the needs in the north will be overlooked in favour of the short-term packages and programs governments are putting together which are more for overcoming short-term unemployment or businesses troubles caused by the epidemic.

This is why New North is strongly advocating for a Northern Strategy. A Northern Strategy by its nature is a long-term plan with far-sighted goals and objectives.

Our plan is to try to leverage this current moment, where people are primed for collective action and cross-government co-operation, to have conversations about the bigger picture and systemic problems in northern Saskatchewan.

As they say, crisis brings opportunity. As difficult as it is, given everything going on, let's try to seize it while we can.

Northern Municipal Legislation Changes Coming January 1; Some in Place Already

One of the strangest government knee-jerk reactions we've seen in a long time was the amendment to the Bill amending the various municipalities acts to prohibit municipalities in Saskatchewan from making any *new* bylaws relating to gun ownership. The amendment was in response to comments by the federal government that they were thinking of giving municipalities the authority to ban handguns, even though everyone knew they were talking about municipalities like Toronto and Vancouver, and not municipalities like Val Marie or Dore Lake, and amendments to the federal guns laws, should they come, are not even a glimmer in a legislation-writer's eye at this point.

There are two take-aways from this episode. Firstly, the provincial government can move fast when they want to, even on things that have no bearing on anyone or anything. Pass legislation related to gun laws? Watch how fast we do it, rural voters! Pass legislation on suicide prevention? Forget about it.

The second take-away is that even though municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government continues to address municipalities directly in a manoeuvre that sport's writers refer to as an "end-run". The last time

they did this in any meaningful way was in relation to the promise by the feds to share cannabis revenues with municipalities—a promise they had no right to make, or capacity to fulfil, since this is a matter for the provinces.

Even so, it makes for good sport, and we look forward to the feds continuing to overstep their constitutional authority more often.

In other municipal amendment news, *The Northern Municipalities Act* will be changed come January 1st in a number of significant ways, in a number of potentially disastrous ways, and in a number of ways both significant and potentially disastrous.

With respect the latter, the amendments to the conflict of interest provisions will make the new rules either really easy to navigate or way to open too interpretation to be effective, and the changes to the provisions for when a municipality is required to have a certified administrator (ie, always) will either be a precursor to a major leap forward in administrative competence, accountability and transparency, or a case of pointless overreach.

We will have more discussion about these amendments in next month's newsletter.

New North Launching Regional Admin Pilot Project

It's been delayed by a year, but the New North Regional Administration Pilot project is now back on track and scheduled to begin later this year or early next year.

The pilot project will see two experienced administrators running around assisting communities within a particular regional cluster with their day-to-day municipal administration operations, with an emphasis on training and education.

There will be an annual cost to participating communities—\$1600 for villages, \$800 for hamlets—but for that they will get to have access to the regional administrator more or less whenever they need them, either in person or over the phone. Setting up effective remote working relationships will be a key role of the regional administrators in the first year.

The rest of the cost is borne by New North, with additional funding coming from the Targeted Sector Support Initiative.

Because this is a pilot project, we expect this idea will evolve a bit overtime.

In light of the new requirement coming in 2021 that every municipality will need to employ a certified administrator, one thing we are keen to explore is whether communities would like to nominate the regional administrator as their community's certified administrator, who would provide mentorship, training and support to a community's acting administrator as they work toward their certification.

New North will contact communities individually over the next few months to provide more information about this pilot project, and to tell you where to send the checks.

Revenue Sharing

Upcoming Municipal Revenue Sharing Grant Declaration of Eligibility BY The Ministry of Government Relations

Below is an excerpt that appeared in the Municipal Administrator's Corner of the September issue of Municipalities Today which was sent to municipalities.

A unique link and password for the online Municipal Revenue Sharing Declaration of Eligibility will be emailed to each municipality on **November 13, 2020**.

- o Administrators: if you do not receive the email, please check your SPAM/JUNK folder. If the email is not in your SPAM/JUNK folder, please email grcompliance@gov.sk.ca requesting the email to be re-sent.
- o Reminder that submission of the Declaration of Eligibility, which includes a resolution from council, and meeting the Eligibility Requirements is required to avoid the municipality's Municipal Revenue Sharing grant for the 2021-22 year from being withheld. The deadline for submission of the Declaration of Eligibility will be January 31, 2021. **You will want to ensure that the Declaration of Eligibility is included on the November, December or January council meeting agenda.**

The Eligibility Requirements are the following legislated responsibilities:

- Submission of Annual Audited Financial Statement;
- Submission of Waterworks Reporting, if applicable;
- In good standing with Education Property Tax;
- Council Procedure Bylaw has been adopted by council;
- Employee Code of Conduct has been adopted by council; and
- Public Disclosure Statements have been filed and annually updated by council members.

Province Introduces Additional Eligibility Requirements for Federal Infrastructure Grants

We mentioned last month that the federal government has created a new tranche of funding called the COVID Resiliency Fund, which municipalities can, in theory, access to make capital purchases for COVID stuff.

We say "in theory" because the province has slapped on some additional eligibility requirements which means that, if the

funding wasn't already out of reach for some, it's probably now out of reach for many.

The eligibility requirements include those you see above (see above), but one or two others, such as the requirement that municipalities have a certified administrator, and that municipalities are in good standing with the Gas Tax Fund.

Vacancies in Northern Health Positions May Present Challenges in COVID Response

“Open Until Filled” is an epithet attached to many if not all job postings in northern Saskatchewan in professional fields (we’ve used it a few times recently). Before my wife took the Speech Pathology position in La Ronge in 2011 it had been open for 17 years. It’s open again now.

The recruitment of health professionals in northern Saskatchewan is once again reaching a crisis point. While the number of advertised vacancies is not particularly high on a provincial scale—Saskatoon seems to be awash with nursing openings—the fact that it seems to be concentrated in a number of key areas, geographically and discipline-wise, warrants serious attention.

As of writing, Pinehouse, for example, has about half a dozen nursing or primary care positions unfilled—including a manager’s role. La Ronge has a similar number of positions unfilled in the detox unit. While many people (quite rightly) complain about a lack of funding for mental health, a key issue is filling the positions already available; there are more than ten positions related to mental health and addictions, social work and counselling currently unfilled, a number of those in one community.

Altogether, there about 50 unfilled positions across the north in a range of clinical, nursing, allied health, palliative care and mental health and addictions roles. And two Speech Pathology positions—the only two in the northern health area.

All this, of course, amidst the worst health crisis in our lifetimes.

Front line health workers across the world have borne the brunt of the COVID epidemic. According to the government of Saskatchewan, 99 out of the 3100 people who’ve contracted COVID-19 are health workers—or about 3%. The government—redundantly—cautions “that the source of the infections may not be related to healthcare in all instances,” but it’s hard to imagine many other occupational category to be as highly represented as health workers.

The reality is that the ongoing, historic problems of attracting health workers to the north is now, in the context of COVID, turning into a matter of overwhelming concern which needs to be immediately addressed.

Province Creates More COVID Reporting “Zones”

As in most other jurisdictions, the government of Saskatchewan provides daily COVID-19 updates which includes statistics relating to new cases, active cases, testing and other variables, including a broad demographic breakdown for those into advanced epidemiology, which apparently is everyone nowadays.

When the pandemic first hit back in March jurisdictions across the globe took different approaches to reporting instances of COVID infections. Most started off by reporting cases in the most locally-specific way possible, including in Saskatchewan. As expected, Saskatchewan soon went its own way and moved to a regional reporting system, with local communities only identified in outbreak situations. Unlike in other jurisdictions, Saskatchewan does not maintain a publicly-accessible database of local active cases. In Australia, by contrast, cases are identified and tracked on a suburb-by-suburb or LGA basis. The benefit of this is that the public is prepared—for when the time comes—to accept a lock-down of a particular local government area (referred to as a “ring of steel”). As of writing, Australia has zero new cases. New Zealand, which took a similar approach, has eliminated the virus altogether.

It’s never been explained to us why the government is sticking to its regional reporting model, but it’s possible that the way the province collects client information is the main reason. In Saskatchewan (and probably elsewhere), the health authority records your residence information based on your post-code. Many people don’t live in the same place as their post-code, and this is so much truer in the rural and remote parts of the province.

Thus, we have the regional model. Over time the regional model has become a little more refined, so that, for instance the “northern region” is now no longer fully one half of the province, as it was in the beginning, but has been sliced up over time to report in smaller sub-zones. The north (or what we call the “north”) is now divided into five smaller zones: Far North West 1, Far North West 2, Far North Central, and Far North East 1 and Far North East 2.

The new zones don’t appear in the daily map you will typically see published by the media. To access the map with the smaller zones, you need to go to the province’s COVID webpage, www.saskatchewan.ca/covid.

Electomania2020

Poor Northern Turn-Out in Provincials a Worrying Sign

This year's provincial election had one of the lowest turnouts in the history of elections in Saskatchewan, as just under 50% of eligible voters showed up to their local community hall, compared to 53% in 2016, and down a mind-blowing 34 points since 1982, when 80% of eligible voters voted.

The northern ridings generally lag the rest of the province by 20 to 30 points when it comes to percentages of registered voters voting, but this year hit a new low, with just 25% of registered voters voting in the northern riding of Cumberland, and around 30% in Athabasca.

Even given the generally lower turn-out province-wide, the level of voter apathy in the north was disproportionately high. Provincially, there was about a 6% drop in voter turnout since 2016; in the north, it was a 28% drop in Cumberland and about 9% in Athabasca.

How to explain the extremely poor turnout in northern Saskatchewan?

COVID would certainly have played a part. With few alternatives to voting on election day, northerners perhaps felt safer simply staying home. For starters, advance polling was out of reach for many northerners; there are just 12 advance polling stations in an area half the size of the province. Provincially, mail-in ballots made up 10 to 15% of the total votes cast. In the north, by contrast, it was just 23 in total in Athabasca, and 189 in Cumberland—less than 1% and 5% respectively. Lockdowns in a number of communities also had a deterrent effect.

But there may have been some deeper reasons as well to explain the poor turnout, including whether either party had done enough to engage the interests of northern and Indigenous voters.

Speaking with MBCRadio, U of S professor and well-known northern and Indigenous advocate Ken Coates said: "I think at some point people will wake up to the fact that the north is by far and away the poorest part of the country, of the province. That we need to do a lot more to provide economic stability and services that the government has actually cut back on many of the services in the region and moved personnel out. We need a much better northern strategy than we have now."

He said that "neither party has really gone out of their way to articulate an Indigenous partnership that would actually make sense to a lot of people in the country and that always worries me."

This chimes with earlier observations by New North, which prompted our press release just after the campaign

New North Provincial Election Wish-List

Physical and Mental Health

- Recruitment drive to fill chronic vacancies in addictions, mental health and allied health positions within the northern health areas
- The expansion of alcohol management programs to a greater number of northern communities
- In consultation with northern communities, the establishment of a northern-wide, cross-jurisdictional opioid and methamphetamine strategy
- A northern-specific funding component to the Cognitive Disabilities Strategy to help with the diagnosis and support for clients with FASD and a range of cognitive and behavioural issues
- Program support for the Embracing Life Committee, a coalition of agencies addressing suicide prevention, intervention and postvention in northern Saskatchewan

Economic and Social Development

- A northern home repair program to attend to the fact that 30% of dwellings in northern Saskatchewan need "major repairs," as compared to 10% province wide
- The convening of a Northern Economic Development taskforce to develop job-creation initiatives. This may include support for communities and northern-based businesses to engage more fully in forestry, housing construction, tourism, communications, and mine services
- The creation of a Ministry of Northern Saskatchewan and the immediate expansion of the government's capacity to support northern community development
- Restoration of the "Winterworks" program which provided funding to northern municipalities to carry out general maintenance, clearing and local wildfire mitigation activity

Highways and Infrastructure

- Transparency about whether and to what extent revenues from resource development are channelled back into new road construction and repair in northern Saskatchewan

Education

- Restoration of funding to NORTEP/NORPAC, as well as an expansion of the physical locations of tertiary education facilities into more communities, such as Cumberland House and Pinehouse

began. New North called for a "substantive" debate of northern issues, and put across some ideas about where we might start. There, Chair Bruce Fidler expressed frustration that northern and Indigenous issues weren't getting much of an airing in the political arena. "When COVID began, we instinctively knew this was bad news for us because of the wide-spread presence of vulnerable populations and poor health indicators, and so people began to agitate for lockdowns. So why isn't addressing these poor health outcomes in northern Saskatchewan not a specific part of any party's platform?" Mayor Fidler asked.

We wrote "that while the COVID 19 pandemic brought attention to the poor health outcomes of northern residents and heightened the concern of leaders and authorities in the north, all that seems to have been forgotten come election time, as the north appears to be mostly off the radar this election campaign, if the party platforms are anything to go on."

New North Unveils Concept for Co-Operative Centre for Developing Northern Saskatchewan

If you wanted to pin-point the exact date the government of Saskatchewan gave up on northern Saskatchewan you could do worse than nominate the provincial budget that cut funding to the International Centre for Northern Governance and Development in 2017. Attached to the U of S, the centre's research had focused on concerns in areas such as northern governance, First Nations and resource development, northern innovation and climate and socio-economics.

It also provided graduate-level degree programs which led to many northerners obtaining highly-recognized masters degrees greatly enhancing the region's share of economic, intellectual and social capital. Upon its demise in June of that year about a dozen people, many of whom had begun to develop a high level of expertise on northern issues, lost their jobs. The school not only provided tremendous graduate-school opportunities, it provided a unique, and completely irreplaceable, way for northern Saskatchewan to link in with other northern jurisdictions around the globe, fostering the creation of

networks of northern specialists and generating an enormous quantity of hugely valuable and marketable applied research.

The CCNDS doesn't seek to replicate the ICNGD but rather to build in its place a "clearing house" for research and development projects linking universities, industry, communities and people together in the search of new ways of developing northern Saskatchewan's enormous potential for growth.

The concept is based around drawing together new, existing and under-utilized funding and funnelling it through an Expression of Interest process into the hands of researchers. The Centre—to be based in northern Saskatchewan—will have the role of setting research priorities, tracking funding and project outcomes. Governance will be provided by a board.

The CCNDS concept is currently open for discussion (see below). A business plan will follow the initial phase of consultation with stakeholders.

Co-Operative Centre for Developing Northern Saskatchewan

CCDNS brings together communities, industry, universities and other research bodies, small and medium businesses and local and regional development organisations, across all northern Saskatchewan jurisdictions, in a collaborative community- and industry-led research and development venture to assist communities, businesses, governments and researchers identify opportunities for business growth and development in the north. The CCDNS concept builds upon and consolidates decades of pilot projects, short-lived funding programs and other ventures with the objective of initiating a period of sustained and transformative economic and social development growth in northern Saskatchewan.

Purpose

The Centre will:

- Allocate funding via funding calls and Expression of Interest processes to elicit research projects that align with the priorities of the CCDNS Board
- Track and maintain a register of business and community development ventures in the north
- Initiate and maintain oversight of strategic research projects that align with the CCDNS Board's overall priorities

Governance

Governance is supplied by a cross-jurisdictional Board from all corners of the north, and include representatives from business, community leadership and government. The Board will have the responsibility of creating the vision for the Centre and setting strategic priorities for research.

Administration

The Centre's day to day activities will be guided by a CEO, who will maintain operational leadership under the guidance of the Board. Additional staff will include an Administrative Assistant, Finance Manager, and two or three project managers. The Centre's administrative base will be in northern Saskatchewan, with offices in different locations.

Required Funding

\$10 million over 10 years

Potential Strategic Priorities

- Aquaculture, horticulture, agriculture and food security
- Tourism and recreation
- Technology and innovation
- Commercial retail and wholesale

From the CEO MATT HELEY

Donald Trump, the great disrupter, is to American democracy what a hammer-wielding maniac is to a herringbone dinner set, so witnessing the relatively effortless and almost uneventful version of democracy-in-action in Saskatchewan over the last few weeks has been a welcome salve and much needed reminder of how all that stuff is supposed to work. Victory speeches were humble and conciliatory, concession speeches were graceful and sometimes even classy; Tina Beaudry-Mellor's stands out.

In the northern municipal sector, the elections have been going on since early October. The turn-out in many places has been phenomenal. Pinehouse, which concluded their elections on October 7, had about 600 people voting—in a community of 1200. We're not sure what percentage of voters that is, but it would be pretty high. In other places, hundreds are turning up to advance polling, perhaps in the hope of beating the crowds on election day. The irony is not lost on anyone.

We tend to think that municipal government in general suffers from "representational deficit" but that's simply not the case in the north—at least, not at election time. The high turnout in northern municipal elections means that northern municipal leaders are the most heavily endorsed, and most representative, leaders in northern Saskatchewan.

New North launched a series of radio ads on MBC to "get out the vote" in local elections. In hindsight, we needn't have bothered.

In hindsight, perhaps it was the provincial elections we should have been worried about. As noted in these pages, turnout in the north was abysmal—barely 25% in Cumberland, and 30% in Athabasca. This is 20 to 25 points lower than the rest of the province. Why have northerners become so disengaged from the provincial process? Was it just COVID related? Were there not enough advance polls? Not enough information being circulated about how to apply for a mail-in ballot?

We can't know for sure, but to us there is a clear case for government to explain what it is they can do for northern people. They need to spell out their vision for northern Saskatchewan—if they can.

This might be a challenging proposition, given the unique jurisdictional patchwork comprising the political culture in the north. Perhaps the failure to put together any kind of "northern strategy" is not really a failure at all, but rather an intrinsic, preternatural recognition of the irreconcilability of the elements that comprise this patchwork, which would make any such attempt at a coherent, cohesive plan appear like a weak, unsatisfactory compromise.

We already see such weaknesses in other examples of the province's attempts at coherent plans, such as the widely-panned Pillars of Life suicide prevention strategy. There are others: the poverty strategy (abandoned because the province couldn't "afford it"), the mental health strategy, the disability strategy, and many others.

Even if the intent is good, why are these plans so poorly received? And would a "northern strategy" fair any better?

In our view, it would.

Putting aside the obvious challenges, a key reason we need a northern strategy is because we feel government needs something it can "check itself" against. Policy decisions in the north are often made in a vacuum. Jobs are cut, positions and programs moved around and de-funded, with no rhyme or reason other than some arbitrary bottom line. By contrast, if we had a strategy, and an element of a government's northern strategy was stated explicitly as "job creation," then job cuts would need to find a justification within that vision.

But we can also see why such a vision would never be articulated. Paradoxically, we need a northern strategy precisely because government doesn't want one. We need outcomes and benchmarks—set in consultation with northern people. A northern strategy would facilitate that. Perhaps then we will see the political engagement come back.

About New North ...

Since 1996 New North has been the voice of the municipalities of Northern Saskatchewan. Our goal, as defined by our mission statement, is to advocate, negotiate and initiate improvements in well-being of the residents of the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District. Organized on the basis of strength through unity, New North partners with all northern stakeholders, from government and non-government agencies, associations and First Nations, to enhance the quality of life, create opportunities and build better futures for the people of the north.

New North Executive

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Mayor Gord Stomp (Treasurer)
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