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**OPINION COLUMN**

## Seeds of Northern revolution planted in Cochrane



By Wayne Snider, The Daily Press (Timmins)  
Wednesday, February 6, 2013 1:17:35 EST PM



Cochrane Mayor Peter Politis talks about the principles of Good Governance during a meeting of the Northeastern Ontario Municipal Association. NEOMA members have formed a subcommittee to discuss his Good Governance plan, which deals with the way Queen's Park has treated Northern Ontario.

TIMMINS - The Town of Cochrane is enjoying a major boom.

It's the headquarters for the Detour Gold Mine camp, which is building the largest gold mine in North America. It has a top-notch tourist attraction in the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat. The population is on pace to grow from about 5,500 to 7,000. In recent years, new retail development has sprung up on the edge of town along Hwy. 11.

Cochrane is the prototypical close-knit, Northern town. Everyone still takes part in major community events, such as the Cochrane Winter Carnival. The arena at the state-of-the-art Tim Horton Event Centre fills to the brim whenever the local midget hockey team takes to the ice. Everybody knows everybody.

But in the midst of these boom times, Cochrane has also become the epicentre for Northern discontent with Queen's Park.

Cochrane used to be the Northern terminus for the Northlander passenger rail service. As part of the provincial sell-off of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, the Northlander was shut down in September.

Greenwater Provincial Park will be closed this year as a cost-cutting measure by the Ministry of Natural Resources. It was a camping facility enjoyed by both townsfolk and visitors.

And many residents fear for the future of the two world-class mill operations in town, thanks to planned reductions in wood allocations.

Most feel that key legislation impacting Northern Ontario, such as the Far North Act and the Forest Management Plan for the Abitibi River Forest, have been rammed through without any real local consultation.

But instead of raising the white flag, town leaders are raising a red flag. They are doing their best to rally their Northern brethren to fight back.

Leading the charge is Cochrane Mayor Peter Politis. A former executive from the forestry sector, Politis never really intended to get involved in politics. But the treatment of Northern Ontario by Queen's Park pushed him to not only join the fight, but to lead it.

The voice of Politis is growing louder across the North. And his counterparts are listening. At the most recent meeting of the Northeastern Ontario Municipal Association (NEOMA) — which includes mayors and council members from all municipalities in the district — members agreed to form a subcommittee to examine his revolutionary plan.

Called Good Governance, it is about letting Northerners control their own destiny, instead of being treated like a colony by southern Ontario.

"In a nutshell, it's about us as Northerners recognizing that the relationship between us and the rest of the province is not working," Politis said. "There are different things that can happen, from doing nothing to people talking about separation.

"We need to get our act together. We need to look at our own economy here and develop a business plan ourselves about what we can do with things such as the ONTC, getting foreign investment, getting transmission lines — not to the south, but throughout the North to transmit, for example, 1,700 megawatts of power off the Abitibi River through the region — attracting more business and development here."

Politis maintained an even, controlled voice level as he continued. But while calm, there was genuine passion behind his words. "So we put together the business development plan. We put together the economic impact assessment. Then we go sit with the province and have a very polite conversation. We say, 'You know we want to be part of Ontario, Ontario is a very important part of who we are, but we are not going to stay in Ontario if it continues down this road.'

"Here's what we could be ... and here's what it means to the province. What we need you (Queen's Park) to do is recognize we need some type of regional governance jurisdiction here to make some decisions here on the important issues that we have, and we are ready and willing to talk."

Politis is not just blowing hot air. He has quietly assembled a background of experts to volunteer their time to do the necessary research — educators, academics, economists and politicians. Northerners are buying into his plan of Good Governance.

"Then the choice will be the province's," he said. "And they can decide at that point. Do they want to continue to go down a road where they recognize there is a difference here and deal with it, or do they want leave us to make our own decisions from there?"

He said discussions with the provincial government — whether it is the Liberals, Conservatives or NDP in charge — must be calm and rational. "It's a step away from the 'well we've had enough, let's get out of here' approach," he continued. "Which is the frustration I feel a lot of times, too. It's a progressive, constructive approach to have a very intelligent conversation.

"It starts with us first. Let's do our homework. Let's recognize what we are, who we are, where the costing is and so on, and what we could be. Then go sit with the province with a very credible discussion on this is what it can be. And I think we'll win that argument."

Politis and his supporters still have a lot of work to do, but the Northern revolution has begun.

And if the provincial government does not take these discussions seriously, the political scene in Ontario will heat up beyond the boiling point.


And to think it all started in a small, booming Northern Ontario town.

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**jamesbay**

Mayor Politis & NEOMA have planted the seeds of a growing discontent with Southern Ontario & the Provincial legislature. Northern Ontario does not begin in Muskoka! We as Northerners must grasp this opportunity with NEOMA to push hard for a rational change in our relationship with our Provincial Government. If not, this relationship will end badly.

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**Bill Pudim**

It's about time, someone does something!

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**Pro North**

Today was a great day for the north with the announcement that Bartolucci will not lead the MNM. We need a minister that will consult with our communities. I would also suggest that his Ministry no longer meets the needs of Northern Ontario. Disband or should I say divest the MNM let our united communities decide what is best for our northern ontario.

19 hours ago  Flag

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**picklesdilly**

its sad to say but as long as we continue to elect people from the 3rd party we will have no clout as evidenced when we had Harris and then McGinty and now Wynne.

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**rickromain**

You have hit the nail on the head. This is so true. Keep electing NDP and there will be no relationship with the Governments in power and the North will continue to be left out as it has been for many years.

23 hours ago in reply to picklesdilly  Flag

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