

## Letter to the Editor: The State of the North – A New Vision is Emerging

On September 27 and 28 in the City of Timmins over 150 people representing various government agencies, elected officials, business organizations and owners, educational institutions, students and First Nations groups.

Sep 28, 2017 9:27 AM by: Community Submission



*Letters to the editor - with text*

### **To the editor:**

On September 27 and 28 in the City of Timmins over 150 people representing various government agencies, elected officials, business organizations and owners, educational institutions, students and First Nations groups participated in a "State of the North" conference to discuss key trends, challenges and opportunities shaping our future. This information was gathered by the Northern Policy Institute in a massive undertaking that looked at real evidence provided by in-depth research and studies as well as extensive consultation with key decision makers in the North.

The picture that is emerging is one of substantial demographic changes and declining population that started years ago and while they are losing fewer people than we once were, the number of retired people versus those working is changing drastically and it will have a profound effect on our quality of life unless we start reversing such trend by attracting more young families.

Shortages of skilled labour has been an issue for many years and new efforts in apprenticeship programs are slowly taking shape but more needs to be done. Our own Regional Hospital and Homes for Seniors lack the numbers of health support workers and beds are sitting empty creating gridlock. The Provincial Immigration Nominee Program like the successful one in the Province of Manitoba is being explored as a viable option in dealing with such shortages.

While there may be some differences between the Northwestern and Northeastern Ontario regions, the North has unique challenges that set us apart from Southeastern Ontario. This is nothing new, but what is new is the opportunities that are emerging in this dynamic and changing environment being created by new technologies and Innovation. For example, with the lower dollar and the growing economy in the US we have been able to attract more tourists in the North, but if we want to fully capitalize on that market we need more extensive cellular and Internet coverage across the North so those entire families can enjoy the superb natural beauty of our region, and to entice the kids to come along, they need to stay connected with their friends.

Another major finding has been that youth employment and job opportunities in the North are greater than those in Southern Ontario, but somehow that information is not getting out and unfortunately we still have too many of our young people leaving for the big cities because they have been told that the grass is greener on the other side when the evidence now clearly indicates that it is not so. A major communication effort is needed here that should include the educational institutions, the parents, and elected officials in promoting more the amazing opportunities now being created in many new areas in the North.

One event to discuss such trends, challenges and opportunities for growth in our population, the economy, and ultimately property taxes and levels of service in the City of Thunder Bay and region, is being hosted at the Italian Cultural Centre on October 4, 2017 between 7-9 pm where over a dozen key community organizations will hold a panel discussion followed by Q&A session from an open mic in a town hall meeting setting and everyone is welcome to attend.

*Frank Pullia, Councilor for the City of Thunder Bay  
fpullia@thunderbay.ca or at 767-6579*