

OUR OPINION

# Business tack trumps politics

On Tuesday, the city's top politicians and community leaders were, well, apoplectic, when they learned the federal government had decided not to put any money into the Centre of Excellence in Mining Innovation based at Laurentian University.

"This is the modus operandi of the current federal government. People challenge them publicly and they punish a community," Sudbury MPP Rick Bartolucci said.

"This is Clement being vindictive," he added, referring to federal cabinet minister Tony Clement, the minister responsible for FedNor, the federal economic development program for Northern Ontario.

Peter Kaiser, CEMI's chief executive officer, called the rejection "arrogant." Mayor John Rodriguez and the city's two Liberal MPs, Diane Marleau (Sudbury) and Ray Bonin (Nickel Belt), were also highly critical.

But by Thursday, after a meeting of the major players, the tone had changed considerably. Mining and business leaders decided to create a committee to lobby the federal government; they hope to get the Conservatives to reconsider.

Instead of a lot of yelling, name-calling (remember Bartolucci calling Clement the minister of FedNot?) and political posturing, the committee's members say they will try to make an economic case for federal funding.

The meeting, held at CEMI's offices on the Laurentian campus, featured Bartolucci, Kaiser, Rodriguez, representatives of Xstrata Nickel, Vale Inco, Laurentian and the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce.

The group opted to form a four-member committee, free of political representation, to lobby the Conservative government to support CEMI. The committee will include Kaiser and representatives of Xstrata, Vale Inco and the chamber of commerce. The group's spokesman will be Mike Romaniuk, vice-president of Xstrata Nickel's Sudbury operations.

Bartolucci, taking a far more diplomatic tone on Thursday, said the committee will look at other funding opportunities for CEMI and will "present their case in a proactive, positive way."

CEMI was created to develop research in deep mining, exploration, mine process engineering, automation and environmental processes. The agency has received \$10 million from the provincial government and \$5 million each from Vale Inco and Xstrata, as well as indirect support from several other sources.

CEMI had sought \$9.5 million, over a five-year period, from FedNor, the federal government's economic development program for Northern Ontario.

The Conservative government said earlier this week it rejected the CEMI request because it "would require a significant investment that would not serve to maximize FedNor's principles of promoting growth, economic diversification, job creation and sustainable, self-reliant communities in Northern Ontario."

Indeed, the local committee can make a strong case for federal dollars to CEMI, based on those very FedNor principles. The work being done at CEMI is more than a just a bunch of tall foreheads locked away in a laboratory producing obscure academic papers read only by a bunch of other tall foreheads locked in labs across the world.

Instead, the work they do will tackle real-life mining problems and, in the process, create new solutions and new technology that can be exported across Canada and around the world. Sounds like a good way "of promoting growth, economic diversification, job creation and sustainable, self-reliant communities in Northern Ontario."

That's the case to present to the feds — non-political, non-partisan and business-like. Such an approach may not work, since the Conservatives aren't likely to elect any members in Sudbury, but it has a better chance of succeeding than calling the government and its ministers a bunch of nasty names and hoping that will change their minds.

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