



Government needs to take action on mining exodus

By Jack Bourassa

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Dominion Diamond showed its true colours in November when the company decided to pack up their Yellowknife office and move their headquarters to Calgary.

Yet just as worrisome is the complete absence of a response from the government of the Northwest Territories.

The move was met not with a bang but a whimper from the territory's premier and top politicians, many of whom campaigned on a promise of a strong and vibrant mining sector.

Dominion Diamond's move is bad news for all residents of the NWT.

One hundred hard-working Dominion Diamond employees lost their jobs in the shuffle, and it's also going to hurt local business owners, who will take a hit both from workers moving out of Yellowknife and the loss of big contracts with Dominion.

The true impacts of this move will take months to ripple out, affecting workers and their families and altering the very image Dominion has tried so hard to keep up.

So where is the government's response to this shifting landscape? The government was equally quiet when DeBoers chose to shift part of its workforce to Calgary last October.

Approximately 40% of the territory's economy relies on mining, and if Premier Bob McLeod intends to stimulate the growth of the economy and our population, his government needs to stop the bleeding.

The GNWT will feel the pinch with the loss of federal transfer payments from a declining population.

The onus also lies with mining companies themselves to re-invest the profits of their mining operations into the territory.

For years, Dominion has insisted they're a "Northern company" with their workers and leadership based right out of Yellowknife.

Last year, Dominion's Chief Operations Officer Chantal Lavoie was quick to poke fun of De Beers for moving south just as he accepted the Corporate Business of the Year award on behalf of Dominion.

During his speech, Lavoie remarked on Dominion's decision to move its head office to Yellowknife and how positive it had been for the company.

"More than two thirds of our staff and employees now live here," he said to the crowd, which included Premier Bob McLeod, Minister of Industry, Tourism and Investment David Ramsay and Deputy Mayor Linda Bussey.

And in an even more abrupt about-face, Dominion placed a full-page ad in UpHere Magazine with the powerful tagline "Dominion Diamond, committed to the North" and touting its Yellowknife headquarters just *days* before they announced their decision to move to Calgary.

This double speak is especially troubling to workers at Dominion who are looking for a new contract after being without a collective agreement for more than 30 months.

If the company is willing to let Northerners down just to save a few million dollars, what can we expect from them at the bargaining table?