

What Will You Compromise for a Payout of Billions?

By Monica Guetre

There's a new twist that the Manitoba Government is inflicting on those of us living and working here in eastern Manitoba and this twist directly affects the majority who want to protect our right to clean drinking water.

Recently two new red carpeted announcements were made by our politicians regarding our mineral resources. No surprise, since a frenzy of incumbent government spending media releases always occurs just before an election so that politicians can make us think they've got a plan and try and get us to forget the bad taste in our mouth we had from their previous years of decisions.

In this case, one announcement was a "new" Critical Minerals Strategy such as lithium, graphite, nickel, cobalt, copper and rare earth elements.

The second was a big dollar and job announcement attached to a Memorandum of Understanding signed with a German solar panel manufacturer, RCT Solutions, to explore the construction of a mega facility in Manitoba. This involves billions in investment and thousands of jobs.

Sounds fantastic, right?

What would you do for the reported \$3 billion investment and the creation of 8,000 jobs?

Glossed over is that this solar panel plant won't magically appear tomorrow as it would need to be built over a few years. Additionally, to get the ball rolling, the announcement doesn't mention what taxpayer dollars would have to be spent to entice this manufacturer such as government tax and grant incentives.

We'd also need to build the infrastructure like roads, sewer and waste water treatment for the influx of skilled people to operate the plant, and find affordable housing for these people.

Now here's the biggy... add in the fact that while the announcements listed some minerals, they purposely avoided the word "silica", which in the southeast is turning into a trigger word associated with tampering with our drinking water. The optics of using the word "quartz" instead of the granular specific "silica" helps with their narrative. In the Critical Minerals Strategy quartz and silica were completely left out.

In a nutshell, none of these hurdles are mentioned in the government's media releases. Instead it is a blatant spin offering a handful of "magic beans" placated with big dollars as they gloss over their intent while making back room deals that jeopardizes our future and our children's future.

If you have put 2 and 2 together now to equal 4, you now realize that it's Sio Silica waiting in the wings. Sio Silica, the company that's eagerly waiting to frack our aquifer, drilling into our naturally protected clean water source by removing the quartz, or more specifically, the silica sand.

It now seems it was Sio Silica who approached RCT Solutions who then followed up introducing themselves to our elected politicians. RCT Solutions makes no secret they are banking on access to the silica sand that Sio Silica wants to frack.

Sio Silica has just turned into a surrogate for 8,000 jobs and \$3B in investment, adding the icing on the cake to their proposed 150 direct jobs. This could be an attempt to sweeten the pot, to influence shoulder-shrugs when debating any negative findings in the Clean Environment Commission's recommendations.

Based on the official media release from the government and the purposeful way it is written to avoid certain trigger words, it looks like it's worked like a charm on the government.

Extracting silica sand does not always have to be devastating and there are methods with proven mitigation processes.

Canadian Premium Sand (CPS) has already been mining north of Winnipeg and has stockpiled quartz by surface mining and using an acid wash to remove impurities like iron to create the high purity silica needed.

Additionally, CPS has actually applied for their own solar glass manufacturing license which has the potential to add about 300 manufacturing jobs to our economy.

It seems since CPS has a good business model geared to add manufacturing to its mining, Sio Silica is trying to steal their playbook by aligning itself with a manufacturer.

With the dangling carrot of big numbers, politicians are attempting to soften the opposition.

Solar panel use and technology is indeed is one of the renewable energy strategies we should be embracing and to have jobs here would certainly be advantageous.

On the other hand, we have all been educating ourselves to the dangers of the extracting silica from our aquifer.

Let's ask ourselves a question. When big money and jobs come calling, what line are you willing to cross and most specifically what and who will you compromise?

Is \$3 billion and 8,000 jobs a big enough carrot to change your opinion of yesterday to a new opinion today? With an election on the horizon, this is a question you also need to ask the candidates when they come knocking on your door.