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Subject: Manitoba's Silica Strategy Deserves a Broader Discussion

Dear Mr. Lagasse,

CC: Premier Wab Kinew

CC: Deputy Minister – Daniel Blaikie

CC: [REDACTED], Winnipeg Sun

CC: [REDACTED], The Carillon

Thank you for continuing to raise questions regarding Manitoba's long-term economic and environmental interests. While opinions may differ on the ultimate merits of the Sio Silica proposal, I believe the discussion presents an opportunity to examine a broader question: how Manitoba can best achieve its economic, environmental, and manufacturing objectives while maintaining public confidence in the process.

I read with interest your recent comments regarding Prime Minister Carney's public support for the Sio Silica project before Manitoba's environmental review process has been completed.

I believe you are correct to question the wisdom of publicly promoting a project whose approval remains subject to scientific review, regulatory scrutiny, and public confidence in the integrity of that process. Manitobans deserve assurance that decisions affecting their communities, water resources, and economic future will be made through evidence and due process rather than political enthusiasm.

However, your comments raise what I believe is an even larger question.

If the objective is to establish Manitoba as a leader in silica-based manufacturing, solar technology, advanced materials, semiconductor production, and related industries, why is so much attention being directed toward the Sio proposal when Manitoba already possesses an alternative silica-development pathway through Canadian Premium Sand?

The recent announcements surrounding Sio emphasize international partnerships, Indigenous participation, downstream manufacturing opportunities, and the development of a broader solar and technology supply chain. These are all worthwhile objectives. Yet none of these objectives are unique to the Sio proposal.

Indigenous economic participation is rightly becoming an essential component of major resource developments across Canada. The recent announcement speaks of building a fully integrated solar manufacturing hub involving Indigenous participation and international partners. That is a commendable objective. However, if the goal is the creation of an Indigenous-supported manufacturing hub, there appears to be no obvious reason similar partnerships could not be developed and expanded through the Canadian Premium Sand project and its associated processing and manufacturing opportunities. If Manitoba's objective is truly the creation of a world-class manufacturing hub, Manitobans deserve to understand why one silica-development pathway is being promoted over another.

Likewise, if the objective is to produce solar glass, silicon-based products, photovoltaic components, or advanced manufacturing materials, Manitoba already possesses a silica resource capable of supporting those ambitions.

While Sio proponents argue that their deposit possesses exceptionally high-purity silica, that fact alone does not automatically resolve the broader policy question. Silica resources of varying grades are routinely upgraded and processed throughout the world to meet industrial specifications. Even if additional beneficiation, refining, or processing were required, the ultimate objective remains the same: converting silica into higher-value products such as solar glass, silicon metal, photovoltaic materials, and advanced manufacturing inputs.

The critical point is that the greatest economic value is not created at the point of extraction. It is created through the downstream stages of processing, reduction smelting, manufacturing, and product development. Whether silica originates from the Sio deposit or from Canadian Premium Sand, substantial industrial processing must ultimately occur before the material becomes the silicon used in solar technologies, advanced manufacturing, and semiconductor applications.

Rather than focusing narrowly on one project, Manitoba should be evaluating how to build a fully integrated silica-to-manufacturing supply chain within our province. Mining, processing, refining, transportation, Indigenous participation, manufacturing, and export infrastructure should be examined as components of a unified economic strategy.

The potential exists to create an industrial corridor in which Manitoba resources are transformed into Manitoba-made products by Manitoba workers. Historical examples demonstrate that bulk commodities have long moved through eastern Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg transportation networks. Whether future transportation occurs by road, rail, marine routes, or other infrastructure solutions, the objective should be to maximize value-added production within our province rather than exporting opportunity elsewhere.

It is also noteworthy that Canadian Premium Sand's proposed development has generally been understood as a more conventional silica-mining operation. While every mining project carries environmental considerations and must be evaluated on its own merits, the public debate surrounding Sio Silica has focused on a unique extraction methodology and its potential interaction with groundwater resources. Whether those concerns ultimately prove justified or not, they have contributed significantly to the level of public controversy surrounding the project.

There is also a broader public-interest consideration. For many Manitobans, the debate surrounding Sio Silica has never been solely about economic development. It has also involved concerns regarding the long-term protection of groundwater resources and the potable aquifer relied upon by thousands of residents across southeastern Manitoba. If Manitoba can achieve similar economic, manufacturing, Indigenous partnership, and green-energy objectives through an alternative silica-development pathway, then it is reasonable to ask whether such an approach could reduce public concern while advancing the Province's economic and environmental goals simultaneously.

Mining projects frequently evolve as information becomes available, markets change, technologies advance, and public concerns are better understood. There is nothing unusual or improper about governments, regulators, companies, and communities reassessing the best path forward when new opportunities emerge. Responsible development requires exactly that kind of continual evaluation.

This leads me to a simple question:

If Manitoba already possesses a silica resource capable of supporting a vertically integrated manufacturing strategy, creating jobs, attracting investment, supporting Indigenous participation, and advancing solar and technology industries, why is government attention increasingly focused on a project that continues to generate significant environmental controversy and public concern?

That question deserves a clear answer.

Should Manitoba ultimately determine that an alternative silica-development pathway better serves the public interest, such a decision should not be viewed as a rejection of economic development. Rather, it should be viewed as a strategic evolution of Manitoba's resource and manufacturing policy.

Governments are often called upon to balance economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, public confidence, and long-term provincial interests. If similar manufacturing, employment, Indigenous partnership, and green-energy objectives can be achieved through a

pathway that generates less public concern and carries fewer perceived risks to critical groundwater resources, then choosing that path would not represent a retreat from development. It would represent responsible development.

In that context, the question is not whether Manitoba should participate in the silica economy. The question is how Manitoba can do so in a manner that maximizes public benefit, protects public confidence, and strengthens the Province's long-term economic future.

The current picture appears incomplete. Manitobans are being told that Sio Silica is essential to achieving these economic objectives, yet many of those same objectives appear achievable through an alternative pathway that has received far less public attention.

This is not a call to abandon Manitoba's silica opportunity. It is a call to ensure that the Province is pursuing the pathway that best balances economic growth, environmental stewardship, Indigenous participation, public confidence, and long-term prosperity.

The public deserves a clear explanation as to why one project is being elevated while another appears to be overlooked.

Thank you for your continued efforts to raise important questions on behalf of your constituents and all Manitobans.

Respectfully,

Edwin Giesbrecht

Resident, RM of Springfield

Advocate for Accountability, Transparency, and Responsible Development

As this matter concerns public policy, environmental stewardship, economic development, groundwater protection, and Manitoba's long-term silica strategy, I believe the discussion is of legitimate public interest.