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Staying on top of our number one priority

You've heard the AMM speak many times over about our "number one priority." Education taxation on property has been just that for some time now, and will continue to be for some time to come. Provincial Budget 2005 was released on March 8 and, while this budget is not without a number of positives for municipalities, we obviously have yet to see the kind of longer term plan required to find a solution to the inequitable way we fund education in our province.

The AMM was pleased with November's Throne Speech announcement of a 33% reduction in farmland property taxes, but has always maintained that was simply a good first step – not a solution. Budget 2005 made good on the Throne Speech promise of increasing this to a 50% reduction in farmland property taxes, along with decreasing the Education Support Levy (ESL) by \$30M. While the AMM is very appreciative of these steps, we still have a long way to go before achieving our ultimate goal, which remains the total removal of education funding from property across all classes.

Where does that leave the AMM's "number one priority?" It is clear that this is

a long-term problem that will require long-term lobbying before a permanent solution is delivered. The type of hard lobbying needed requires help from everyone in our membership – from the smallest RM to the largest city. In the coming months, we will be asking our membership to lobby with us as we devise a strategy to continue moving this issue forward. That may mean asking our members to compile information and statistics from your own municipalities, to continue to raise the issue within your councils and communities, and above all, to lobby the provincial government from where you sit – your own council table.

The AMM is a strong voice for Manitoba's municipalities, and we will continue to lobby on your behalf on the many issues you identify as important to municipalities. Some issues, however, require an even greater investment, and education taxation on property is one of those issues. This is an issue that requires all AMM members to work together to present a strong, united lobbying voice. \$

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Budget Day 2005.