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Ron Bell, President

Exciting times for municipalities

Having just returned from the FCM Annual Conference in St. John's, Newfoundland, I am reflecting on the many positive developments we are seeing in the relationships between all levels of government. These are exciting times for municipalities, as we are receiving more recognition from the federal and provincial levels of government than ever before. The new deal for municipalities and more funding for infrastructure projects throughout Manitoba represent a good start at reducing our infrastructure deficit. Certainly, the more we partner with our federal and provincial counterparts the more municipalities stand to benefit. However, these positive developments are accompanied by increased responsibility, as well.

As we inch closer to negotiating the distribution of new deal funding, the AMM has the responsibility to consider the needs of each of our members. It has always been our mandate to ensure all communities, large or small, are represented equally. This will continue to be a priority as the municipal agenda continues to increase in visibility. This balancing act is not without dissension, but the end result will be positive – a fair share of gas tax funding for all municipalities.

The Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (MRIF) is another positive for municipalities. This fund recently awarded \$14 million to a dozen new projects in rural and northern Manitoba, and more projects will be announced after the second intake deadline of June 15. However, the projects awarded represented only a fraction of those submitted for consideration. The Local Consultative Committee on Infrastructure, on which the AMM Executive sits, is charged with a number of responsibilities when recom-

mending projects to be awarded. These include the responsibility to award at least 40% of the funding to green projects, and the responsibility to ensure the funding is awarded strategically, taking into consideration province-wide needs alongside community needs.

With these responsibilities came some challenging discussion and decision-making, but the end result was again positive – a dozen communities making a dent in Manitoba's huge infrastructure needs, with more communities being considered for future funding.

We have seen a number of encouraging developments for municipalities in the Manitoba Legislature recently, as well. *Bill 36, the Courts Administration Act*, will allow municipalities to enforce by-laws in a more cost-effective manner. *Bill 25, the Workers Compensation Amendment Act*, proposes to extend compensation to part-time firefighters. *Bill 29, the Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act*, proposes to make the election process easier to administer. *Bill 33, The Planning Act*, does have areas of concern, but in general the AMM is supportive of the bill and looks forward to many of the improvements to long-term planning that will be achieved by the legislation. The AMM is also pleased with the province's recent decision to allow the provincial water-bomber fleet to assist municipalities in certain emergency operations at no cost to municipalities.

These developments are all encouraging signs that the municipal agenda is indeed moving to the forefront, both provincially and federally. And while an increase in roles and responsibilities is often accompanied by growing pains, the rewards are greater also. \$

“The municipal agenda is moving to the forefront.”