

Throne Speech from the 5th Session of the 38th Legislature

By Tyler MacAfee, AMM Director of Policy and Communications

November 15 marked the start of the fifth session of the current legislature as Lieutenant-Governor **John Harvard** delivered the Speech from the Throne. This year's throne speech was promising for municipalities as a number of long-standing issues drew attention. Highlights included:

- **Infrastructure** - What is being touted as the "largest investment in infrastructure ever made in Manitoba," the speech made a \$4 billion commitment over the next 10 years for Manitoba highways.
- **Inter-facility Patient Transfers** – The speech commits to removing fees for inter-facility ambulance trips, a resolution the AMM has been working on since 1999.
- **Review of RHA system** - There is a commitment to commission an external management review of the RHA initiative, an AMM resolution since 2004.
- **Neighbourhoods Alive! Program** – This program will be expanded beyond just Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson to include other communities across Manitoba. The AMM has been actively lobbying to have this program expanded since 2003 and has made it clear that this needs to be new funding, so those current communities do not see a loss.
- **Libraries** – There is a funding commitment for libraries, an active resolution since 1999.
- **Food Costs in Northern Manitoba** – The Province will test a new form of truck transport (Rocky Mountain

Doubles), similar to the AMM resolution passed at the 2004 Convention. There is also a commitment to increase the Northern Food Allowance to help families in remote communities pay for higher costs of healthy food, something the AMM has been lobbying for since 2002.

Other Highlights from the speech included:

- A commitment to add resources to help police maintain a greater presence in Manitoba communities;
- Five additional *Lighthouses* will be added, which provide safe and fun places for youth to go in the evenings;
- Expansion of the *Turnabout* program that provides both help and firm consequences for children under the age of 12 who aren't subject to federal youth laws;
- Enhanced training of health care professionals;
- Continued commitment to developing wind power, which presents economic development opportunities for rural communities;
- Maintaining the commitment of \$7 million for recreation options in rural and northern Manitoba;
- Continued commitment of funds to clean up contaminated areas, including orphaned petroleum sites and abandoned mines;
- \$50 million for Winnipeg regional roads and bicycle routes; and
- \$12.6 million to cost-share transit on a

50-50 basis with municipalities and also \$5.4 million for handi-transit vehicles throughout Manitoba from the federal Bill C-48 funding.

While there was certainly a lot of good news in the Throne Speech, it did fail to provide any clarification on the responsibilities of implementing the requirements of the *Water Protection Act*. While stricter standards were mentioned, the speech failed to make a firm commitment to assist with the funding of the proposed requirements. Municipal budgets are stretched too thin already and municipalities cannot be left to fund this alone. We will be continuing to deliver this message to government and look forward to a commitment in the 2007 Budget.

On the legislative front, perhaps the most interesting bills introduced in this sitting were two private member bills. The *Phosphorus-Free Dishwashing Detergent Act* calls for a prohibition on the sale of dishwashing detergent containing phosphorus for household use and commercial and industrial use. The second is the *Milk Prices Review Amendment Act* that would require the fixed price for at least one type of fluid milk that is to be charged by retailers throughout the province. We will be following both of these bills to see if they make it to second reading.

The AMM will be closely monitoring the progress of the commitments made in the Throne Speech and will be updating the membership as changes occur. ☺



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