



# Throne Speech addresses municipalities

By Tyler MacAfee, AMM Director of Policy and Communications

Things got back underway at the Manitoba Legislature in September, picking up where they left off from the shortened June sitting. Over the fall months, 20 bills were passed before the first session of the 39<sup>th</sup> Legislature adjourned on November 8.

Of note, the bill creating the new February holiday was passed, as was the bill creating new foundations to create tributes in the memory of peace officers, firefighters and other workers who have lost their lives on the job.

A couple of bills were of note for municipalities. The first was *The Forest Health Protection Act*, which essentially extends the previous *Dutch Elm Disease Act* to other trees. The requirements for municipalities are now extended to these new areas.

A second bill of note is a minor change to *The Planning Act*. Bill 20 closes a minor loophole in the revised *Planning Act* and deals with a situation when two or more existing livestock operations should be treated as a single operation.

After a short week off, Broadway was buzzing again with the Speech from the Throne marking the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the 39<sup>th</sup> Legislature. This session's Throne Speech highlighted a number of initiatives that will be of interest to municipalities.

Under the umbrella of "Green and Growing," the Throne Speech made a \$150 million commitment to rural and northern water and wastewater projects, as well as \$206 million to upgrade all three wastewater treatment plants in Winnipeg as part of tri-level negotiations to address the City of Winnipeg's capital requirements. The AMM will be looking

into whether this is entirely new funding, or if the intent is to recover this funding from existing programs.

The Speech also made mention of requiring the capture of methane emissions from large landfills, which will have positive environmental benefits for the province. A new fuel mandate for biodiesel was also mentioned, as were new restrictions on household use of dishwashing detergents and lawn fertilizers to help protect lakes and rivers. New measures to address cottage and residential septic fields, as well as a new strategy to conserve water were included.

Under the ever-popular banner of tax reductions, the speech indicated that the farmland school tax rebate will increase to 70% in 2008, up from the current 65%. Directed at creating healthy families, the speech committed to an expansion of child-care spaces by another 2,500 over the next two years. In the area of health care, new nurse training spaces will be added at Manitoba's universities and colleges, as well as new training spaces at the University of Manitoba School of Medicine. A new primary-care paramedic program will be introduced at Red River College, and several regions of the province will see new investments, with a new hospital planned for Selkirk, new operating facilities at Ste. Anne Hospital and a redevelopment of the emergency ward at Steinbach's Bethesda Hospital.

Safer communities were also a focus of the speech, which committed to hiring more police officers as the first step in a new commitment to add 100 officers. The expansion of the Lighthouses program to provide more places for young people to play sports, study or go online in the evenings was included, as

was an expansion of the Turnabout program to provide more monitoring and alternative outings for children under 12 who come in conflict with the law.

Northern Manitoba will see the enhancement of the University College of the North's main campus facilities in The Pas and Thompson, with additional satellite university campuses in remote communities. The expansion of training of health professionals for northern areas was indicated, as was the further expansion of the successful Northern Healthy Foods Initiative with the development of a commercial greenhouse at Grand Rapids.

The expansion of the Neighbourhoods Alive! Program to the five communities of Flin Flon, The Pas, Dauphin, Portage la Prairie and Selkirk was also mentioned again. Housing made the speech as well, with the commitment to construct new affordable housing across the province as part of the HOMEWorks! Program, and revitalize over 13,000 public housing units. Also in the speech was a commitment to begin implementing a plan to double funding for recreation facilities across the province including support for proposed facilities in Winnipeg, Brandon, The Pas, Portage la Prairie and the Selkirk Library. The speech also committed to launch the Road to 2010 tourism promotion strategy with a goal of reaching \$2 billion in annual tourism revenue by 2010.

As with each year, the AMM will closely follow the progress of the key initiatives proposed in the speech and ensure that those of benefit to municipalities are fulfilled.

A copy of The Speech from the Throne is available at [www.gov.mb.ca/throne.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/throne.html). ☞

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