

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



**O**n behalf of the Board of Directors of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, I am pleased to present the 2009 Annual Report.

It is hard to believe that my first year as AMM President is coming to a close. If time really does fly when you are having fun, 2009 must have been very enjoyable for me—it went by so quickly.

We achieved success in several areas this past year, most notably disaster financial assistance; MPIC (Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation) rates for emergency vehicles; increased funding for drainage; and a further reduction in education taxes on property. The AMM has lobbied for these changes for years and these highlights prove that steady, repeated effort can and does result in successes for municipalities.

Federally, while we remained appreciative of the Building Canada Fund, we also experienced frustration. The January announcement that the Communities Component was “open for business” was positive, but the tight deadline to apply was a concern. Even more disturbing was the lack of municipal representation on the selection committee. Previous programs, most recently the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (MRIF), included the AMM and gave municipalities a voice in the selection process. We think this is essential to a fair and equitable program and although we were disappointed to have been shut out this year, we are optimistic we will have a seat at the table for the next intake period.

Federally and provincially, our key issue this year was the need for alternate revenue for municipalities to deal with the serious infrastructure deficit facing our communities. We highlighted it at every meeting with Provincial Cabinet Ministers, raised it with every MLA we met with during Lobby Days, and discussed it with Premier Doer during our annual meeting with Cabinet. We have asked the Province to share one per cent of the provincial sales tax with municipalities for infrastructure, and we will continue to push for a fair share. It is simply time for a new approach to municipal finance and we have no intention of backing down.

If our key issue was alternate revenue, its partner was our growing anxiety with downloading. Either through direct off-loading of responsibilities from other orders of government or through stricter or new rules, municipalities are shouldering more of the load. With the revenue stream remaining stagnant, this reality is putting a greater strain on municipalities.

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We made sure to convey this message to government at every opportunity this year.

We raised dozens of other issues during our annual minister meetings, including health care. This continues to be a major issue for municipalities, in itself worrisome as health care is not a municipal issue – a perfect example of downloading. Concerns with the regional health authority system, the requirement for municipalities to contribute 10% to capital projects, and issues around physician recruitment, retention and training all place a great deal of pressure on Manitoba communities. And this is only one example. The many other issues we raised are detailed in the pages of this report.

I would like to bid farewell to Gary Doer who has taken up the post of Canadian Ambassador to the United States. The AMM truly appreciates his dedication to the people of our province and we wish him well. I also welcome Premier Greg Selinger to his new position. I met with Premier Selinger several times in his former role as finance minister and have always found him to be honest and forthright. I believe he will be responsive to the needs of municipalities.

I must also thank my executive team for their hard work over the past year. Without the support of Vice-Presidents Shirley Kalyniuk and Roger Wilson and Executive Director Joe Masi, my work would have been much more difficult—and a lot less enjoyable. The entire Board of Directors deserves a warm thank you as well, for their dedication and hard work throughout the year.

I bid farewell to Parkland directors Rene Maillard and Robert Misko, and welcome incoming directors Betty Nykyforak and Ron Kostyshyn, who I am sure will fill those big shoes admirably. Welcome also to Randy Lints, who took over the Midwestern Director spot vacated by Roger Wilson. New faces around the board table always make for an interesting year and I think we have a really great group of people representing the interests of our members.

My final thank-you is of course reserved for our members. Your support and encouragement throughout the past year meant a great deal to me. You may think you are attending AMM events to learn, but really it is we who learn from you. You bring your knowledge, enthusiasm, and ideas to us and it is that dedication that propels us to carry out our work on your behalf. It is truly your ongoing commitment to your communities that makes Manitoba a great place to live.

**Doug Dobrowolski, President**