

AMPLIFY OUR VOICE

2015 Federal Election Municipal Issues Backgrounder



2015 FEDERAL ELECTION MUNICIPAL ISSUES BACKGROUNDER

During the 2015 federal election, the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) is calling on all federal parties to present platforms that:

- a) empower municipalities to ensure our communities are safe, affordable, provide a high standard of living, and attract investment and jobs;
- b) provide proper funding to build modern and climate-resistant infrastructure and ensure existing infrastructure meets national standards;
- c) increase access to affordable housing; and
- d) allow municipalities to plan and monitor their changing communities and ensure they receive accurate per capita funding from other orders of government through the return of the long-form census.

The following package provides key messages and background information on four major issues facing municipalities when it comes to their relationship with the federal government:

1. **Public safety**
2. **Infrastructure**
3. **Quality of life**
4. **The mandatory long-form census**

Under each section you will find items marked as **Needs**, **Fixes** and **Wins**.

Needs – We would like to see these changes, as they would have a positive impact on our communities.

Fixes – We believe the federal government must revisit or reverse these decisions because of a negative impact on municipalities.

Wins – We see progress and are pleased with these results.

This information will ensure you are well prepared to discuss and debate these issues with local candidates and the general public.

SUMA will provide additional tools for members during the election campaign. We will provide text for letters to the editor and candidates, questions to ask during local debates, regular updates on issues through email and our website, plus shareable social media content through our Facebook and Twitter platforms.

We are also working with our federal counterparts, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM). You can visit their federal election advocacy website at www.hometownproud.ca and sign up for regular updates from them.

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ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

NEED: FUNDING TO IMPROVE RAIL SAFETY

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **allocate targeted funding to municipalities** so they can make the improvements required by new federal regulations to improve rail safety (including grade crossing improvements) introduced in the wake of the Lac-Mégantic disaster.

Realistically, many municipalities simply do not have the funds required to make these types of upgrades — especially considering the many other changes mandated by the federal government via new regulations (such as improvements to wastewater treatment facilities), and the programs downloaded onto municipalities following the cancellation of various federal initiatives.

BACKGROUND:

In the immediate aftermath of the Lac-Mégantic disaster, the federal transportation safety board recommended two immediate changes later implemented by the federal government:

- Dangerous goods should not be left unattended on a main track.
- Rail equipment should be properly secured.

At Convention 2014, SUMA members passed a resolution reading:

Therefore be it resolved that The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association cooperatively with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to lobby the federal Minister of Transport and Transport Canada to improve the regulation and enforcement of rail safety standards and operational limits that may directly affect public safety.

The federal government also introduced new regulations in 2014 aimed at preventing deadly collisions between vehicles and trains.

These regulations clarify the responsibilities of rail companies and road authorities (in many cases, municipalities) and create consistent safety standards at all federally regulated crossings.

These updated safety standards require the installation of new signs and warning lights at rail crossings as the regulations are phased in (complete by November 28, 2021) and will bring all grade crossings throughout Canada to the same standard.

The regulations will ensure enforceable safety levels at approximately 14,000 public and 9,000 private grade crossings across the country.

Under the regulations, municipalities and other road authorities will be required to meet these safety standards when building or altering grade crossings. They must also bring existing grade crossings into compliance through measures such as the introduction of signs and warning systems.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

NEED: EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COLLEGE

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **reopen the Canadian Emergency Management College** to provide comprehensive, collaborative and inter-jurisdictional training for municipal and provincial emergency responders.

BACKGROUND:

The recent dramatic increase in costs related to natural disasters indicates a broader trend in Canada and globally.

In fact, in 2013, a leaked briefing package from Public Safety Canada indicated that rising cost of natural disasters and the financial burden on Ottawa is the country's biggest public safety risk.

For 58 years, provincial and municipal officials, and first responders could access collaborative

emergency management training through the Canadian Emergency Management College. The federal government closed the college in 2012, for annual savings of \$1,000,000 per year (or three cents per Canadian).

Maintaining an interoperable emergency response system is critical to maximize the effectiveness of our mutual aid agreements, and facilitate large-scale deployment of public and private resources.

The loss of the Emergency Management College removed central leadership. We now have a splintered approach through provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, and through community colleges, universities and private sector organizations. Expertise is being lost, training levels are falling, and interoperability is being sacrificed for short-term savings.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

NEED: FUNDING FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE EQUIPMENT

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **reinvest in the Joint Emergency Preparedness Project (JEPP)** to ensure municipal fire departments and other emergency responders have access to the equipment required to respond to emergencies as safely and effectively as possible.

BACKGROUND:

JEPP once enabled the federal government, the provinces and territories, and municipalities to cost-share equipment that increased emergency preparedness and response capacity.

For example, this program provided municipal fire departments with access to the type of equipment needed to respond to emergencies in a safe and efficient manner.

In 2012-13, the federal government ended the program arguing its goals had been met. Once again, the costs for this program have been downloaded onto municipalities who have had to bear the entire cost for emergency response and rescue equipment.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

NEED: ACCESS TO NATIONAL CLIMATE RESEARCH AND RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS, AS WELL AS FUNDING TO BUILD AND ADAPT CLIMATE RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE.

KEY MESSAGES:

For decades, municipalities and other orders of government planned for once-in-a-century natural disasters. Recent years have demonstrated that large-scale natural disasters are occurring with more frequency with a significant financial impact on all orders of government.

To ensure municipalities are as prepared as possible for future disasters and can make informed

decisions about future infrastructure projects, **SUMA is calling on the federal government to provide communities with access to national climate research and risk assessment tools.**

For municipal infrastructure to withstand future climate change, the federal government must update infrastructure standards and help with funding for municipalities to increase long-term resiliency to extreme weather events and large-scale disasters.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

FIX: NATIONAL DISASTER MITIGATION PROGRAM

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **expand the National Disaster Mitigation Program to include ALL natural disasters, to allow direct application from municipalities** (instead of provinces and territories acting as the middle man), and to **fund larger mitigation and infrastructure resiliency projects.**

Mitigation can reduce the impact of natural disasters on vulnerable communities and reduce the costs associated with these events.

BACKGROUND:

In early 2015, the federal government introduced the National Disaster Mitigation Program (NDMP) to reduce the impact of natural disasters on communities across Canada and encourage the development of a flood insurance market in Canada.

Accessible *only* to provinces and territories, which are in charge of selecting which individual municipal projects to fund, if any, the NDMP focuses exclusively on flood mitigation — specifically information gathering and small-scale resiliency projects.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

FIX: DISASTER FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is also calling on the federal government to **reverse recent threshold changes to the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement Program** to prevent the downloading of response and recovery costs onto municipalities by provinces and territories.

BACKGROUND:

The Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement allows provinces and territories to recover a percentage of the losses it pays out under provincial

disaster relief programs. In Saskatchewan, that is the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program (PDAP).

Recent changes by the Government of Canada to the thresholds for provincial reimbursement mean that provinces and territories are responsible for increased costs. This gap in funding may very well be downloaded onto municipalities and taxpayers through corresponding changes to provincial or territorial programs.

ISSUE: PUBLIC SAFETY

WIN: RAIL SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

SUMA was pleased with the short-term measures put in place by the federal government to improve the safety of dangerous goods transport by rail after the July 2013 tragedy where 47 people were killed following a disastrous derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec.

Municipalities have continued to be involved in the process for replacing these temporary directives

with permanent legislation that speaks to information sharing, rail car design, speed and train length restrictions, and other safety-related outcomes.

SUMA is supportive of the federal government working in concert with municipalities and other stakeholders to develop new legislation that will further increase rail safety and help achieve long-term goals for the safe transportation of dangerous goods.

ISSUE: INFRASTRUCTURE

NEED: FUNDING FOR WASTEWATER REGULATION CHANGES

KEY MESSAGES:

While supportive of new regulations governing the management of municipal wastewater effluent, SUMA, alongside municipalities nationwide, is calling for a **new long-term dedicated federal fund** of \$300 million annually for 20 years.

Local and provincial governments would match this funding to assist communities with the capital costs of rebuilding their wastewater systems, in turn ensuring that all Canadians have access to safe water.

Without proper funding, the cost to build such facilities will again be downloaded onto the local taxpayer.

BACKGROUND:

The federal government introduced the *Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations* for the management of municipal wastewater effluent in 2010.

These regulations set new national standards for more than 3,500 wastewater systems across Canada and require that nearly 25 per cent of all existing wastewater treatment systems either be completely replaced or substantially retrofitted.

As with all regulations, however, municipalities are now facing significant capital costs to upgrade wastewater infrastructure — money that many small communities in Saskatchewan simply do not have.

A conservative estimate by FCM puts the capital costs of meeting these regulations in excess of \$18 billion dollars, with at least \$3.4 billion of those costs being incurred before 2020.

ISSUE: INFRASTRUCTURE

NEED: LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE, PREDICTABLE INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **introduce a *permanent, long-term, sustainable, and predictable* infrastructure program** that increases the overall amount of funding available for municipal infrastructure projects.

Any new program must be flexible and should not limit the types of projects that can be funded.

This program must also allow municipalities to choose priority projects.

BACKGROUND:

After decades of underinvestment, Canada's municipalities are facing a significant infrastructure deficit, including crumbling roads, rusting bridges and sewer systems, outdated water treatment facilities, and overcrowded public transportation systems.

While the federal government recently announced a New Building Canada Plan (NBCP) to replace the previous Building Canada Fund that expired March 31, 2014, the new plan has some significant limitations.

The plan is not permanent, it is not flexible when it comes to the types of projects that can receive funding, and municipalities are unable to select priority projects.

The NBCP consists of \$47 billion dollars to be allocated over 10 years broken down as follows:

\$22 billion – \$2 billion a year for 10 years from the federal Gas Tax Fund (includes a two per cent index beginning 2014-15).

\$9 billion – 100 per cent municipal GST Rebate totaling approximately \$900 million a year over 10 years.

\$14 billion – New Building Canada Fund (over 10 years) consisting of:

- **\$4 billion for the National Infrastructure Component:** Project funding will be determined on its merits by the Government of Canada alone and projects must fall under specific categories.
- **\$9 billion for the Provincial/Territorial Infrastructure Component:** A project review committee made up of provincial and municipal representatives will determine project funding and projects must fall under pre-identified categories. The program provides Saskatchewan with \$436.7 million in federal funding over the next 10 years from 2014 — an amount shared between the provincial government and Saskatchewan's more than 800 municipalities.
- **\$1 billion for the Small Communities Fund:** This funding is dedicated to projects located in communities of fewer than 100,000 residents.

\$1.25 billion – P3 Canada Fund – To encourage and support the use of P3s within projects supported by the Government of Canada.

While municipalities own more than 60 per cent of Canada's public infrastructure, they collect only eight cents from every tax dollar paid in Canada, with the balance going to federal, provincial, and territorial governments.

On their own, municipalities don't have the revenue tools to rebuild infrastructure, especially while they are expected to meet growing needs for policing, housing, the environment, and settlement of newcomers, including many responsibilities downloaded from other orders of government.

ISSUE: INFRASTRUCTURE

WINS:

The **federal Gas Tax Fund**, legislated by the Government of Canada in 2005, is a permanent, long-term, sustainable source of infrastructure funding for municipalities.

Since 2014, the federal GTF is indexed annually at a rate of two per cent.

The **GST rebate** delivered approximately \$7 billion to municipalities between 2004 and 2014 and rebated 100 per cent of the GST back to local governments. The current 100 per cent municipal GST Rebate reaffirmed as part of the New Building Canada Plan totals approximately \$900 million/year over 10 years.

ISSUE: QUALITY OF LIFE

NEED: SOCIAL AND ACCESSIBLE HOUSING THROUGH CANADIAN MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION

KEY MESSAGES:

SUMA is supportive of **maintaining the federal government's current commitment from the 2015-16 budget to spend more than \$2.3 billion per year** over the next four years to help ensure Canadians in need have access to affordable housing.

SUMA is calling on the federal government to **establish a Northern Affordable Housing Program** focused on those communities affected by resource development. This funding will help alleviate the strain on existing housing and provide access to affordable housing for labourers employed in the resource sector in these areas.

An increase in the amount of social and affordable rental units and more affordable home ownership can have numerous positive benefits including:

- increased vacancy rates and the ability for growing economies and communities to attract workers and students;
- increased opportunities for low-income earners, seniors, newcomers and young families; and
- reducing the rate of homelessness.

BACKGROUND:

According to a recent report released by FCM (*Built to Last: Strengthening the Foundations of Housing in Canada*, May 2015), the following trends have placed Canada's housing system at risk:

- Ownership costs have risen dramatically and, in many municipalities, young families, people newly entering the workforce, and other would-be first-time buyers can no longer afford to buy.
- Very low levels of new rental construction limit rental housing options.
- The stock of lower-rent dwellings is shrinking as properties are demolished for new condominium development, and as rents rise beyond levels affordable to lower- and moderate-income households.
- Canada's small but vital social housing sector is being put at risk by the termination of long-term federal subsidies.

In 2011, 20 per cent of renters were spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent.

The Government of Canada spends 40 per cent less on housing than it did in 1989. By 2023, there will be a cumulative reduction of more than \$6 billion in federal spending on social housing since 1996.

Between 2001 and 2011 alone, 850,000 units renting below \$800 were lost.

ISSUE: QUALITY OF LIFE
NEED: INITIATE AN INQUIRY OR ROUND TABLE ON MISSING AND MURDERED ABORIGINAL WOMEN AS PER THE RESOLUTION PASSED AT SUMA'S 110TH ANNUAL CONVENTION

KEY MESSAGES:

At Convention 2015, SUMA members passed the following resolution:

Therefore be it resolved that the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association members join with voices in their communities calling for an inquiry or round table on missing and murdered Indigenous women; and

Further be it resolved that the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association lobby the Federal Government, calling for an inquiry or round table on missing and murdered Indigenous women.

BACKGROUND:

The RCMP recently released a report noting that 1,017 women and girls identified as Indigenous were murdered between 1980 and 2012 — a homicide rate roughly 4.5 times higher than that of all other women in Canada.

ISSUE: QUALITY OF LIFE
WIN:

FCM created the **Green Municipal Fund** with a \$550 million endowment from the federal government to support projects that achieve higher standards of air, water, and soil quality, and climate protection.

ISSUE: LONG-FORM CENSUS

NEED: REINSTATEMENT OF THE MANDATORY LONG-FORM CENSUS

KEY MESSAGES:

The end of the **mandatory long-form census** has had a significant negative impact on municipalities' ability to plan and monitor the ever-changing needs of their communities.

Information from the census is essential for municipalities to ensure they are meeting their citizens' needs for service.

The end of the mandatory long-form census has hampered the ability of municipalities (and provinces and territories) to analyze infrastructure needs, and plan for transportation, affordable housing, schools, public health facilities and other essential services.

Since municipalities receive per capita funding from the federal and provincial governments, unreliable census data can also have a negative impact on the funding they receive.

BACKGROUND:

Citing privacy concerns, the federal government cancelled the mandatory long-form census in 2010 and replaced it with a mandatory short-form census and new voluntary National Household Survey that were first executed in 2011.

Many industry professionals, policy makers, and organizations that have historically made use of the data, have argued that the results are less accurate than those obtained via the mandatory long-form census.

In fact, Canada's Chief Statistician resigned in the wake of these changes, publicly noting that a voluntary survey simply cannot be a substitute for a mandatory census.

Groups in support of reinstating the mandatory long-form census include: provincial and municipal governments, urban planners, economists, statisticians, chambers of commerce, unions, medical associations, charities, academics, scientists, business leaders, pollsters, policy makers, boards of trade, and groups representing some of society's most vulnerable.

The projected response rate for a traditional mandatory census is 94 per cent. The first National Household Survey issued in 2011 had a response rate of only 68 per cent.

Upon the release of data, Statistics Canada noted that results of the NHS were considerably less reliable when it came to communities with fewer than 25,000 residents.

In fact, Statistics Canada decided to withhold ALL data on one-quarter (1,128) of Canadian municipalities.

Saskatchewan had the worst survey results, with no information available on 43 percent (500) of the province's communities.

In the wake of the release of some of the data from the 2011 NHS, one editorial noted: "no conclusions about the Canadian population can be drawn from the national household survey. Since making these types of conclusions is the whole point of a census, the survey data is worthless."



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