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NEWS RELEASE

Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus Returns from a Successful AMO Conference

Today, Members of the Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus (EOWC) returned from the annual Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) conference, held in Niagara Falls between August 15th and 19th. The EOWC is comprised of the Heads of Council of the 13 County and Single Tier municipalities of Eastern Ontario. The EOWC focuses its efforts on advocacy for the 750,000 residents of rural Eastern Ontario, developing positions based on research and the interests of its taxpayers. Priority issues for the EOWC in 2015 are equitable infrastructure funding, closing existing cellular coverage gaps (broadband coverage to facilitate better business and emergency response communication), and access to natural gas for rural residents.

At the conference, EOWC members met with its counterpart organization in Western Ontario, the Western Ontario Warden's Caucus and the Eastern Ontario Mayor's Committee (EOMC), to discuss issues of mutual importance and concern. Most notably, at the joint EOWC/EOMC meeting, members ratified the terms of reference for the formation of a Leadership Council, to guide the implementation of the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Strategy. That document, approved in 2014 as a partnership between the EOWC and the EOMC, forms the basis for implementing a truly regional strategy to facilitate economic growth and development throughout all of rural Eastern Ontario.

Highlights of the conference included dedicated meetings with several elected provincial officials, including Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca to discuss the deterioration of the quality of asphalt in Ontario; Minister of Food and Rural Affairs Jeff Leal, to discuss EOWC priorities in general; and a large "Multi-Ministerial" meeting, attended by Minister of Municipal Affairs Ted McMeekin, Minister of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure Brad Duguid, Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli, and Yasir Naqvi, Minister of Safety and

Correctional Services. The EOWC used this panel as a forum to advance its priority issues with key cabinet members. In addition to issues already mentioned, the EOWC took the opportunity to raise several other important issues for local taxpayers, including the increasing cost of policing and joint and several liability, where municipalities can be forced to pick up the tab in lawsuits where they may be found as little as 1% at fault.

While at the conference, EOWC members met with members of both the Progressive Conservative and NDP caucuses. Discussion was again centered around the priorities of the EOWC, and how to best advance the interests of rural Eastern Ontario.

Eric Duncan, Warden of SDG County and Chair of the Caucus, said "It is important that the EOWC continues to take every available opportunity to advance its issues, and the annual AMO conference is a great venue to meet with not only elected government officials, but opposition MPP's, key staff members, and external organizations such as the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. This year, I think we achieved our goal of having very frank conversations about important topics with a wide variety of people, as we continue to work collectively to effectively represent the interests of the residents and businesses of our region of Ontario."

Lanark County councillors met directly with Minister of Energy Bob Chiarelli to discuss electricity rates for rural customers and increased access to natural gas. "We had the opportunity to talk directly with Minister Chiarelli," said Lanark County Warden Keith Kerr (Tay Valley Reeve). "His ministry supports our position on the natural gas file. We will continue to press Enbridge to increase distribution of natural gas for our rural residents, farms and businesses. We need the expansion of natural gas to happen in a timely manner to provide energy price relief to residents and allow our businesses to compete and prosper."

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