

**Remarks for AMO President Gary McNamara
2016 Annual AMO Conference
Caesars Windsor, Plenary Hall, Colosseum Theatre
Windsor, Ontario
Monday, August 15, 2016, 9:10 a.m. – 9:20 a.m.**

Thank you.

This is my last address as AMO's President.

This conference is THE event for AMO... and each year we work hard to make sure that it's THE event for Ontario's municipalities.

It takes more than a year to plan it.

In fact, we're already thinking about next year's conference in Ottawa – but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

We're in the moment now... in Windsor.. and Essex County.

My home community of Tecumseh is just down the road.

I'm proud to call this part of the province home.

Anyone who cares about Ontario's communities is welcome here.

That common thread ties us together.

You just heard from Premier Wynne.

I want to thank her for having her door open to me during the past two years. She sets the tone.

Most of her Cabinet is here.

Ontario's Opposition Leaders and many of their caucus colleagues are here.

Patrick Brown and Andrea Horwath will be hear this afternoon.

They're *all* here because they *all* want our communities to succeed.

They're also here because *you* are here.

They want *your* support – and *we* want them to earn it.

All is as it should be.

AMO has been around for 117 years – and I've been around long enough to know this:

At every conference, there has *ALWAYS* been something that we work together to solve.

There's always been challenges.

There's always been things we're happy about.

There's always been things we're mad about.

There's always been achievements we can be proud of.

That has *always* been the case, and it always will be.

We believe AMO is a meeting place, where governments – municipal, provincial AND federal – can get together, work together and find solutions together.

A lot of that happens here, at this event.

There's something like 300 delegation meetings alone.

Many of you have come a long way to bring your community's top challenges, *straight to the top*.

It all happens here.

You can learn a lot from the person beside you.

Introduce yourself.

You didn't get this far by being shy.

We appreciate your participation here. It makes AMO stronger.

By listening to one another, and by supporting one another, we can and do achieve more.

Take it from those of us who have been coming to this conference for years.

Things happen for us when we are united – and things happen to us when we are divided.

We look out for each other.

Like good neighbours, we pitch in to build things that none of us could build alone.

Several of your peers have stepped forward to serve on AMO's Board.

It's a great honour and a great experience. It requires time, energy and travel.

Please join me in thanking all those who have served for the last two years – and all those who aspire to.

On Wednesday, the torch will pass to Lynn Dollin, Deputy Mayor of Innisfil.

Two more sleeps Lynn... two more sleeps.

She'll be a great President, and I look forward to supporting her as an active Past President.

I'm proud of AMO's accomplishments over the past two years – and I'm proud of our determination to change our communities for the better.

Later this morning, Nik Nanos will present his latest polling research, but I'll provide a teaser.

More people have faith in municipal governments.

And *more* people appreciate the value and importance of municipal services.

Across Canada, municipal priorities are shared by the masses... and they've been embraced by the new Government of Canada.

Obviously, FCM's has helped achieve that, and we work well together.

For the first time ever, Canada's Infrastructure Minister came to AMO's office, because the Government of Canada understands the need to work with Ontario's municipal governments.

We appreciate that.

We've proven that we are effective partners on infrastructure and economic stimulus programs.

We've pushed to provide input on the design and delivery of these initiatives.

The newest is \$1.5 billion for transit in Ontario, and \$570 million for water and wastewater.

As you have just heard, the funding agreement is a work in progress – and we want to make sure they get it right.

It's intended to target repair and rehab projects that can be wrapped up in about two years.

We want to get started.

AMO has promoted stronger ties between the Federal and municipal orders of government.

For example, in Ontario, Federal Gas Tax Funding is predictable and it flows directly to you, through AMO.

Outside of Ontario, Federal Gas Tax dollars flow to provincial governments, and municipalities submit applications for it.

Over the past decade the Federal Gas Tax Fund has injected about \$7 billion into Ontario communities.

For many years, AMO and the province have called for a Federal Housing strategy.

It's on its way.

Here again, AMO wants the Federal Government to work with Ontario's municipalities as it creates its housing strategy.

It took us more than a decade to reverse provincial downloading... but we are now eight years into a 10 year plan to *UPLOAD* Provincial costs from the municipal property tax base.

Ontario's municipalities used to send about \$1.6 billion annually to the provincial treasury.

The province worked with us to change that – and it opened the door to municipal infrastructure investment.

The Ontario government is committing record investment of its own.

There's \$130 billion for public infrastructure over 10 years.

The Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, or OCIF, is growing from \$100 million to \$300 million annually.

There's \$2.6 billion more for Moving Ontario Forward and the Connecting Links program.

They've given us more than \$1 billion for infrastructure since 2008.

That doesn't include Provincial Gas Tax funding for Transit... which was worth more than \$320 million in 2014 alone.

We appreciate all this progress... and we like to give credit where credit is due.

At the same time, we don't move our communities forward by sitting back and resting on our achievements.

AMO will always advocate for change, when and where change is needed.

Emergency service costs have been a key concern throughout my term.

The goal is obvious: all Ontario communities must have safe, effective and affordable emergency services.

Municipalities do what they can to achieve that – but the Ontario government must do its part as well.

We led the charge on the need to modernize policing.

Our white paper, and its 34 recommendations, struck a nerve.

It's been downloaded more than 7,000 times.

We *proved* that change was warranted, possible and overdue.

We are now working *with* the province on the first review of Ontario's Police Services Act in 25 years.

We are also working to restore faith in Ontario's interest arbitration process.

Police and firefighters should get wage and benefit increases that other people can relate to.

They're the most highly paid employees we have... and they should be... within reason.

But we can't pay them increases at the expense of other services that keep communities safe and healthy.

We value their service.

We also value safe roads and bridges, good winter maintenance, safe drinking water, paramedics, effective public health services, economic development, housing, and social services.

We have to deliver it all – and the Ontario government needs to ensure that we can.

So we continue to work on interest arbitration.

Getting consensus with union associations on changes to on process matters is the easy part.

The real challenge is capacity to pay.

Arbitrators must fairly evaluate a municipality's capacity to pay increases.

Arbitrators are unelected and unaccountable... so they should have to follow clear criteria.

Discussions continue. It's been tough.

Look at the increases that police and fire have been receiving, compared to the increases that other municipal employees negotiated.

The difference is staggering... and its costing us dearly.

Provincial inaction on interest arbitration cost us \$485 million between 2010 and 2014.

Meanwhile, the province is mulling over the Ontario Professional Firefighter Association's proposal to create 'Fire Medics'.

It would allow certified firefighters to provide emergency medical responses. It sounds simple – but it has a number of challenges.

This Fire Medics proposal suggests a municipality would decide if it wants to go down that road.

But we know, under the current interest arbitration system, an arbitrator could impose this on us, just like we saw with 24/7 shifts... and salary awards.

Interest arbitration issues used to hide deep in the plumbing.

Not anymore.

They are now a common topic for newspaper articles, columns and editorials. People get it.

As Buddha said, there are three things you cannot hide for long: the sun, the moon and the truth.

Sooner or later, people connect the dots – and change often follows.

We see the same thing happening on municipal insurance costs and the rise in premiums.

Canadians want to toboggan, play road hockey, skateboard, hike trails, and drive ATVs and snowmobiles.

Municipalities get that.

We also know that lawyers are using municipal property taxes to pay for other people's negligence.

They know it too.

Taxpayers are waking up to this.

The legal convention of joint and several liability is working its way out of the plumbing and into editorial pages.

A couple of years ago, the Province had a proposal to help protect property tax payers and create reasonable limits on municipal liability.

We were close to a getting better approach... but insurance lawyers rallied, and the Province got cold feet.

The lawyers won that round... but we will win eventually... because you can only hide the sun, the moon and the truth for so long.

At the core of our interests – is to be treated as a mature order of government.

It's nice to be told that we are trusted and respected, but actions and legislation are a better measure.

There are a lot of pots to watch in this program – including pot!

The Federal government wants to legalize it.

Rest assured that AMO is on top of that.

The stakes are high.

Increased marijuana use has the potential to create new planning, policing and social service impacts.

It will be taxed, and some of that revenue should go to municipalities.

Over the next three days, you can get up to speed on all these priorities and many more.

We will be tweeting extensively, using our @AMOPolicy account.

Check out our our newly updated website – amo.on.ca – where you can get lots more detail.

At any given time, AMO is working on about 50 different policy files.

Much of that work needs to answer the questions.

How can we afford this? How will we pay for that? Can we stretch tax dollars further?

Can we say, “Yes. We can deliver that”... or how will we say, “No. We can’t afford to do that?”

AMO has taken on one project that weaves through this.

I invite you to stay for the next session as we look at our long-term fiscal future.

It is something that we all need to understand.

We all need to ponder solutions and then build appropriate plans.

It is important work for each of us.

It has been an honour to serve as AMO’s President for the past two years.

It’s an amazing – and sometimes exhausting – experience that takes you on a journey across Ontario... and through the dreams and challenges of our diverse communities.

My service was made possible thanks to the support of my Council colleagues, the staff at Tecumseth, and at Essex County.

I can’t say enough about AMO’s staff. They do amazing work for us.

And I have to thank my wife, Heather. She has always been patient, but it is one thing to say you have to work late, and another to say you have to rush out of town for two days.

In many ways, we took this role on together.

Finally, like everything else related to AMO, I want to thank all of you for making my opportunity possible.

AMO is what we all make it – and it is up to all of us to make AMO work as well as it possible can.

Thank you.