



Northern Administrators Association Kicks Off

See inside.

Upcoming

New North
AGM, June 27th,
Coronet

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

**NEW
NORTH**

This month ..

- Feds Make Wildfire Mitigation Funding Available
- MRS Eligibility Criteria Revealed
- NMA Amendments Overview
- Events Round-up
- FASD in the North

Monthly Newsletter
April 2019

Feds Announce Wildfire Mitigation Funding for North

Located deep within the boreal forest as all northern municipalities are, it's been a sore point for northern leaders and residents for many years that very little funding is made available to help secure their communities against the impact of a catastrophic wildfire incursion.

The wildfire emergency through most of the north in 2015, and on the east side a few years later, didn't really change government's disposition too much. Federal funding was made available to First Nations communities in the north to thin trees, but the municipalities in the north were left out.

The April announcement by the federal government has changed all that.

Starting this year, and for the next 9 years, we will see funding available for municipalities to undertake fuel mitigation initiatives to help protect themselves from wildfire threats.

In all, the federal government approved funding for 141 projects, with a significant portion of those projects landing in the north. SaskPower also received funding to do tree clearing around power lines, and the Ministry of Environment will match the federal funding they received to undertake work on Crown land; much of that land borders the northern communities.

The announcement follows the Ministry of Environment's submission to the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund earlier this year.

New North presented an overview of the ministry's submission to northern leaders for their approval at the November 2018 Mayor and Councillor Gathering. A resolution by members supporting the proposal was submitted as part of the application to the federal program.

The planning of the first of the projects is to begin very shortly, the first step being the hiring of a project manager to oversee community consultations and project design. The level of involvement of community leaders in the project design will be up to them; no municipal project can go ahead without community sign-off. It is hoped and expected that locals will do the bulk of the work.

More information about project roll-outs will be available soon.

As part of the same announcement, Ile a la Crosse is to receive \$400,000 for a crime prevention initiative. The initiative is called Healing on the Land, and will see groups of young people taken on to the land to learn traditional ways from Elders and residents.

Pelican Lake First Nation and Witchekan Lake First Nation also received similar funding.

The federal government also pledged \$12.5 million for 50kms of improvements along Highway 55 east of Carrot River, to be matched by the provincial government. ■

NewNorth News & Updates

New North Annual General Meeting: June 27

Notice is given that the New North Annual General Meeting will be held on June 27, at the Prince Albert Coronet, starting at 9am.

As per every one of these, New North will present for review our Annual Report, our Annual Financial Statements, the approved 2019 budget as well as our work plan for the year (see below).

Resolutions

Although resolutions can be put forward at any New North meeting, the AGM is generally where communities bring

them up for debate. Resolutions need to be submitted to the New North office at least a few weeks before the meeting date; ideally, we would like to circulate the resolutions to the membership so they can have a good think about them.

Agenda Items Requested

We've invited a bevy of ministers to the Gathering—including the Premier—but apart from that, the agenda is wide open at this point. If members would like us to invite anyone in particular, or to see a particular item featured, now is the time to let us know! ■

New North 2019-2020 Plan to Focus on Administrative Capacity, Regional Co-Operation, Wildfire Mitigation Planning, Among Others

Since 2017, the New North Executive has made building northern municipal administrative and governance capacity a key part of their strategic plan. A major focus of that plan this year will be advocating for what we are calling the Northern Administrative Circuit Rider program—modelled on the northern water and sewer circuit rider program, which is funded through the NMTA and overseen by its Board, and administered by ATAP. The next few years will likely see not insignificant challenges for many northern municipalities—some of whom are already struggling with administrative challenges—as new compliance requirements for revenue sharing (among other things) kick in. The administrative circuit rider program is pitched as an additional support system for administrators and elected officials, and will be focused on both building *and* supplementing local capacity, provide training and “onboarding” to administrators and clerks and assurance to elected officials that all boxes are getting ticked.

The launch of the Northern Administrators Association by the NMTA Management Board in April is the first of many initiatives the NMTA MB will be rolling out in the next little while, and New North will continue to support their implementation as best we know how.

Another initiative we are looking forward to being a part of is the Targeted Sector Support program. To be co-managed by Government Relations, SUMA, SARM and New North, the program will provide pathways for municipalities interested in exploring regional co-operation opportunities with the municipality or First Nation that recently creamed them on the ice.

And to help build municipal governance capacity in the north we will continue to work with governance guru Laurent Mougeot, whose workshop in April was rated as one of the best we've ever had.

In addition to our usual advocacy and lobbying activities, New North runs about a dozen projects a year, give or take. In the 18 months from the beginning of 2018 to now, we held 5 Mayor and Councillor Gatherings, 4 Administrators Conferences, 2 Waterworks, 2 Northern Justice Symposiums, administered funds for 3 ministries, hosted 2 or 3 other events on behalf of other agencies, engaged in countless consultations, reviewed—and attempted to make intelligent comments on—dozens of bits of legislation, and published 150,000 words in more than a dozen newsletters, just like the one you're reading now.

The plan this year is to continue to do all of that, but with some new emphases. For example, we heard at the Empowering Our Communities event earlier this year a desire to see the Framework for Community Policing reviewed and updated. As well, communities are looking at the success of the pilot Community Safety Officer program and asking for that to be enhanced and rolled out more broadly. A Northern Justice Symposium is already planned for March 2020 to continue the work of forming communities of practice to address the disproportionately high impact of the criminal justice system on northern and Indigenous people.

We will also continue to provide material support to the Embracing Life Committee, which works to reduce the impact of suicide in the north, and whose most recent successful initiative was the Embracing Life Through Cultural Healing youth conference back in March.

And, of course, this year will be the first year of the wildfire mitigation program, which will deliver dozens of mitigation and firesmart projects in the north over the next 9 years. Quite apart from everything else, we intend to be deep in the coarse woody habitat with a chainsaw and hardhat—not literally, of course; we don't want to cut our knees off, but you get the idea. ■

Ministry of Government Relations Unveils Eligibility Criteria for MRS

One of the principles of the new revenue sharing arrangement announced earlier in the year and furiously debated all through last year was to see if the transfer could be used to support and encourage good governance and greater transparency in the municipal sector.

The answer is: yes. Some of this work will be done through the Targeted Sector Support program, which is being created out of a carve-off from municipal revenue sharing to the tune of \$1.5 million annually. (Another, longer-standing, carve-off from revenue sharing supports the work of the Ombudsman's office.)

From 2020 and enforced in 2021, government will be setting some eligibility criteria for municipalities to receive the grant. Most of these are fairly straightforward and easily achievable. For the north, though, some will certainly present a challenge.

The eligibility requirements are:

1. **Submitting an Audited Financial Statement;**
2. **Submitting waterworks reporting, if applicable;**
3. **Considered "in good standing" for Education Property Tax remittance;**
4. **Adoption of a Council Procedures Bylaw;**
5. **Adoption of an Employee Code of Conduct; and**
6. **Council members filing and annually updating Public Disclosure Statements.**

Municipalities have been required to have an employee code of conduct bylaw and a council procedures bylaw since 2015,

and the annual public disclosure statement requirement came into effect then as well. (Elected officials that haven't submitted their statements are in breach of *The Northern Municipalities Act*—which means they are technically disqualified.)

The submission of a waterworks statement is also a long-standing requirement, as is the annual submission of audited financial statements. At this point it isn't clear if the financial statements need to come with an "unqualified" opinion; we suspect not.

We are not sure what being "in good standing for Education Property tax remittance" means—presumably it just means being caught up.

As communicated in *Municipalities Today*, the government's official municipal newsletter (slogan: subscribe to *Today, today!*), the compliance program will roll out thusly:

1. Sometime in fiscal 2020-21 (ie, next year), the ministry will ask for the annual declaration to confirm eligibility for the grant. This confirmation will apply to the 2021 municipal year.
2. From that year on, municipalities will have to declare annually that they are in compliance with the six eligibility requirements we listed above.

As of now, the ministry hasn't decided how they will do the declaration bit; perhaps it will mostly be a self-reporting regime, backed by random audits?

Failure to declare, or declaring and not meeting eligibility, may result in revenue sharing getting held back until you make it right. Or at least that is our guess. ■

Register for SUMA's Towns, Villages and Northern Communities Sector Meeting & Building a Better Workplace Workshop

Packing two events back to back is a great way to efficiently cover a lot of territory, and that's what SUMA is planning to do May 8 and 9 in Prince Albert.

May 8 is a Building Better Workplaces workshop to "help make your municipality the most attractive place to work so you can find, and keep, employees that enhance your hometown."

On May 9, they are holding their Towns, Villages and Northern Communities Sector meeting. Like our Gatherings, these are always great opportunities to discuss current issues with other elected officials and get lunch. In attendance will be the

Minister of Government Relations, Warren Kaeding, a local MLA, and you, hopefully.

A feature of the May 8 workshop is a panel discussion on dealing with difficult residents. This is the kind of presentation that our members have requested of us so we are very happy SUMA is putting this on. They will also have the workplace harassment session we hosted back in November. It was good then, and well worth sitting through again.

The workshop cost \$65, and is at the Art Hauser Centre—we think it's in the Ches Leach lounge (yes, we just checked).

The sector meeting is in the same place, but the next day, of course. Go to SUMA's website to register. ■

Of Course *The Northern Municipalities Act* Amendments Will Create a Rift in the Space-Time Continuum ...

The NMA has been “open” since the summer to see whether any of it—or all of it—could do with a new coat of paint, a spit-shine and maybe some new tires.

New North, the NMTA Management Board, Northern Municipal Services, administrators and elected officials have all been provided the opportunity to submit their zaniest amendment ideas—some of which have actually made it through the nit-picking and “are you kidding me?” stages, to be where we are now: the potential draft amendments consultation and “get a load of this” stage.

Right now, everything in the suite of proposed amendments is open for critical review. Nothing is set in stone. So take a look and get back to us with your comments. The full 60 pages of amendments are up on the New North website, and have been emailed to municipal offices. Below is a quick summary of some of the amendments of greatest interest ...

Every Municipality Required to Appoint an Administrator

The one proposed amendment that may cause some consternation is the requirement that every municipality, regardless of size, will have to “establish the position of administrator.” Currently, communities with populations of 500 or less can hire a clerk (or an administrator if they so wish). If the amendment goes through, every municipality in the north will need to make sure their administrator is on the path to getting certified as per *The Urban Municipal Administrators Act*, or is already certified. This will be an extremely difficult bar for many smaller northern municipalities to reach; it’s already a difficult bar for larger communities to reach.

Of course, councils can appoint an acting administrator, and acting administrators don’t have to meet all qualification requirements—but they have all the same powers. In all practical respects, what this change will mean is that, unless the applicant is actually certified, any new appointments to what we now, for simplicity sake, refer to as an administrator or clerk position will henceforth be appointments as *acting* administrators; there will no longer be a “clerk” designation in the Act. Actually, this should always have been the practice: it is an offence in the urban administrators legislation to give yourself the title “administrator” in a municipal setting without being one in accordance with standards set out in that Act.

Administrator in Charge of Hiring and Firing

A new section will enable administrators to be in charge of hiring and firing employees—*unless otherwise provided by council*. It is not currently really clear in the Act who has responsibility for employees, with the exception of administrators themselves, who are the employees of council. In any case, this amendment is probably only a clarification of what is already happening in most larger municipalities, where the administrator is delegated responsibility for looking after the municipality’s human resources. In the really old northern municipal legislation, it was actually the mayor and deputy mayor who had the responsibility to oversee the conduct of employees. The trend nowadays is for a much clearer, and cleaner, division between the responsibilities of council and administrators. This is especially so when it comes to employees. An implication of the proposed amendment may be that the hiring and firing of employees (and all other matters related to employee conduct) would default to the administrator in the absence of an overarching policy established by council.

Municipalities Can “Give Notice” in Anyway They See Fit—But Be Careful with this One

With the decline of print media and the rise of digital forms of communication, it is no longer really feasible for municipalities to publish public notices in newspapers as per the current legislation. The proposed amendments to the Act will allow municipalities to choose some other form of giving notice—like their website, Myspace page or a popular monthly newsletter—as long as that medium is specified in a public notice policy adopted by bylaw. Now, how you *give notice* of the public notice policy bylaw that *is itself* the thing that is establishing the form of giving notice is not clarified in the proposed amendment, so we guess municipalities will just have to hope residents will “divine” the existence of the public notice bylaw

and not dwell too much on the self-collapsing logic of this amendment because now you’ve just gone and destroyed the universe.

Can’t Go More than 60 Days without a Meeting

An amendment to Section 140 will ensure that councils cannot go more than two months without a meeting.

Council Can Make Policy Regarding Absences

Currently, if a council member has to take an extended leave of absence council needs to make a resolution granting the leave. With the amendment, council can create a leave of absence policy and have it as part of their council procedures bylaw.

Agricultural Exemptions from Taxation (Greenhouses)

“Buildings that are used to grow plants in an artificial environment” are exempt in the current Act, but will no longer be exempt with this amendment. You can at least partly thank the legalization of cannabis for the removal of the exemption: if left in there, any grow-op could be set up in the north, make millions of dollars, and pay no property taxes. Of course, community greenhouses and municipal-owned greenhouses would still be exempt.

Municipalities Can Finance Clean Energy Improvements

A really interesting amendment would allow municipalities to run their own green energy home or business improvement program allowing the municipality to fund a clean energy improvement, like a solar panel installation, the cost of which could be added to the home or business owners’ property taxes. The amount due with respect to the improvement would be considered a “lien on the land.”

Minister’s Powers to Issue Directions and Dismiss

Section 420 of the NMA is the bit of the Act that sets out the powers of the Minister of Government Relations to “direct or dismiss” following an “official examination.” Because of the potential for the words “official examination” to set your mind a-racing, the Act actually defines what it means by that. Currently, an official examination refers to an audit, an inspection or inquiry, and an Ombudsman’s report. An amendment to the Act adds investigations, reviews, reports and findings issued by authorities under *The Saskatchewan Employment Act*, and anything the Privacy Commissioner pumps out. The former has been added to support the sections dealing with the new protection from reprisal sections of the Act relating to municipal employees who report wrong-doings, but it could be applied more broadly, too. In recent years elected officials have been found at fault, following official investigations, in cases of workplace harassment, but the minister has not really had the power to take action. Now the minister will have that power.

An additional sub-section also provides for municipal officials to obtain an outcome based on natural justice in cases where the minister has decided to direct or dismiss. Rather than abruptly and arbitrarily taking action, the procedure set out in the Act will be that the minister will write to the party affected (whether municipality, elected or appointed official), tell them the decision that’s about to be made, and give them the chance to change the minister’s mind. Of course, the “right of reply” is a tenet of procedural fairness and so should be there anyway, but we think by including this backstop the ministry is signalling that they will perhaps be using this section a little more often, as opposed to the practically never, as it is now.

As well, a new sub-section will allow for the minister to consult with any other “association or organization” before making a decision. We just want to tell them they can do that now, if they like.

Operating Grants Now Called Revenue Sharing

The government used to refer to the revenue sharing program as the municipal operating grants program (MOG), and immediately regretted ever calling it that, for the simple reason that municipalities then starting clamouring for some kind of municipal *capital* grant program. (Of course, in the north we do have a capital program, *as well as* NRS, so ...). This amendment will sweep away the last remnants of that semantic bungle. ■



New North Waterworks: April 10 & 11

Altercation Breaks Out Over Correct Pronunciation of “Algae” at New North Waterworks. Again.

Very few people will know the name John Snow—unless you watch *Game of Thrones*, in which case you’d be thinking of a different John Snow (one whose name is also spelled differently). The John Snow I am talking about is a guy who lived in 19th London and is regarded as the father of water treatment. It’s one of the minor tragedies of the modern age that John Snow’s contribution to water and wastewater treatment isn’t commemorated with some kind of annual jar testing ritual and his portrait isn’t on display in every water and sewer works, unlike that of the Son of Lyanna Stark, the late Prince of Dragonstone, which, of course, is.

Anyway, John Snow is the person who, using some ingenious research methods and without consulting Google even once because it didn’t exist then, discovered that cholera—which was on one of its periodic death-bringsings through the inner-city neighbourhoods of London, England at the time—was not contracted through the air, as was commonly thought, but through the water people were collecting from the neighbourhood well. In point of fact, the contents of the well was as much water as it was effluent, but the locals thought it was OK because at least it wasn’t *entirely* effluent, and even if it was, drinking that couldn’t kill you. Except, of course, it was. No one believed John Snow when he told them drinking water from contaminated wells was killing them. We think he could have convinced them with a really simple experiment: get them to drink a glass of contaminated water. If they survived the night—or at least retained most of their lower intestine in the correct position—then he could happily concede he was wrong. But he wasn’t.

All of this, of course, is just a drawn-out way of leading into why we go to extraordinary lengths to make sure the water we drink is kept very separate from the water that smells kind of funny, and why treating the latter before it finds its way into the former, via a surface water body or drip drip dripping into an aquifer, is so vitally important. Cholera is one heck of a way to go.

A fact that everyone finds surprising when they hear it is that wastewater, or sewage, is actually over 99% pure water. It’s the less than 1% of it—the solids—that creates the problem. Solids come in two shapes: suspended solids are the ones

you can see. Dissolved solids have joined the liquid and are now a part of it, and, like sugar mixed in with hot coffee, change the character of the liquid, usually making it worse, unless it’s a Timmy’s, which was worse to begin with.

The New North Waterworks Workshop in Prince Albert over April 10 and 11 was full of these types of facts, ones you could insert into any dinner party conversation and send everyone into thoughtful silence. One thing we found particularly interesting was the discussion on bacteria in the Enviroway CEU session led by Vishal Behari.

We commonly think of bacteria as a bad thing that can kill you. Which it can certainly be. But bacteria is really just another kind of organism, with no inherent good or bad qualities, that likes to eat things and reproduce, just like we do, go to weddings and poison everyone, which ... we don’t.

But bacteria’s most fearful quality—how rapidly it eats, destroys and reproduces—can also be harnessed to do good. Devouring all the bad stuff in wastewater, for example, is one thing that bacteria can do. In fact, bacteria, properly motivated, can eat just about anything. Single-use plastic bags, for instance, are a scourge on the environment because nothing can break them down. But plastic bags that are made of something bacteria likes to eat would solve the problem overnight. Not literally, of course: that would be scary.

The other CEU session, on Lagoon Operation and Maintenance, was led by Josh Buniak from ATAP. This, too, was extremely well received, as most northern communities use lagoons to treat their wastewater. If you’re ever out at your lagoon you can check in on the “health” of the micro-organic processes going on by observing the colour of the pond. If it’s a clear dark green, it’s good. If it’s brown, you’ve got a low oxygen problem, which could mean that toxic substances are getting in. A blackish green means there is blue-green algae in it, and grey means there is algae in it, but the algae is dead. Red or pink means it has sulphur bacteria in it, and bright flames shooting into the night sky means you’re probably looking at the landfill.

Once again, we thank our sponsors for financially supporting the event, and the WSA’s Kerry Desjarlais for her expertise, guidance and high energy levels throughout. ■

Chelsea Laskowski begins an investigation into the services and supports available to address the impact of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder in northern Saskatchewan ...

Probing Why FASD Matters in the North: A Series

BY Chelsea Laskowski

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. It's a phrase that, in newspapers and on the nightly news, you're probably used to seeing in the context of court cases. Individuals with FASD have grabbed grizzly headlines: a teenager in Saskatoon who killed baby Nikosis Jace Cantre was diagnosed with FASD after her brutal crime and the La Roche mass shooter has been acknowledged in court as having FASD.

Lawyers in both those cases used the diagnoses to argue for specialized treatment for their clients. FASD also factored into arguments for youth sentences. And yet, diagnoses were not sought until after the individual's crimes were committed.

FASD is a disorder that people are born with — it doesn't only surface after serious crimes are committed. So why do we seem to hear most about FASD in the courtroom, in relation to adults and youths, when it's a lifelong issue?

That's something we're going to explore in this article, with more to come in the future. But first, we're going to touch on the basics of FASD.

What is it?

Simply put, FASD is a brain injury caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol. This means there's a risk that a child will have FASD if its mother drank during pregnancy. As the term "spectrum" implies, much like autism, there is a range of the impact that alcohol exposure has after birth. This depends on when the fetus was exposed to alcohol while in utero. The alcohol comes in through the bloodstream, something that was first scientifically explored in 1973.

Regardless of whether the symptoms are mild or extreme, they will remain

with anyone who has FASD for the rest of their lives (but many argue that working with a child from a young age can help their brain develop significantly and mitigate the effects of the brain injury). The physical features associated with FASD are smooth ridges between the upper lip, small heads and flat cheekbones, but 90 per cent of people with FASD do not have any physical signs, according to the FASD Network of Saskatchewan

"For the most part, FASD is invisible... Most

people think that you can see FASD so a lot of times it's just seen as bad behavior because that's sometimes how it manifests. If there's sensory issues or if people are falling behind, sometimes the behavior comes out," said Andrea Cotlar-Livingston, the network's executive director.

Health Canada tells us that cognitive conditions like poor memory, learning disabilities, difficulty in school and poor reasoning and judgment skills are commonly linked to FASD. These conditions have far reaches into family life and school life. A child with FASD can fail to understand consequences,

struggle to process language and to follow directions, have difficulty learning and remembering, have poor comprehension of social rules and expectations and have behavioural problems or impulsive behaviours, according to a provincial FASD guide for educators.

Up until last year, there were no numbers on FASD prevalence in Canada. We followed the assumption that we were in line with the United States, where around one per cent of the population has FASD, journalist

Vanessa Hrvatin said in a recent Postmedia podcast. But the results of a general population survey in Toronto last year (the first large-scale study on FASD in Canada) completely blew those numbers out of the water. Researchers

found Canada's FASD rates were closer to somewhere between three or four per cent — and that's expected to be an underestimate.

The prevalence of FASD in Canada is expected to be greater than that of autism and cerebral palsy combined, Hrvatin wrote in a recent series on FASD. So what kind of supports are

there for FASD in northern Saskatchewan?

The FASD Network of Saskatchewan is the most visible, and its offices are located in Saskatoon. The network has one outreach worker who covers all areas of the province outside of Saskatoon and Regina, which admittedly makes it impossible to have a permanent physical presence in the north, said executive director Cotlar-Livingston.

Instead, the network relies on Skype, email and phone calls to communicate with people who want to reach out for guidance and support. The network offers training for frontline workers, foster parents, educators and community organizations that can be delivered via telehealth and the outreach worker travels up north for presentations a few times per year. The idea is to give people tools to improve their response to the needs of those around them who they suspect or know have FASD.

"We don't want to go in and tell people what they need to do. We want to work with the community and try to help them build capacity in their own community to support individuals," Cotlar-Livingston said.

"... there isn't a cheerleader for offering FASD-specific programming in the north right now, nor are there any support groups ... The closest support group is in Prince Albert."

"For the most part, FASD is invisible ... Most people think that you can see FASD so a lot of times it's just seen as bad behavior because that's sometimes how it manifests."

However, there isn't a cheerleader for offering FASD-specific programming in the north right now, nor are there any support groups, she said. The closest support group is in Prince Albert.

Last year the FASD network traveled to Sandy Bay, Fond du Lac and a few other spots in the north, and this year they went to La Ronge, La Loche and Buffalo Narrows area.

"We would love to be able to support more, but we try to make sure that we don't forget about the communities that are up there," Cotlar-Livingston said.

Considering the wide challenges that people with FASD face, funding for an individual's specific needs can be a huge help. Well, let me tell you, it's pretty complicated to figure out how to find that funding. It turns out that there is something provincially called the Cognitive Disability Strategy that provides funding for a broad range of needs associated with cognitive disabilities, of which FASD and suspected FASD are included.

Those who work for the CDS under the umbrella organization Children North say the CDS is meant to be a last resort after

trying to find funding elsewhere. Most referrals to the La Ronge office (there is another in the north-west) come from educational assistants.

But the CDS funding doesn't require a diagnosis.

Which brings us back to what I mentioned at the start of this article. Why do people seem to be diagnosed with FASD so rarely? One big reason is that the mother needs to confirm that she consumed alcohol while pregnant. This is tough to come by (I'll discuss more in a future article) But there are also limited people travelling to the north who can diagnose people with FASD — and an official diagnosis can't be made until a person is older than six.

Most children get diagnosed at the Alvin Buckwold Child Development Centre, which is all the way in Saskatoon, Cotlar-Livingston said.

And some question where an FASD diagnosis actually benefits an individual. That's something I'm still researching, and I'll have more to report back in future articles on this topic. Stay buckled in, because this FASD series is just getting started. ■

Northern Administrators & Elected Officials Gather

Northern Administrators Conference & Mayor and Councillor Gathering: April 25 & 26

It's easy to exaggerate the significance of an event, but the Northern Administrators Conference on April 25 could very well be one of those days we look back on and say, "It all started there."

What the "it" turns out to be is up to the northern administrators and clerks, but what we'd like to say is that that was the day when the Northern Administrators Association took its first steps as a self-identifying organization, with a name, mandate, membership and probably a cool logo.

The administrators association wasn't the only thing on the agenda. Brittany from the tax arrears management (ie, collection) firm TAXervice led a discussion on tax enforcement, which included an overview of the service her company provides to help municipalities to do that.

Discussion throughout the conference touched on some of the initiatives of the Northern Municipal Trust Account Management Board, and New North, aimed at building administrative capacity. The association is one of these, but others include the Administrative Circuit Rider program and the creation of a resource bank—a website, essentially—providing a virtual space for administrators to share information, learn from each other and help each other locate things, as well as bringing together and supplementing all the vast volumes of information already out there.

Round-table discussions facilitated by the administrator members of the NMTA Management Board were about getting a sense of where everyone was at in their jobs, and to help the Management Board get a better understanding of the many challenges administrators are facing.

The Gathering

Laurent Mougeot, former CEO of SUMA, was the keynote presenter at the Mayor and Councillor Gathering on April 26. For almost 3 hours, Laurent held the participants spellbound in his "There is a Line in the Sand: Roles and Responsibilities" workshop. At the end of the day, Laurent told the audience that if you're an elected official and you're wondering where that "line" is, all you need to remember is the acronym NIFO (apparently coined by Malcolm Eaton), which stands for: Noses In, Fingers Out.

Also on the agenda was a fascinating discussion about greenhouses and grow tunnels, which featured Ile a la Crosse Mayor Duane Favel, and Councillor Allan Bishoff from Cumberland House. We also had a Highways update from Highways.

As well, Allan Laird from the Ministry of Government Relations took everyone through the latest revision of the draft NMA amendments (see earlier), and finally, Larry Fremont from Wildfire Management came along to give an update on the next steps following the announcement that wildfire mitigation funding will soon be available to northern municipalities. ■

From the CEO
MATT HELEY*

Former federal
Environment
Minister Stéphane

Dion says this about a carbon tax: “It would be difficult to find a policy that generates more praise and support among policy experts and one that is more associated with political suicide.”

Following the recent Appeals Court victory for the federal government, and for any supporter of a carbon tax, we may yet see the bitter truth of Dion’s comment if there’s a change of government in October.

Quite apart from the 3-2 outcome in this case, to our mind one of the most interesting discussions in the lengthy decision released on May 3 was about whether the carbon tax was even actually a *tax*. You will recall that Saskatchewan had argued that it was, and that the feds didn’t have the power to levy it.

The court made an interesting ruling: first of all, agreeing with the feds, it wasn’t a tax; it was a *charge*. With that, the second part of Saskatchewan’s argument is irrelevant, but the court

addressed it anyway: even if it was a tax, the federal government had the jurisdiction to impose it.

Why isn’t it a tax? It’s not a tax because its main purpose is not to willy nilly raise revenue; the purpose of it is to increase the cost of GHG emissions so as to mitigate them.

So why do we refer to it as a carbon *tax*, if it isn’t really? Part of the reason is no doubt because, in everyday language, a tax is a tax is a tax. We use the word “tax” for all sorts of things that are really “fees,” “excises” or “rates.” Here, we commonly refer to the money we pay to our local government as property taxes, but elsewhere in the world, like where I am from, they are called “rates,” because where I am from only the commonwealth (federal) government may raise money through taxation.

Back on to the carbon tax. Could it be that the political battle for a carbon tax was lost as soon as it was called a tax? Could the federal government have done more to contest this semantic hijacking? I’ll leave that as an

unanswered question—mainly because we will find out for sure in October.

At the end of the day, we may be left with another example of how a good policy can be so easily dismantled by political tribalism and hip-pocket politics.

You may recall the healthcare policy wars in the U.S. following Trump’s victory in 2016. Upon taking power, the Republicans were determined to dismantle the healthcare legislation brought in by Obama, even though they had nothing to replace it with (and still don’t). It was Republicans who had earlier dubbed that legislation Obamacare. Frequently, when Americans were asked what they thought of Obamacare they said they didn’t like it. However, they approved of the Affordable Care Act.

“Obamacare” and the Affordable Care Act (full name: *The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*) are the exact same thing. ■

***Opinions are those of the author**

About New North ...

Since 1996 New North has been the voice of the municipalities of Northern Saskatchewan. Our goal, as defined by our mission statement, is to advocate, negotiate and initiate improvements in well-being of the residents of the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District. Organized on the basis of strength through unity, New North partners with all northern stakeholders, from government and non-government agencies, associations and First Nations, to enhance the quality of life, create opportunities and build better futures for the people of the north.

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