

Mayor of Beauval Nick Daigneault presenting at Beauval's BRIC (Beauval Rebuilding its Community) Awareness day, January 27.

The BRIC focuses on the challenges of drugs and other social issue in the community, with an emphasis on building partnerships, community healing, and the sharing of information and experiences.



Photo by Rhonda Hueser

Upcoming

*SUMA Convention, Feb 5-8,
Saskatoon*

*New North Waterworks, April
11-12, Prince Albert*

Saskatchewan Association of
Northern Communities

**NEW
NORTH**

This month ..

- Mental Health Funding
- The Ombudsman's Report into Municipal Conflict of Interest Investigations
- Health Restructuring

**Monthly Newsletter
January 2017**

Prov-Fed Health Agreement Has Targeted Mental Health, Home Care Funding

After weeks of wrangling, the provincial and federal government's agreement about how federal health transfers will work has an unexpected twist to it, with part of the transfer now targeted to two areas of particular concern in the north, home care and mental health.

Although the provincial government would have preferred to see money getting handed over with no strings attached, the home care and mental funding allocation does, at least in theory, mean that people will now see better access to services, perhaps in areas of lower population density, like the north.

The federal-provincial transfer will provide an additional \$190 million for home care, and about \$150 million for mental health, over the next ten

years. Although \$15 million a year for mental health is a drop in the bucket given the level of need, it's a start, and something we can work with.

New North member communities resolved in November to lobby the provincial government to beef up support for mental health and addictions in the north, including getting a commitment to build a facility to help people overcome addictions issues.

New North members have consistently raised concerns about the massive impact that mental health and addictions issues have on municipal service delivery, economic development, and overall community well-being in the north.

The New North Executive is set to meet with Minister for Rural and Remote Health Ottenbreit in March. ■

New North Upcoming Advocacy, Consultation and Capacity Building Agenda

Early February SUMA CONVENTION: New North Executive to meet with Minister of Government Relations, Donna Harpauer.

March NEW NORTH EXECUTIVE MEETING: Minister for Rural and Remote Health Ottenbreit is scheduled to meet with the Executive, with a number of items on the agenda including mental health funding, speech language services, electronic record sharing, and quite possibly that health restructuring thing people are talking about. The Executive is also scheduled to meet with representatives from Cameco.

March SARM CONVENTION: New North Chair Bruce Fidler and Vice Chair Robert St.Pierre are New North's special delegation to SARM this year.

March COMMUNITY POLICE BOARD TRAINING

April NEW NORTH WATERWORKS

June NEW NORTH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Community Visits: We are always looking for opportunities to come pay you a visit, so keep an eye out for us!

NewNorth News & Updates

New North Waterworks: Prince Albert Travelodge, April 11 & 12, 2017

New North trains 60 to 70 water operators from around the north, and even some that are not, at our waterworks, and this year won't be any different. With so many municipalities in the north sharing water systems with neighbouring First Nations it's pleasing that many of the operators we see coming along are from the local reserves. Planning for this year's event is in the early stages. Look for an agenda and registration details next month.

Community Police Board Training: Prince Albert Travelodge, March 14-16.

We've been a proud partner with the government and the RCMP in the FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND POLICING INITIATIVES since it was signed way back in 2009. The Framework Agreement was the first of its kind in Canada—and remains so. A big part of the agreement provided for the creation of Community Police Boards. There are at least 8 active boards in the north right now on the municipal side, and more than 30 active

on reserve (they go by the name Community Consultative Groups), with a new one popping into existence seemingly every month.

All those CPB and CCG members will come together in one big venue in March to talk about their successes and challenges, as well as participate in discussions on policing and local criminal justice issues. New North, with funding from the Ministry of Justice, will cover the costs (hotel, travel and meals) for three CPB members from each board. The registration fee for non-CPB members is \$100 for the three days. However, spots are limited, so first come first served! **Call us for more details.**

Mental Health Funding: Get Your Letters of Support to Increase Mental Health Funding for the North Done Now!

At the New North AGM back in November the group resolved to send letters to our MLAs, and the Health ministries, requesting increased support for mental health and addictions in the north. With the announcement of a new stream of mental health funding as part of the federal-provincial health transfer, it's a good time to be demanding that a fair chunk of that be directed to dealing with mental and addictions in the north. If you didn't get a copy of our template letter, shoot us an email at matt.newnorth@sasktel.net.

With Great Sadness We Say Goodbye to Another EA, and Say "Hello, Sunshyne"

Emily Ross, New North's Executive Assistant since August, left us at the end of the month. Emily has chosen to go back to school to continue with her Commerce degree. Emily was a great asset to the association, and we wish her all the best.

Taking her place will be Sunshyne Charles, who's spent the better part of the year working with the La Ronge band, and doing lashes and nails on the side. If you happen to notice our lashes and nails looking particularly radiant, that's why. Sunshyne coming back does allow us to bring out one of our favourite photos, of her and a guy who went on to become a little bit famous for some reason or another.



From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

“Hello again to everyone. The New Year has already started off to what I think is going to be a busy year. In mid-January, myself and New North CEO Matt Heley met with RCMP “F” Division Commander Curtis Zablocki in Regina. It was our first meeting with CO Zablocki since his appointment last year. We had a very open and honest discussion about policing issues, touching upon staffing, recruitment, Aboriginal sensitivity, and many other things. The CO was also very interested in hearing about the success of the Community Police Boards in many of our communities in building relationships with the RCMP, and their role in community policing generally.

We came away from the meeting feeling very positive about the direction the RCMP are heading in resolving some of the issues that have cropped up in the last year or so.

On a less positive note, Cameco announcing 120 job cuts is quite disappointing and raises concerns. In the next month the New North Executive will be meeting with Cameco to discuss our concerns.



RCMP Assistant Commissioner Curtis Zablocki and New North Chair Bruce Fidler.

Before I finish with my letter this week, I’d like to offer my thoughts and prayers to Minister of Rural and Remote Health, Greg Ottenbreit, who has been diagnosed with cancer and is undergoing treatment. I think most of you will agree that Greg is a very attentive and well-liked minister, and we wish him all the best on his speedy recovery.

Take care everyone, and I’ll see you at SUMA Convention in Saskatoon, February 5 to 8!”

BRUCE

RCMP Depot Youth Camp

Is there a teenager in your life who enjoys nothing more than telling everyone to put coasters under their drinks, patting down guests as they arrive for that big dinner party, or randomly reading complete strangers their rights?

If you answered “yes” to those questions, then the Depot Youth Camp may be just the thing they are looking for.

Open to teens aged 16-19 in grades 11 and 12, Depot Youth Camp is a summer camp designed to give that prospective crypto-authority figure in your life the chance to experience everything Depot has to offer, and for them to get an idea of what a career in the RCMP might look like, before they the put in their application.

Selection for Depot Youth Camp is based on academic achievement, fitness, and interest in a career in policing.

While at camp, students are issued with an actual RCMP uniform, get to wake up early and train like a real RCMP member, observe drills and perhaps even participate in driver training.

Going on the photos, they also get to march. In fact, it’s probably all just marching.

To find out more, and to get a pamphlet you can leave suggestively on their pillow, here’s the email address:

FDIV-ProActive-Recruiting@rcmp-grc.gc.ca

March 1 is the deadline for applications.

The dates of the camp are August 7-11 for everyone, with Aboriginal Focus being August 14-18.

Ombudsman

Ombudsman Rules on Conflict of Interest at RM of Sherwood Following Probe into Probe

It's probably no coincidence that the Ombudsman's office released their report of three investigations into municipal conflict of interest just before municipal association convention season.

The reports give us a pretty good idea of what the Ombudsman's role will look like now that Mary McFadyen has jurisdiction over municipal entities. The reports are worth reading because they clearly articulate what elected officials need to do if they feel they are, or might be, in a conflict of interest: declare, disclose, abstain, refrain, and leave.

Amongst her findings released this month, the Saskatchewan Ombudsman has found that an elected municipal official from the RM of Sherwood is now disqualified from office over a failure to follow proper procedures involving the declaration of a conflict of interest.

The finding with respect Sherwood comes after the OMB's investigation into a complaint by residents of the R.M. that Tim Probe, a member of council, "failed to comply with provisions of *The Municipalities Act*," arising from "his failure to declare a conflict of interest and participated in a discussion about whether Sherwood should take steps to recover" the reimbursement of the legal fees he racked up during the Sherwood Inquiry a few years ago.

The Sherwood Inquiry, if you've just joined us, was ordered by the Minister of Government Relations to look into conflicts of interest over land dealings involving the Reeve of Sherwood. The Inquiry ultimately recommended the removal of the Reeve (which happened). Other Sherwood Councillors, including Probe, were also called to the Inquiry to provide testimony, and understandably, they lawyered-up.

The councillors were required to cover their own legal fees, so the council of Sherwood passed a bylaw – A Bylaw to *Provide for the Indemnity and Defence of Members of Council Against Liability Incurred While Acting Heroically on Behalf of the Municipality*, or something like that; I may have added "heroically" (we didn't realize the naming of bylaws had to be so literal, but there you are). The bylaw enabled Probe to be reimbursed almost



The provincial Ombudsman, Mary McFadyen, QC, at last year's New North Administrators Conference.

\$50,000 in personal legal costs. Residents, presumably enraged by what they considered a major overstepping of council's authority, applied to the Queen's Bench to have the reimbursement bylaw quashed. The Queen's Bench, in *Baker v Sherwood*, agreed the bylaw was *ultra vires* – which means "not cool" in plain English – and quashed it.

By October 2015, there were only two councillors left on council from the Sherwood Inquiry days, Councillors Probe and Repetski. The question of what to do about *Baker v Sherwood* was in play, as was the question of what to do about recovering the money paid to Probe. An October 2015 council motion to appeal the decision in *Baker v Sherwood* was defeated.

But this is where things get tricky. On January 13, 2016, a resident made a presentation to council requesting council look into how the R.M. could get its money back. Council made a motion to do that. Probe, who was present at the meeting, wanted attention placed on whether the defeated *Baker v Sherwood* motion could be brought back. Council postponed the first motion, and having now distracted themselves with a legal issue over council procedures, voted in favour of a motion to get legal advice as to whether the *Baker v Sherwood* motion could be resurrected (it could, by the way, but that's beside the point).

In her report, the Ombudsman said that if Probe and Repetski had followed the conflict of interest rules in *The Municipalities Act*, the first motion – the one to recover the reimbursement of legal fees – would not have been postponed. Probe and Repetski were also in a conflict of interest in sticking around during the delegation’s presentation to council. In fact, their presence at that meeting, from the moment the agenda was accepted (moved by Probe, ironically), to the time they finished talking about anything to do with the reimbursement issue, including the motion to distract the other council members with bits of shiny tinfoil, meant they were in conflicts of interest up to their eyeballs.

The Ombudsman’s finding that Probe was in a conflict of interest, and didn’t take the required steps under the Act to deal with it, means, according to the Ombudsman’s report, that he is “now disqualified from council, should resign immediately, and is not eligible for nomination or election to any municipality for 12 years.” If Probe doesn’t resign, the report goes on, council (or a voter) can apply to the Queen’s Bench to enforce the disqualification.

What is interesting in the Ombudsman’s findings, especially with respect Probe, is that the element of “honest mistake” is not entertained as underlying his failure to declare, disclose, abstain, refrain and leave.

The Ombudsman notes that a judge can dismiss an application to disqualify if the disqualification arose through “inadvertence or an honest mistake.”

The council could, if it wanted to, ignore the finding, but it is likely that a voter, if they haven’t done so already, will make the application themselves, as residents there seem fairly activist-oriented about his particular councillor.

So even though the Ombudsman cannot, through her findings or recommendations, compel a particular outcome in this case—since that is up to the judiciary or council to decide—you would think her findings, regardless what the limits of the Ombudsman’s power is here in a judicial sense, would be fairly persuasive.

In a separate investigation, the Ombudsman made a finding that the mayor of the Village of Manor was in a conflict of interest by not declaring a pecuniary interest in the sale of village land to her son. The Ombudsman also found that the village didn’t follow its own bylaw by not properly notifying the public of the sale. The Ombudsman cannot order the land be sold back to the village, and because the mayor is no longer mayor, the Ombudsman made no finding as to whether she’d have been disqualified or not. Interestingly, the Ombudsman recommended the village pass a bylaw adopting procedures “allowing” anyone who “honestly believes” a councillor is in a conflict of interest, or about to be, to approach them, or council, to point it out. You could call it the busybody clause, or to use the proper titling, a *Bylaw Allowing Anyone to Indicate to You That What Your Gut is Telling You is Wrong is Indeed Actually Wrong*.■

The Northern Municipalities Act: **Disclosure of Conflict of Interest Provisions**

Sec. 161 (2)

If a member of council has a conflict of interest in a matter before the council, a council committee, a controlled corporation or other body, the member shall, if present:

(a) **before** any consideration or discussion of the matter, declare that he or she has a conflict of interest;

(b) **disclose** the general nature of the conflict of interest and any material details that could reasonably be perceived to affect the member’s impartiality in the exercise of his or her office;

(c) **abstain** from voting on any question, decision, recommendation or other action to be taken relating to the matter;

(d) subject to subsection (4), refrain from participating in any discussion relating to the matter; and

(e) subject to subsections (3) and (4), leave the room in which the meeting is being held until discussion and voting on the matter are concluded.

Dismembering and Re-Suturing Health Care

The Saskatchewan Advisory Panel Report on Health System Structure was late. It was supposed to come out in November, then December. Then it got pushed back to January. Now that it's here, and the Minister has accepted all its recommendations, how should we be feeling? A little queasy, nauseous, mildly inflamed ...?

Healthcare ... meet *Transformational Change*

The Perrins report into Educational Governance reform released in December and the report into health system restructuring released in January (which we have in front of us now), both imagine fairly radical overhauls of education and health systems respectively.

A key difference between the Perrins report and this one on health restructuring is that the latter had a much more explicitly, and prescriptive, mandate, to wit, that they “provide a recommendation of a future of health system with fewer Regional Health Authorities (RHAs).”

Another difference is the focus on improving actual outcomes—or, as the report puts it, “Better Health, Better Care, Better Value, Better Teams.” The report itself, of course, is even called “Optimizing and Integrating Patient-Centred Care.” The Perrins Report into education, by contrast, spends little time on how outcomes, especially student achievement, might be improved by re-structuring education governance.

The spin accompanying the Health Minister Jim Reiter’s acceptance of all the recommendations of the health re-structuring report also focused, at least initially, on achieving improvements to patient care. The minister was quite explicit that this wasn’t about the money. In the days following, the ministry thought it might be a little bit about the money, putting out a statement saying that government would save up \$20 million a year. It was a sensible move framing the re-structuring like this: if it all goes pear-shaped, then at least government can say it was for a noble cause; and if it ends up costing a lot more than anyone thought, they can say it was never about the money. Smart.

Of the four key recommendations made by the Advisory Panel on Health System Structure, the first is the one that caught everyone off guard. Asked to recommend a system with fewer RHAs, the panel, perhaps quoting their favourite movie ever (*Highlander*), said: “There can be only one,” or words to that effect.

The new Health Authority couldn’t, by definition, be a Regional Health Authority anymore, so it had to be renamed as the Provincial Health Authority. You may notice the linguistic slippage: no regional health authorities is fewer than 12, for sure, but “fewer” is rarely ever thought to mean zero.

A second element of this recommendation is the creation of four “service integration areas.” One of those areas, the recommendation goes, should be unique to the north, and be created by merging Keewatin Yatthé and Mamawetan Churchill River Regional Health Authorities. If there is a saving grace here it is that we’ll never have to remember where the extra R goes in MCRRA (next to the other R, I guess).

Within this recommendation is a particular emphasis on what it calls Indigenous Engagement. The report says: “There are significant examples of poorer health outcomes of Indigenous people compared to the non-Indigenous population, such as higher rates of kidney disease, diabetes, obesity and communicable diseases. Tragically, Indigenous people have higher rates of suicide and infant mortality.” The report recommends that, because all of this, “the health care system must be responsive and respectful of Indigenous culture, and we must create space for Indigenous voices to be heard at all levels.”

It is interesting to think about what is really being said here. In a report recommending fairly substantial structural re-organization, the best that can be said on the issue of Indigenous health is “we need to listen to Indigenous voices more.” (Or, government could address the housing, poverty, food security and other factors that contribute to poor health outcomes. Or it could move services closer to the most affected communities.) The report recommends establishing a senior administrative role within the PHA “with the responsibility for ensuring health care services respect the Indigenous and Métis patient experience.” We will go out on a

limb here and say that will be the most frustrating and difficult job in the province.

The next of the four key recommendations is also likely to impact how services are delivered, as it speaks to the “consolidation of clinical services within and across service integration areas.” In some respects this is happening now, of course, as northerners already have to take long trips to Saskatoon to seek specialists (or experience long waits for them to come here). The report actually implies that the example of Northern Medical Services, where specialists fly into the north, could be a model for how such services are delivered through the rest of the province. It paints a picture for improving patient care by suggesting that, rather than people coming to the specialist, the specialist can go to the people: “A Provincial Health Authority governance model provides opportunity to co-ordinate a provincial model of service delivery, including visiting services.” But then again, it can’t be sure if this will work, as “Saskatchewan has not implemented evidence-based policies for proactive planning and delivery of specialized services in the province.” So it’s just speculation, then.

The recommendation on integrating service delivery also touches upon Emergency Medical Services (EMS). The report says that “Saskatchewan is falling behind other jurisdictions in Canada in providing efficient and patient-focused ambulance services,” and makes specific mention of issues that northern communities also face in the provision of EMS, particularly the fact that most communities don’t have full-time EMS personnel, and often rely on recruiting local residents to take basic level training to fill the gap. Volunteers also undertake the training on their own dollar. The report recommends that “governance, management and delivery of EMS services be assumed by the Provincial Health Authority,” and you can read into that whatever you like.

The final two sets of key recommendations of the report will most certainly be of interest to health region bureaucrats and people who love strategic planning, legislative amendments, whatever the Health Quality Council actually does, and anyone who enjoys using the word “synergy.” We know that’s most of you, of course.

Final Thoughts

The main question for us is whether the re-structuring of health in the province will lead to a greater capacity to respond to the many health system issues that are brought our way. Of particular interest here is the recommendation that Cumberland House be part of the northern service integration area. Besides that, there’s really no telling how this will all work out. You would think that electronic record sharing would be better, for instance, but then again, maybe not. From a lobbying perspective, having a single health authority to speak to seems to make our job a little easier. But then again, communities tended to take their “big picture” issues to the ministerial level anyway, so probably no change there.

So what do we really have? The problem with both the Perrins report and the report into health re-structuring is that because of the absence of any real examination of the evidence for doing anything at all, we can’t say whether anything will improve. The consultations don’t help in shedding much light here at all, since, with only about 300 people and organizations responding, it is impossible to know how widespread any of the issues highlighted actually are. For example, while health bureaucrats are already talking up one of the benefits of restructuring to be an improvement in “patient flow,” how many of us have ever had a negative experience because of patient blockage? Well, we have no idea, because no evidence is presented either way.■

Infographic Recommendations Not Accepted by Minister

1. Mandatory “Patch Adams” Training
2. Standardizing shade of hospital green
3. Separate smoking areas so visitors not reminded where terrible choices are taking them
4. Renaming of Ministry to Health! Health! Health!
5. Hand warmers
6. Cancerous tumours to be called “Trumps”

Opinion

By MATT HELEY*

A year ago we wrote in these pages about the emergence of different “narrative frames” to explain the shooting event in La Loche in January 2016. In the immediate aftermath, we saw

media, politicians and community leaders scrambling to situate the shooting in different social, political and economic contexts: bullying, poverty, colonialism, government neglect, guns.

No explanation was any more compelling than any other. For leaders there was the particular challenge of translating the complex, inchoate feelings and dispositions of a diverse group of community members into a plan to deal with the underlying issues. We also saw the media struggle with its tendency toward stereotyping. This is sometimes referred to as representational violence.

It’s probably fair to say that at some point a consensus developed. We call this the La Loche consensus. The government was partly responsible for this when it set in play its plan for La Loche. Four community priority areas were identified: housing, infrastructure, education, health. Each one had a committee with community representation. Mid-year it rolled out what it says is only the first tranche of its plan to help La Loche “rebuild”: a package totalling about \$1.3 million worth of programs, including partnering in the building of social housing units, a new teaching program, some counsellors, and even an x-ray machine. Even though the roll-out seemed comprehensive, there was something arbitrary about some of the choices, as if anything, no matter what it was, was at least *something*. In truth, government was on a hiding to nothing. If the inter-ministerial committees were a tacit admission that government had indeed been holding out on this community all these years, then 6 months of work wasn’t really going to fix that.

The messaging from government and local leaders reflected that it was “work in progress.” La Loche was “healing,” and the the road would be long. The Premier said that there was “still much work to do” in pre-Christmas interviews.

Except that, from time to time, we heard that maybe there wasn’t as much happening as we thought. Local MP and La Loche resident Georgina Jolibois, never shy of saying uncomfortable things, made statements critical of federal, and by extension, provincial, government action, in particular, noting that residents didn’t have access to counselling after hours. A minor point, perhaps, but not to locals; there have been stories of an increase in incidences of self-harm.

Then there was the story of Charlene Klyne, one of the victims, who spoke in September about her struggles with the Workers Compensation Board. We were hearing very little about what the other victims were going through.

In October two paramedics attending that day, Calvin Jones and Darryl Morin from KY Regional Health Authority, were recognized for bravery, each receiving the Lieutenant Governor’s Bravery Award in a ceremony in Regina.

Their comments to CBC when accepting the medals revealed they were still deeply suffering. Jones said: “During that time I had a little bit of a scare when a student opened a door nearby while I was performing CPR. I still have dreams about it every now and then but it’s getting better.” We need to be careful not to discount the deliberate understatement of the emergency worker here. You don’t have recurrent dreams about a “little bit of a scare.”

But still, even as the emergency workers indicated the extent of their own mental wounds, we still see the “healing” narrative shining through: “it’s getting better.” In the weeks since we have heard stories about the victims, their bravery and the bravery of the staff. Phyllis Longobardi was profiled in a number of stories, including in the Star Phoenix. She confronted the shooter, holding him up for what the RCMP thought was about 6 six seconds. “Everybody that day who had kids with them or protected them, was heroic,” she said. Well, what else can you say? But she wasn’t completely buying into the narrative either. She feels staff have been overlooked; she says that staff did not receive a formal “thank you” from the school division.

Then, in January, a bombshell. At a media event to mark the beginning of remembrances, a couple of words from the La Loche High School Principal, Greg Hatch, blew it all out of the water. The media jumped on his words. “Things were the same when as we left in June, so that was frustration, anger, (for) students (and) staff. For the most part, we feel that we’ve been left alone and we’ve been abandoned,” the Star Phoenix reporting him saying.

Government was taken a-back. Immediately there came an email to the media from government with a detailed list of everything they’d done, not just in La Loche, but across the north: education spending, health spending, housing spending ... Government was trying to get the narrative back on track, but the media wasn’t really buying it. Reporters covered the government’s response, in the interests of balance, but no one seemed convinced.

Those who were at the La Loche press conference, or who’ve listened to the audio of Hatch’s comments, will say that there was a great deal more said there that was conciliatory, more appreciative of the support, than would seem to suggest from the reporting. Perhaps. But how much of that is about trying to get the consensus back? Harold Johnson says “everything is story.” We might say that the La “Loche consensus” is just another “story” (and, of course, my story of the “La Loche consensus” is *also* just another story).

But, as Johnson says, stories have power, and we have to ask ourselves: how does it happen that one particular story is the one we accept as the “truth”? Is it because it is more comfortable to think that healing is happening, that things are improving, measures are working? But comfortable to whom? Government, certainly. The public who don’t want to have to acknowledge that what little is being done is not working?

The downside is a weakening of our capacity to ask uncomfortable questions, to make suggestions that don’t fit within an accepted framework. You can see even in Hatch’s comments an awareness of a breach of protocol, an upsetting of the way people, at least publicly, have conditioned themselves to talk about La Loche: “It’s not a statement of disrespect. It’s just an honest answer (to) where are we are at. We were traumatized. We still haven’t dealt with the trauma.”

Hatch is almost apologetic in his break with decorum. He shouldn’t be; and no one should feel compelled to be. The problem with trying to control the “story” is that, for those who don’t agree with it, frustration and resentment can grow, and their healing can be impacted. After Hatch’s comments, we think we’ll see less narrative control, and more listening, from here on.

***Opinions are those of the author and may not reflect the position of New North members.**



SUMA Convention 2017 in Saskatoon in early February, themed as “Shaping an Urban Saskatchewan,” is the annual showcase of one of the most successful municipal associations in the country, and the only must-attend event for municipal officials that we can think of, with the possible, and highly qualified, exceptions of the New North Waterworks Workshops, any New North Gathering, the New North Administrators Conference, the New North Elected Workshops, and of course the New North Christmas Party.

For the northern newly elected who have survived the first three months in office (and managed to read to this far), you may be wondering what to expect from a SUMA Convention, and perhaps more importantly, why you should be there. Here’s a few reasons:

1. You get to dress up

How often do any of us get to wear pants that don’t say Wrangler on them? The President’s Banquet on the Tuesday night is a great opportunity to wear those pants you picked up. And we are not talking sweat pants here, either (you could probably get away with dress sweats).

2. You get to participate in elections

Yeah, we barely know how our own elections work, but I thought I’d mention it. According to the flyer, the Northern Regional Meeting on Monday will elect a Northern Director.

3. You get to see the most bewildering array of product and service offerings aimed at municipal officials ever assembled

Need liner for that lagoon? Running low on spigots? The SUMA Tradeshow is like Christmas on a stick for municipal officials looking to spend some money.

Seriously, folks, leave that credit card at home! And, like any tradeshow, you don’t even have to spend money, as there’s plenty of swag to fill your ... swag. We got a fire truck one year. Watch for the guy who picks up a Yield sign and then has to carry the thing around for the rest of the day. I’m not kidding.

4. You get to ask the Premier a direct question, in front of thousands of people

The bear pit session on the final day has many, if not all, government cabinet ministers perched up there on the stage like cockatoos on a barbed wire fence. You can ask them a question on just about anything you like, then stand awkwardly at the mic listening to the reply. Be mindful you only get one minute to ask the question before they turn the mic off on y-.

5. You get to debate and vote on resolutions

The resolutions session is often one of the most interesting parts of Convention, since it’s always pretty entertaining watching people debate municipal issues. Look out for the guy who always votes against a resolution, no matter what.

This year’s resolutions include one from the SUMA Board about pipelines. Last year’s Convention actually had a resolution urging the federal government to redouble their efforts to have the Energy East pipeline built. In the wake of a couple of spills in recent times, this resolution asking the province to review how they regulate pipelines seems equally apposite.

6. You Get Educated

We probably shouldn’t be making any promises here because you might not learn anything, but the Education Sessions potentially offers some pretty good extension activities, including one session looking at Saskatchewan’s economic indicators. Apparently it’s just 60 minutes of a guy with his head in his hands.

7. You get to eat really good food.

Convention organizers know that food is the thing just about everyone remembers from an event; you’ll notice that at New North we figured that out a long time ago, and now only serve Grade A baked ham with a glaze so thick you can see your face in it. SUMA Convention is no different: the food is always good.

8. The mall is right there

And when you get tired of hanging around other municipal officials at the trade show, go hang out with them at the cosmetics counter of The Bay.

For a overview of SUMA Convention, go to suma.org/conventions

FROM THE CEO

MATT HELEY

There's no telling what particular issues will grasp the imaginations of municipal officials at this year's SUMA Convention.

Most years you can bet on revenue sharing or infrastructure funding coming up. Last year pipelines jumped on the agenda, perhaps not unexpectedly, as the premier may have said one or two things, in passing, about them at some point before hand.

Perhaps this year will be all about the folly of carbon pricing.

And what about the politicians? What will they say? It was in the premier's address in 2016 that anyone first heard about the government's decision to run a budget deficit—in fact, two in a row—with the intent of coming into surplus this year.

Will the premier go back on that commitment in his speech this year, and if so, how would he frame it? If I was a betting man I'd say he would frame it in the same way he is framing the fight against the carbon tax: that the economy is too vulnerable right now to handle the impact on demand that a big new tax would impose. Let's wait until things improve a

little.

You see, a budget deficit is actually a completely legitimate economic management measure. If the premier thought we'd be in a better place to manage a budget surplus then a budget surplus would be just the thing. But it's clearly not the right time for a surplus. Let's wait until things improve a little, he might say.

This year is also the first year Donna Harpauer, the Minister of Government Relations, will address a SUMA Convention. Last year, Jim Reiter spent some time talking about education funding. That's an interesting choice, given that education is not actually his portfolio, but perhaps he was softening everyone up for education property tax increases that never came. Reiter was a very popular minister, and in point of fact he could have spent 30 minutes listing his favourite flavours of ice cream and still have received a standing ovation.

So what about Harpauer? When the present minister was appointed there was a feeling that reform in the municipal sector might be in the air, but nothing has been even hinted at, so perhaps this speech will just have a "steady as she goes, I like pecan" type message.

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 Administrative 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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