

“Empowering Our Communities”

Full Wrap inside.



Upcoming

New North Waterworks, April 11-12, Prince Albert Travelodge
Mayor and Councillor Gathering, April 18, Prince Albert Travelodge

Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities

NEW NORTH

This month ..

- Budget Wrap
- Alcohol Tax
- News & Briefs
- Empowering Our Communities Re-cap

Monthly Newsletter March 2017

“This Wasn’t in the Brochure”: Municipal Sector Feels the Pinch in Prov. Budget

Hadron Collider needed to detect mention of grants in lieu cuts in pre-budget briefings, says sector

One hundred and nine municipalities in southern Saskatchewan, including Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert, have gone into outrage overdrive following the budget announcement that grants in lieu paid to those municipalities by SaskEnergy and SaskPower will be eliminated, at a total cost of \$36 million.

Proving that it’s impossible to cut something you never had, no northern municipalities are affected by this move.

In a budget where “everything [was] on the table,” the government stuck to its commitment to the revenue sharing formula. However, the total hit taken by the municipal sector in this budget—if you include the loss of grants in lieu,

cuts to library funding, the opportunity cost of an increase in Education Property Taxes, and the overall fall in revenue sharing, among others, comes to well over \$100 million.

In other sleeper hits, funeral coverage for income assistance recipients has been slashed from \$3850 to \$2100, in a move that will save the province about \$1 million a year, and greatly impact northerners, who not only die at a faster rate than anyone else in the province, but are also more likely to have had their extravagant “Klingon” death rituals paid for by government, owing to the high number of IA recipients here.

See inside for our budget coverage.

Please Help us By Writing to Minister Responsible for STC over STC Closure

We’ve invited Joe Hargrave, Minister Responsible for STC, to our Mayor & Councillor Gathering in April, to talk about the STC shut-down, but councils can also get ahead of the curve by writing a letter to the minister on behalf of residents. New North has a

template letter available if needed; please contact us if you want it. The minister’s office address is below:

Hon. Joe Hargrave
Minister Responsible for STC
Room 302, Legislative Building,
2405 Legislative Drive, Regina, SK,
Canada, S4S0B3

NewNorth News & Updates

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

Known for copious displays open weeping, shrieks of despair and hallucinogenic remembrances of things past, the New North Waterworks is this year promising to be lighter on the theatrics, heavier on the regulatory frameworks of water operations, and fairly middling on everything else.

In point of fact, many municipal officials don't realize that, the moment they take office, they are actually the permit holders for the local waterworks, with ultimate responsibility for seeing that one of the community's most vital pieces of infrastructure is not only being operated within the appropriate guidelines, but is being kept in tip-top shape. The rapid drop in infant mortality rates since the 1950s in the north has come about because of the access communities have to clean water and to systems providing the safe removal of unclean water. But no pressure: we're sure you all know what you're doing.

In completely unrelated news, New North's Waterworks this year will have a special focus on the responsibilities of water system permittees. We expect to see you there.

Registration and agenda details can be found be on our website, www.newnorthsask.org. New North member communities pay \$60 per operator or municipal official. Everyone else pays \$160.

New North Mayor & Councillor Gathering April 18, PA Travelodge

With the provincial budget done and dusted it seems like a good time to get on with the grieving and griping, so we expect to see plenty of that at the New North Spring Mayor and Councillor Gathering.

The agenda—always a work in progress—is progressing.

For certain we have the Ministry of Environment coming in to talk about the provincial solid waste strategy, such as it is at this point, as well as the policy team from SUMA, who'll be updating us on some the things they've been up to since we heard from them last.

We have also locked in the RCMP Commanding Officer, Assistant Commissioner Curtis Zablocki.

Also on the invite list is the Minister of Rural and Remote Health, Greg Ottenbreit. We are very interested to hear about how the health region amalgamations will affect the north, so we're very hopeful that the Hon. Greg will be able to make it. Fingers crossed.

Our Dogs Are Barking, Mad, Completely Mad

There's no doubt that dogs are intelligent creatures, who've demonstrated an incredible capacity to adapt themselves to living with humans, or to adapt humans to living with them, depending on how much of a dog person you are. There was one story that came out around the time of the last winter Olympics in Russia that really brought this home, where dogs were filmed demonstrating their mastery of the subway system. Quite remarkable, when you consider my teenager, despite years of patient training, has yet to demonstrate mastery of putting his dirty laundry in the hamper.

But dogs are also at heart wild animals, and pack animals at that, and despite their habituation to human environments, they can pose a danger to us, no less at times than the danger we occasionally pose to ourselves. With Spring in the air, dogs are starting to "pack up," a wonderfully quaint expression which actually describes a potentially very dangerous situation. There are almost 100 dog bites a year in the north. Most of the victims are little kids. And most of the wounds are to the face and neck.

The topic of dog control will be on the agenda for the Spring Mayor and Councillor Gathering.

From the New North Chair

BY BRUCE FIDLER, MAYOR OF CREIGHTON

Well, it is that time of year again where we think winter is coming to an end, and then we get another big dump of snow. I know we have had a pretty easy winter, but I am ready for green grass and open water.

We have had a busy month just past. The New North Executive had our first real board meeting on March 2 & 3. We started off with executive business, such as looking at the financials for the last 3 months. We then met with RCMP North District Commander Larry Wilson and Sgt Dave Sanderson, the North District liaison officer. We discussed issues that we had and also they brought forward some of their plans for the next few years. Those areas of concern were: suicides, bootlegging, gang suppression strategy, manpower shortages, vacancies and drug strategy. All very positive talks.

We then met with Jonathon Huntington and Darrel Burnouf, representatives from Cameco. We had discussions around their present and future plans. Our areas of concern were job cuts, shift changes, and flight changes for employees. We had good discussions and agreed to keep in touch for any upcoming changes and plans regarding our northern residents and employees.

Later in the day we met with Minister Greg Ottenbreit, Minister Responsible for Rural and Remote Health. His presentation and our discussion was around mental health support, long-term care facilities, nurse shortages, cross-boarder medical record transfers and the ministry's plan for the future.

The next day, we finished up with board business and plans for our Mayor and Councillor Gathering on April 18.

Vice-chair Robert St. Pierre and myself were invited to attend the SARM Convention as fraternal guests. This was in Saskatoon and was very interesting. Similar to SUMA Convention, although with a few different issues, mainly rural. The Premier had his address and talked about provincial economy and budget. They also had the "bear pit" session with a majority of the cabinet ministers in attendance. Although some of the issues brought up were of rural nature, many were also the same or similar to the issues we face in the north and province-wide. We all seem to face the same problems; maybe to different degrees. I found this convention very interesting and informative.

I had the opportunity to attend the Provincial Budget Release on March 22 in Regina. I started in the morning at the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure. Once again they have a very large budget: \$1.1 billion, with \$500 million for the Regina bypass in this year's budget, and \$342 million in other capital expenditure.

The north has \$55 million, which includes some work on Hwy #102 north of La Ronge, a couple of bridge replacements on #165 and the rest is maintenance and repair. Once again, I feel the north is being neglected.

Next, attended the Government Relations Budget with Minister Donna Harpauer. She talked about spending and program cuts. There will be an increase in infrastructure project funding. The revenue sharing formula is to stay the same for this budget year. The overall amount will be down by 5.1% due to lower PST revenue year before last. The north's share this year will be \$19.18 million, down from \$20.28 million last year. Although the school division districts will remain as is, there will be changes to the education property tax and other areas. The province will assume more control. A more detailed breakdown will be forthcoming.

Later that day I went to the Legislature for the Official Provincial Budget Release. Some other changes coming are: PST increase by 1% and to include children's clothes, restaurant meals, snack foods and others, Liquor and tobacco costs will increase. With other cuts and decreases this year, the province is projecting a \$680 million deficit and working toward a balanced budget in 3 years. They are looking toward a 3.5% wage cut in all provincial staff and public service employees. There are many other areas of cuts and decreases, but one large issue is the STC bus service being stopped at the end of May. This causes many issues for us in the north. Many rely on this service for health care, supplies, travel for schooling and much more. Our very serious concern over this will be taken to Minister Hargrave. Again, there are many more details on this budget that will be available to you. So overall, think this budget had some surprises, some good and some really not good. The next few years are going to be a challenge, but as strong northerners working together, we always survive.

So, yes, it has been a very busy time. Looking forward to Spring and seeing everyone **April 18 in Prince Albert.**

“Empowering Our Communities”

March 14-16, 2017, Prince Albert

By Matt Heley

One clear day in May, 1999, New North Mayors, RCMP leadership and representatives from government, gathered in the Legion Hall on the shores of Lac La Ronge to sign an historic agreement. The Framework for Community Policing Initiatives is more or less what it says on the tin. Essentially, it was an agreement that said the RCMP, the government, and the northern municipalities would work together to improve relations between the communities and the men and women who have sworn to protect them.

A part of the agreement was that everyone would support the formation and growth of Community Police Boards. Eighteen years later the CPBs are still going, better than ever, and “Empowering Our Communities” was a pretty good time to celebrate that fact.

Billed as a training event, it was both more and less the sum of its parts. It is significant that the original agreement was motivated, at least in spirit, by First Nations policing agreements, and it was fitting that “Empowering Our Communities” brought the municipal-based CPBs together with the First Nations’ Community Consultative Groups—or what used to be called Police Management Boards—who’d inspired the CPBs to begin with. The event was really just another chance for everyone to learn from each other about what’s working in their communities. Clearly, a lot is working. There was almost too much packed into this agenda to talk about. And then, as is so typical of these events, there was the “shadow agenda,” the spaces that are carved out with the musings and reflections of the participants themselves, the Elders’ wisdom that can be as instructive, if not more so, than anything you’ll find on paper, that led emcee Nap Gardiner to joke about the event as “half a day of presentations and two days of closing remarks.”

At the end of day 1, Pinehouse’s Phyllis Smith spoke about “Reclaiming Our Community,” an initiative from that small village that for many years, and for many communities, has been a model for how to do community policing. Sandra Erikson and Tracey Tinker presented on Buffalo Narrows’ “Taking Back our Community,” Nick Daigneault spoke about Beauval’s BRIC (Beauval Reclaiming Its Community), while Nap Gardiner did double-time presenting on Ile a la Crosse’s Community Safety Board, and Candice Evans-Waite spoke effervescently about youth engagement in her community of Buffalo Narrows. Gail Gardiner from Beauval spoke about the tremendous success of restorative practices at her Valley View school in reducing the expulsion rate of students.

There was, amongst all this, considerable discussion about the difficulties of recruiting Aboriginal people into the force. The point was also made that RCMP training should be reflective of who members are more likely, statistically, to encounter in

their work, given the massive over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system.

Irene Chepil from Waterhen First Nation said that if the new RCMP members are not properly acclimatized to their new cultural surroundings, they will work on them until they are. And she told the story about how her community, who have a custom of bestowing a gift to a parting RCMP member, followed one around for days so they could measure his feet for a pair moccasins (they didn’t need to, of course; everyone knows the police wear size 12s; it’s something to do with selection criteria, apparently).

Muskoday First Nation’s Herman Crain and Ava Bear spoke about the success of their community’s “intervention circle,” a wrap-around, hub-style program that’s proving the best community justice initiatives are those that begin and end in the communities themselves.

And in one of the more inspiring sessions, which could only have gladdened the heart of their boss, Supt. Larry Wilson, three young constables, Jennifer Parson from Sandy Bay, Nikolas Eaton from Stony Rapids, and Alyssa Ogieglo from Montreal Lake, spoke rapturously of the “welcomes” they received from community members when making their moves into their respective detachments. They left the impression that the RCMP doesn’t recruit officers, but community builders.

Russ Mirasty, in his closing remarks (among the many closing remarks), said that the shift he has seen in the developing relationship between the RCMP and the communities since the 1990s has not really just been in the improvements in the best practices of the police, but in the practices of the communities themselves, who are taking so much more responsibility now to bridge that gap.

No one could walk away from “Empowering Our Communities” without feeling that the former CO of F Division is right.

The Framework Agreement for Community Safety and Policing Initiatives is essentially an MOU signed by the RCMP, government and New North communities, to work together. The agreement was barely mentioned by name after the first day, mainly because it’s such a mouthful, but also because, outside government, it doesn’t need to be talked about anyway. Its principles are now just a part of the policy furniture. Everyone should be proud of that.

“Empowering our Communities” was an event co-organized by New North, the Ministry of Justice and the RCMP, and funded by the provincial government.

Just How Scary is Fentanyl?

The news of an increased uptake in the usage of fentanyl and recent reports of deaths in Saskatchewan associated with the newest opioid on the streets is sending a chill down the spines of many parents, law enforcement personnel and community leaders.

Why is it so dangerous and so feared? Two members of the RCMP came along to Empowering Our Communities to tell us exactly why we should be worried.

First of all: just what is fentanyl? Well, most of you know it as a painkiller. If you've had major surgery, like kneecap removal, follicle re-sewing or navel delinting, it's likely you've taken fentanyl.

But like any street variation of a common, everyday prescription opioid, the stuff you buy from your local drug dealer could easily kill you.

One of the reasons people die from overdoses has to do with how the drug is "cut," or mixed, with other substances. Delegates at Empowering Our Communities learned that the ideal mix ratio is 1:100—that is one part fentanyl, and 100 parts something else. That something else is usually caffeine, but it can be anything: cocaine, dog food, cocaine, or things you can easily find around the house, like cocaine. The problem is that there will be times when the mix is not done right, and a pill ends up with what they call "hotspots," or coagulated bits of fentanyl that exceed safe, non-lethal doses.

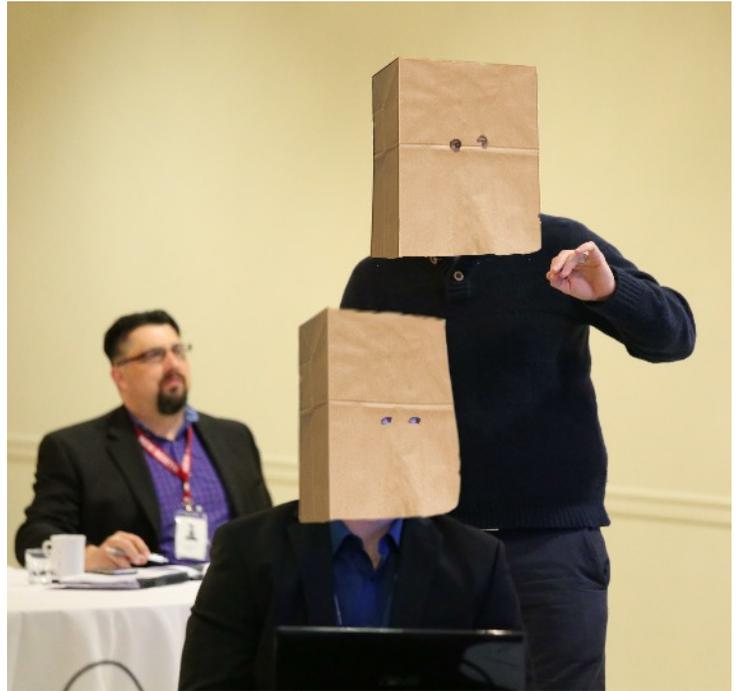
It's a phenomena anyone who's ever tried to get an even distribution of blueberries in a batch of muffins has probably encountered. Except, no one has ever been hurt from an OD of blueberries, apart from Violet Beauregarde, of course.

In BC, where they've been tracking overdoses from fentanyl for a while now, the number of deaths has gone from 13 in 2012 to 260 in 2016.

Law enforcement personnel are extremely worried about fentanyl because of the dangers it presents to members who inadvertently stumble upon a fentanyl lab in the course of a routine investigation. Even the briefest exposure to a small amount of fentanyl in airborne particles can be fatal.

What makes the drug so dangerous is also what makes it so attractive to dealers. Because fentanyl packs such a punch in its concentrated form, it can be imported (from China, the Middle Kingdom) in relatively small amounts. Just one kilogram of fentanyl can produce 100,000 tablets, with a street value of millions. That is an astonishing markup, even in the *legal* drug business.

Just as communities are getting their minds around and bracing for the arrival of meth, here comes something that could be even worse. Let us pray.



Members from the RCMP's Prince Albert detachment presented on warrant procedures and the latest drug craze to hit the area, fentanyl.

Fentanyl *By the Numbers*

The Price of Uncut Fentanyl on the black market: \$12,000 per kilo

The Price of Fentanyl at Shoppers: \$29.99

The typical "mix ratio" of fentanyl: 1:100

The Number of Tablets that 1kg of Fentanyl can produce for sale on the streets: 100,000

The Street Value of 100,000 Fentanyl tablets: \$20 million

In salt terms, a lethal dose of "pure" Fentanyl for the average person: a pinch

On the scale of scariness, where 1 is least scary and 10 is most scary: 11

Govt. Giveth, Govt. Taketh Away

A quick take on some of the highlights, and low lights, of Budget 2017.

PST Increase/Base Broadening: Are Taxpayers the Next Natural Resource Boom?

Increasing the PST and applying it to a broader range of goods and services is a politically brave move. Government backed off applying PST to restaurant meals more than a decade ago because of strong lobbying by that sector, but this time they didn't get a chance to raise a single wine-soaked placard. The taxing of meals is said to have an impact of about \$140 million a year. PST is also being applied to children's clothing, construction services, among others. Together, the PST changes will sting taxpayers by about \$900 million a year.

Education Property Tax

The changes to the way Education Property Tax works saw a shift of more than \$100 million from municipalities to the provincial government back in 2009-10. It seemed like a deal too good to be true (probably because the province noticed everyone backfilling the hole with their own tax increases), and indeed that has proven to be the case, as the province is clawing back about \$60 million of that. The impact on homeowners will vary, depending on how they went in the recent re-valuations. If your house's value stayed the same, you will be a winner, as the EPT mill rate for residential properties has dropped to about four mills from five.

The overall downside is that it will be harder for the municipal sector to increase property taxes to compensate for the drop in revenue sharing. You could say—and I'm going out on a limb here—that, when it comes to property

2017 Budget Highlights

Deficit: Hypothetical

Expenses: Too Many

Revenues: Not Enough

"Ambushes": 1

Relationships in "Serious Trouble" After this: 49

Letters of Protest Currently Sitting in Outboxes: 17,000

taxes, there is actually only one tax payer. In point of fact, sometimes there isn't even one, right folks?

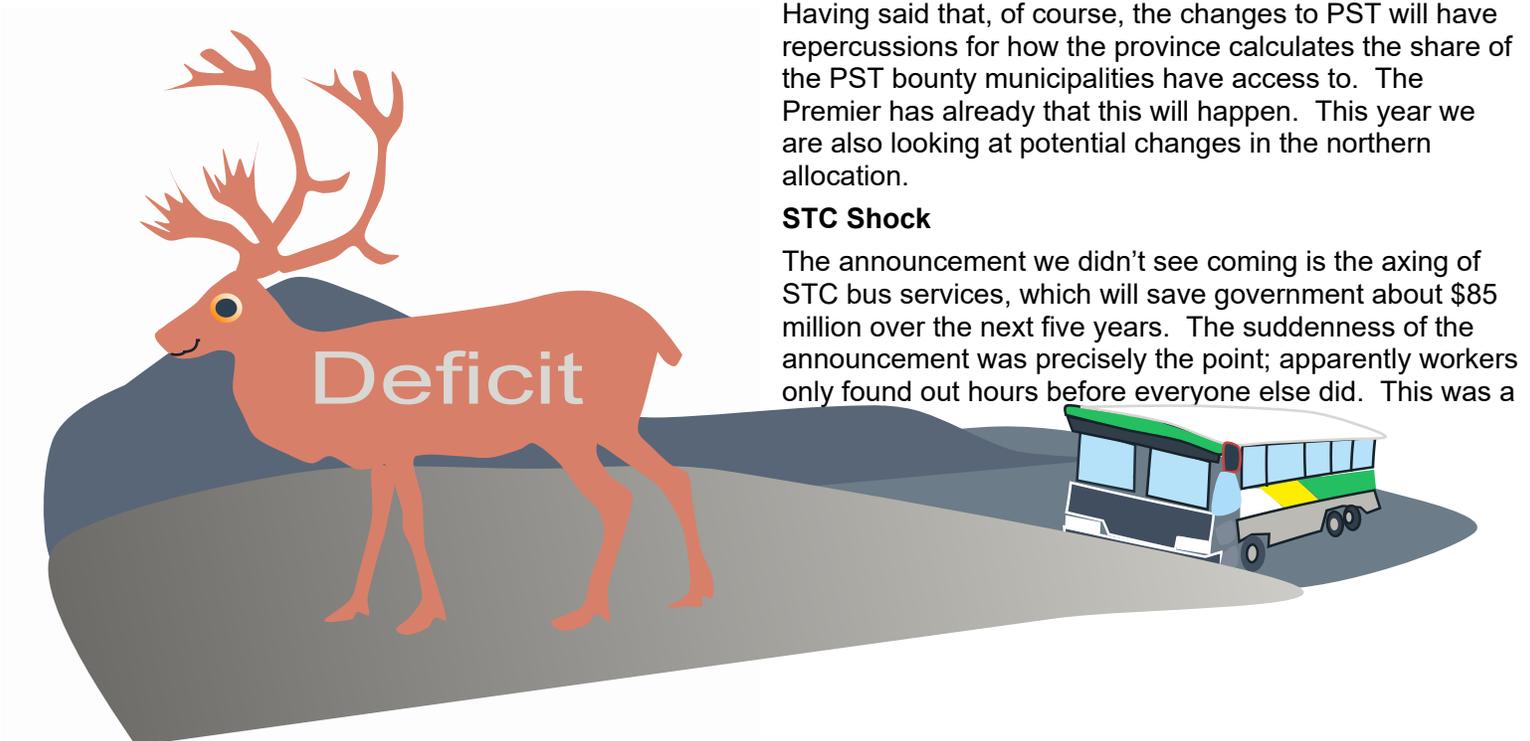
Revenue Sharing

You may have been surprised to see people, especially those working for municipal associations, rejoicing at the news that revenue sharing would fall by 5%. But it's not so much the decrease that's important as what it represents: the province's ongoing commitment to the revenue sharing formula, which overall has been very good for the sector.

Having said that, of course, the changes to PST will have repercussions for how the province calculates the share of the PST bounty municipalities have access to. The Premier has already said that this will happen. This year we are also looking at potential changes in the northern allocation.

STC Shock

The announcement we didn't see coming is the axing of STC bus services, which will save government about \$85 million over the next five years. The suddenness of the announcement was precisely the point; apparently workers only found out hours before everyone else did. This was a



cynical move: unlike some other potential changes to government operations (education, health), there has been no opportunity for anyone to mount a case to keep STC alive while it was still alive. STC, for their part, was in the middle of a refurbishing their fleet—hardly the actions of a service contemplating its own mortality.

Needless to say, the loss of STC will have a massive impact on northerners, especially those relying on it to get to medical services in the city.

Boards of Education Staying Elected/Boundaries Not Moving, Apparently

If you read the Perrins Report you would have read one of the least convincing cases for school board amalgamations imaginable. Predictably, the public response to the floated governance changes was pretty overwhelming, with more than 2000 submissions and virtually all of them—at least those the panel read—coming out in favour of some version of the status quo.

Cynics will say that the exercise was just a distraction for the reforms government really wanted to push through: the Ministry of Education giving itself ultimate authority over school boards.

Our response: well, duh. Even so, the government could not have failed to take notice of how attached people are to their school boards, and it'll be a while before they try that on again.

The budget did see a cut to operating funding for education, and also announced some changes in payroll, data crunching, and procurement maybe? Something pretty backend anyway.

Northern Highways, Airports

One day we promise we'll actually look into how the northern highways allocation is actually spent: this year it is \$53 million, which is consistent with previous years.

Libraries

The province's share of regional library funding has been eliminated in Saskatoon and Regina, and greatly reduced elsewhere. The municipalities will have to pick up the slack, fire staff (which is already happening, apparently), cancel their New Yorker Magazine subscriptions, and use cheaper timbers for those poles newspapers are threaded onto, just for starters.

Luckily, the northern system, the Pahkisimon Nuye?Áh, is untouched. Pahkisimon Nuye?Áh, incidentally, means "sunrise" in Cree and Dene. That seems appropriate: there's nothing like cuts to library funding to make you feel like you live in very dark times.

Elimination of Some Grants in Lieu "Guts" Revenues: SUMA

If you have a government building in your community, then instead of getting municipal property taxes, you most likely get something called Grants in Lieu.

The budget saw the announcement that SaskEnergy and SaskPower would be eliminating grants in lieu for about

Words to Describe this Year's Budget

Do-able

Ambushy

Not Do-able

Highly Flammable

Responsible

Sensible

Ambitious

Mean-Spirited

Brave

Incandescent

Cruel

**va, Do'Ha' yorlq!
(Klingon)**

100 municipalities, which will cost those communities about \$36 million in revenue, according to SUMA's figures. No northern municipalities are affected, it seems.

The dawning realization of the extent of the revenue hit sparked one of the strongest-worded policy alerts we've ever seen from our sister association, with a release from SUMA describing the budget announcement as an "ambush": "Municipal revenue sharing is being effectively gutted for urban municipalities by provincial government downloading, and revenue clawbacks ... what good is revenue sharing if you are losing up to half the amount through the loss of grants in lieu ... ?"

Projections Still Too Optimistic?

This budget proposes a deficit of \$680 million this year, and outlines a plan to bring it into surplus in time for the next election. It proposes doing that by keeping spending increases to about 1% year over year, and growing revenue by double that. That seems like a tough ask: in this year's "austerity budget" expenses/revenue growth were exactly the reverse.

Government is also predicting relatively stable potash prices, and for oil to trade at about \$56 a barrel, with the dollar to average below .75 cents US. These are very bold projections, so, like we said last year, the risk is on the bleh side.

Perhaps the scariest part of this budget for the people of Saskatchewan is that, despite an unrepeatable PST hike, and including in there previous excluded items like kid's clothes and construction, upping the EPT, closing STC, and jamming the tertiary education sector's fingers in the door (among many other little things), we could still be staring at a \$1 billion deficit at the end of the year. The province, in fact, has built \$300 million in contingency money into the budget, to be paid for by reductions of 3.5% (\$250 million) in public service salaries. It's still questionable whether a great bulk of that 3.5% is even remotely achievable.

A Taxation Solution, By CHELSEA LASKOWSKI to a Taxing Problem?

As author Harold Johnson says, we have problem with alcohol. Johnson says that 1 in 2 of all deaths in the north are related to alcohol use and addictions, as are 90% of court appearances.

Addictions treatment, detoxification, counselling programs, and family wellness programming are all ways to support those looking to end addictions. Prevention education in schools is also a helpful tool to stem the ill social effects of liquor. Liquor enforcement programming is another way to decrease harm.

But where does the north get the money to provide comprehensive, effective programming?

Let's note that alcohol is one of the few legal, taxable intoxicants in this province. The idea of collecting a "user tax" on alcohol and contributing it back into these types of things is not unheard of. Could a northern alcohol tax be one way for northern communities to direct the types of alcohol programming they'd like to see?

Before we get too deep into that concept, I want to walk you through how the province collects money from liquor sales and where that money goes.

Liquor sales and the General Revenue Fund

For decades, Saskatchewan has collected revenue from liquor sales in two ways: "mark-up," and the liquor consumption tax.

"Mark-up" might be familiar to you. Just last week, Finance Minister Kevin Doherty delivered a budget that will gain an extra \$5 million in revenue by increasing the liquor mark-up. In his budget speech, Doherty told the province "effective April 1st, wholesale liquor mark-ups will go up across-the-board by between 4 and 6.8 per cent." The net income from these mark-ups is collected by the SLGA and goes into the province's General Revenue Fund (GRF).

The province also charges a 10 per cent liquor consumption tax (LCT), which is collected by SLGA from people buying liquor at bars or liquor stores and passed on to the Ministry of Finance. Like the income from liquor mark-ups, the LCT income goes into the GRF.

In 2015-16, SLGA's net income of \$255.5 million ended up in the GRF, which was 41.1 per cent of the total provincial liquor sales.

How much liquor money is the province getting from the north?

I recently put in a request with SLGA for its breakdown of the province's Northern

Saskatchewan Administration District's liquor spending. I received information on sales at the SLGA Liquor stores in Creighton, La Loche, La Ronge, and Buffalo Narrows as well as sales to permittees who have off-sale endorsements. Here is what we found out: liquor sales in the NSAD were \$18.87 million in the 2014-15 budget year and \$19.05 million in the 2015-16 budget year. The provincial liquor sales were \$622.4 million in 2014-15 and \$641.1 million in 2015-16. On average, this means liquor purchases from the NSAD contribute around three per cent of the province's liquor sales. That number might seem low, but it's worth keeping in mind residents from the NSAD also spend money on liquor elsewhere. In fact, my SLGA statistics were accompanied by this message: "[A]lso note that some northern residents are likely buying alcohol in the south and there is no way to account for that."

However, crunching the numbers that can be accounted for, the province's GRF received a cash injection of at least \$7.7 million from northern liquor sales in 2015-16.

Addictions & funding inequity in the north

Despite delivering at least three per cent of the province's liquor sales, the NSAD does not get any money delivered back to specifically address the problem from which the province is profiting. Instead, the province considers that money to be "an important stream of revenue for the government that helps to pay for other public priorities such as healthcare, roads and education."

As a general rule, any situation where money is being taken from the north and then being redistributed to the rest of the province is loathed by northerners – and with good reason. It seems the money has no issue travelling south but the likelihood of that money heading back north is a different situation.

This is more pronounced when the money heading south is specifically coming from liquor consumption in an area that is disproportionately affected by addictions. The Northern Alcohol Strategy (NAS) found people aged 15 and over in the La Ronge area consume \$1,100 worth of liquor annually than the rest of the province. As well, there is a lack of related programming, as shown by the NAS's final recommendations for more comprehensive alcohol abuse treatment. The social

cleavage between the NSAD and the south is further punctuated by the differing cost of basic goods: for example, groceries are much more expensive in the north.

So what can we do with all this information to help balance the inequity?

The province's deficit budget is relying on the forecasted \$5 million from increased liquor markups, so that money is pretty much off limits to address the disproportionate issues associated with alcohol abuse in the north.

There is something to benefit northerners here though: the budget shows how easy it is for the province to make a substantial change to liquor pricing and receive minimal criticism from the public. The liquor mark-up increases aren't chump change: they make up 0.56 per cent of the province's recently announced tax increases for 2017-18. Yet in media coverage of the changes, the public didn't seem too fazed. When radio station CJME hit the streets for public reaction to the budget, one man was quoted as saying he "doesn't mind paying more for alcohol." Certainly a big contrast from what we're hearing on the closure of the Saskatchewan Transportation Company.

The province undoubtedly has the capacity to collect a liquor tax and remit it back to a specific governing body. For instance, a 2010 provincial media release says the province has agreements with seven First Nations that host casinos in which liquor fees are returned to the host First Nation to be used at the band's discretion to "meet local on-reserve needs." The 10 per cent casino levies replace the LCT because First Nations are not required to collect provincial tax on reserve.

Municipalities in the NSAD clearly do not have the ability to implement a 10 per cent tax of its own. It's subject to provincial laws and thus its LCT income needs to go to SLGA.

However, in theory, there's nothing barring the province from introducing a northern regional tax on liquor that could go towards specific addiction prevention and treatment in the north. Other jurisdictions have done that: a 2006 report on alcohol pricing by the Centre for Addiction Research of BC report notes 10 States in USA have an "earmarked" tax for alcohol programming. The same report says "It is clear that such taxes are far more acceptable to the voting public than taxes which go into general revenue."

Northern Regional Liquor Tax (NRTL)

Let's abbreviate this hypothetical tax as the NRTL. What per cent would be sufficient enough

Alcohol Taxation: By the Numbers

Alcohol Revenues in NSAD: \$19 million (2015-16)

Revenues from NSAD Alcohol Sales to GRF: \$7 million

Additional 1% Tax: \$190,000

Additional 2% Tax: \$380,000

Additional 5% Tax: \$950,000

for the NRTL to provide improved alcohol-related programming, but small enough that the province might get on board?

Based on the 2015-16 \$19.05 million liquor sales in the NAD, a newly-introduced NRTL of one per cent in that region would equate to around \$190,500 while a two per cent increase would be around \$381,000.

Based on public reaction to the province's budget liquor increases, it seems people could stomach up to two per cent. The 2006 BC report points out tax hikes can be viewed as "punishing the many for the sins of a few," so a proposed NRTL above two per cent would likely be more controversial.

Now, this money wouldn't be a groundbreaking sum for northerners. However, it could go towards real change in their communities if directed properly.

Options for spending that money might include: subsidizing after hours taxi services to ensure they stay operating after hours; offsetting the high cost of groceries in the north with a transport subsidizing; extending the duration of rehabilitation/detox programming, or subsidizing the operating expenses of a new addictions treatment centre.

A 2012 report by the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse addresses the current disconnect in how governments put liquor revenue into general revenue funds: "Most government liquor authorities report to ministries of finance or economic development. This arrangement means that fiscal imperatives may overshadow health and safety costs." The NRTL concept proposed here allows for a different type of setup where the social cost of liquor and inequity between the north and south is explicitly addressed.

FROM THE CEO Matt Heley

If you've ever used public transport in any city virtually anywhere in the world, you've been using a service subsidized by

taxpayers. If you've ever been in a health centre, driven on a rural road, visited a museum, lived in a SaskHousing rental, flown to Mexico, gotten an education, watched your beloved Riders turf a pigskin around, left your hose on all day, or built a multi-billion dollar bypass—guess what? You've gotten a taxpayer subsidy to do all that.

Which is why both the decision to close down STC, and the discussions following, have been so infuriating. Critics of STC will point to the fact that the province was subsidizing passengers to the tune of about \$94 a ride. They figure that out by dividing the total ridership into the province's subsidy (and, by our figures, it comes in closer to \$70). They will then say that government should not be in the business of subsidizing bus services.

But is it just the cost of the subsidy, or the principle itself that people are concerned about? The problem with government's decision on STC is that that discussion, unlike with Sasktel, never got a chance to feed into the decision to axe it.

The hypocrisy of critics of STC becomes so much more infuriating when you think about how many of them

would probably defend the public ownership of Sasktel. The government has stepped away from getting rid of the Crown due to public pressure—particularly in recent weeks following reports that, under private ownership, the cost of having a cell phone would increase substantially. The fact is we know that we get a good deal out of having Sasktel in public hands. But those lower phone prices come at the cost of Sasktel's dividends to the province. If Saskatchewan's mobile phone market was subject to market logic, we'd pay higher prices at the gate, but government coffers would be better off.

CBC recently published a report showing that the province is spending many thousands of dollars on roads in rural Saskatchewan that hardly anyone uses. The article quoted a government spokesperson who defended keeping these roads open, like this: "Closing low-traffic volume highways would essentially close rural Saskatchewan," the official said in an email. "Whether a highway serves 50 vehicles per day, or 5,000, that highway is essential to those who use it."

Let's rephrase: "Whether a bus service serves 50 people a day or 5,000, that service is essential to those who use it."

Works for me.

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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