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NOMA met with Government at 2023 ROMA Conference to Discuss Issues Facing Northwestern Ontario

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Thunder Bay, ON - The Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) met with Provincial government including Minister Rickford, Minister Graydon Smith, Minister Mulroney, Parliamentary Assistant Kevin Holland, Stan Cho, and Deepak Anand, and numerous parliamentary staff during the ROMA Conference this week in Toronto. Additionally, we met with both the Liberal and NDP Parties on Monday. NOMA shared with them four issues Northwestern Ontario is experiencing and provided potential solutions to resolve the issues. These included the sale of crown land, railway costs, road safety, maintenance, and rest stops, and the immigration pilot program.

Municipalities are facing mounting financial pressures and municipal governments constantly explore options to expand financial resources. While continued financial support from the government is needed, NOMA request for the province to work with us to move forward on these issues.

NOMA asked the province to sell crown land for commercial and housing development within municipal boundaries. We asked the province to conduct a survey to evaluate all crown land within municipal boarders in Northern Ontario to determine if they are eligible to be sold for development to increase housing supply and expand their property tax base. The province would benefit from generating revenue from the sale. NOMA also asked the province to ensure compensation is provided to municipalities that are required to provide service to tax exempt lands. The government acknowledged that there is interest but there is are some challenges. The government stated that municipalities may need to commit a portion of property tax revenue to be shared with First Nations to move forward with the sale of crown land. They want to ensure that how they move forward is mutually beneficial to all.

Municipalities continue to pay railway maintenance costs even now that CN and CP are private for-profit corporations with outstanding profit margins. NOMA believes it is time to amend this outdated legislation and come up with a solution to remove this burden from municipal budgets entirely. Railway companies should manage their own assets like other for-profit corporations and not be reliant on public funds and municipal taxpayers for maintenance and upgrades to their infrastructure. NOMA called on the Province of Ontario to conduct of review of this outdated practice of municipalities paying to maintain assets of a for-profit railway corporations and create solutions to municipalities covering a high percentage of railway crossing maintenance and construction. NOMA continues to urge the province to undertake ongoing consideration of municipal taxation for railroad rights of way properties, based on a per tonne-mile concept as the

current formula does not equitably compensate municipalities. During the Minister Forum, Minister Clark committed to moving forward on this issue and they will be beginning consultations soon across the province.

We have seen an increase of fatal collisions on our northern roads this season. We did thank the government for the change from 16 to 12 hours road clearing standards. However, it is not enough, and people continue to die on the highways. NOMA asked the government to clarify the government's plans to enhance highway safety in the north to reduce crashes in northwestern Ontario and to invest to increase road safety. We also asked that more maintained year-round rest stops be opened for truck drivers and other vehicles to access washroom facilities. The government said they are working on this issue and are moving forward with the 2+1 pilot. They will be looking into how to address the human error component and increasing driver training for transport drivers.

NOMA asked the government to allocate more immigrants to small and rural communities in Northwestern Ontario to address labour vacancies. We asked the province to consider working with NOMA and others to make the immigration pilot program permanent to continue to address the current gaps in the labour force, to expand the program so more employers across all communities in the Northwestern Ontario region can participate, and that the province considers attaching a funding envelope to the initiative. PA Deepak Anand said "YES, YES, YES" and the government will support this initiative. We look forward to working with the government.

NOMA was pleased to hear that Government is willing to work with us on some of these outstanding issues. The Government did note that there are complexities to some issues that present challenges, but they are open to working with us to find a resolution.

NOMA, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM), and the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) jointly discussed the crisis of Homelessness, Mental Health, and Addictions with the Provincial Government.

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