



Media Release

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WOWC Champions Housing, Mental Health and Workforce Development Initiatives at ROMA 2024

Toronto, Ontario – The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) continued to advocate strongly for three critical regional priorities during the Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) 2024 Conference. Engaging in constructive dialogue with provincial government representatives from January 21 to 23, 2024, WOWC reaffirmed its commitment to addressing key regional issues facing Western Ontario.

Joining thousands of rural municipal colleagues in Toronto, WOWC members met this week for discussions with several Provincial Ministers and Opposition Parties. These meetings centered around WOWC's key priorities for the 2023-2024 year, which include:

- Housing
- Workforce Development to Support Economic Growth
- Mental Health, Addictions, and Homelessness

“The delegations with provincial representatives were very well received, and our members were respectful but firm in our dialogue with the government – outlining very clearly where we supported the government’s initiatives, while emphasizing the unique needs and improvements required in the many rural and small urban communities across Western Ontario,” stated WOWC Chair Glen McNeil. “We reiterated the WOWC’s desire to continue building our relationship and collaborating with the provincial government and presented a series of recommendations based on significant research conducted with regional stakeholders over the past year.”

“The WOWC’s recommendations included permanent, predictable funding for mental health and addictions; increased consultation with rural and small urban municipalities regarding housing legislation; measures to address and better prepare for future workforce gaps and an

increase to the leave to construct threshold for hydrocarbon projects,” added Mayor Jim Ginn, Chair of WOWC’ Economic Development Committee.

Representatives at the WOWC’s delegation with the government included Hon. Paul Clandra, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing; Honourable Michael Kerzner, Solicitor General; Parm Gill, Minister of Red Tape Reduction; Deepak Anand, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development; and Stéphane Sarrazin, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Energy.

The WOWC also met separately with MPP Marit Stiles, Leader of the Ontario NDP; the Ontario Liberal Party; and MPP Mike Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party of Ontario, as well as independent MPP Bobbi Ann Brady.

“We would like to thank the many provincial representatives for attending these delegations, engaging in constructive dialogue with us, and demonstrating how they value our priorities,” stated WOWC Warden Andy Lennox, Wellington County. “We are adamant that the work being conducted by the WOWC – and the recommendations being made – will serve as a model for the entire province, and we plan to continue our advocacy over the coming months in order to ensure that rural and small urban Western Ontario receives the support and recognition it deserves.”

“The WOWC certainly appreciates the government’s willingness to hear our perspectives and benefited from our delegations to advocate clearly and effectively on our intentions, as well as our interest in continuing to collaborate with all levels of government on these initiatives,” added Mayor Amy Martin, Norfolk County. “This excellent cooperation among governments will only continue to foster our collective success.”

To learn more about the WOWC’s priorities and view the briefing materials used for the ROMA 2024 Conference, please visit www.wowc.ca.

About

The ***Western Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (WOWC)*** is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.5 million residents. The WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research, analysis, and education. For more information, visit www.wowc.ca.

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