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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# Western Canadian Municipal Associations (WCMA) Gather in Edmonton for Annual Meeting

Leaders representing the municipal associations from Western Canada's three Prairie provinces met in Edmonton on Wednesday, October 5, 2022, to discuss common issues.

Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis) and the Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) co-hosted the annual meeting which brings together elected officials and staff from ABmunis, RMA, Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), and the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM).

Discussion items included municipal challenges in accessing federal infrastructure funding, the impacts of the Government of Canada's proposed fertilizer emission reduction targets on Canada's agriculture sector, escalating uncertainty related to RCMP policing, challenges in supporting broadband connectivity, and limited access to health services and mental health and addictions support.

In terms of infrastructure funding, the associations agreed on the need for the federal government to engage with municipalities to ensure future funding programs meet the needs of all municipalities. More specifically, WCMA members are calling for the permanent doubling of the Canada Community Building Fund (CCBF) as a core federal action to support strong and resilient municipalities.

"Municipalities need a seat at the table. We are often required to share costs with the federal and provincial governments but lack a voice in negotiating infrastructure agreements. Our expertise, insights and priorities are vital to the process."

Cathy Heron, President, Alberta Municipalities

Another important issue discussed was the challenge being faced by each province regarding access to healthcare, emergency medical services, and mental health and addictions support in both urban and rural communities. Provincial under-resourcing in these areas have put municipalities across western Canada in a challenging position due to the ongoing downloading of responsibilities without corresponding increases in funding or support.

“The COVID-19 pandemic compounded mental health and addictions issues, which were already a critical crisis in Canada. From affordable housing to additional mental health resources, we need more supports. We need a coordinated response from the provincial and federal governments to help our residents, and our communities.”

Randy Goulden, President, Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association

The associations discussed the Government of Canada’s proposed 30% reduction in fertilizer emissions. It was communicated that if implemented, the proposal would unfairly target the agriculture industry, which is already at the forefront of emissions reductions efforts. Canada’s agriculture industry massively contributes to food security across the world and any new barriers or restrictions placed on the industry must weighed against its economic and humanitarian contributions. All the WCMA members agreed that the federal government must support our Canadian agriculture sector and consult with all sector stakeholders before proceeding with any announcements or directives that affect our agriculture industry.

“Western Canadian ag producers are the most technologically advanced in the world. Heavy restrictions on the use of fertilizers would pave a path to unsustainable agriculture in Canada, leading to lower production and reduced food security.”

Ray Orb, President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities

As many municipalities contract RCMP for policing services, the associations are concerned with the uncertainty around many aspects of policing. This includes a lack of accountability from the federal government to formally commit to assuming the costs of the retroactive RCMP salary increases negotiated through a recent collective agreement with the federal government. Municipalities were not at the table to negotiate the agreement and were not engaged on the impacts of assuming such costs. WCMA is calling on the federal government to firmly indicate that municipalities will not be required to assume these costs.

WCMA members are also seeking clarity from the Government of Canada in the RCMP’s future role in contract policing. With several provinces considering or actively studying a transition to a provincial police service, WCMA believes the Government of Canada has a responsibility to provide municipalities with certainty around the RCMP’s role moving forward.

“Despite being a paying contract partner, municipalities were completely shut out of the RCMP collective bargaining process. While we appreciate the Government of Canada pausing invoices to municipalities, the federal government needs to find an immediate solution to retroactive policing bills. Moving forward, we will continue to call on the federal government to fully absorb all retroactive pay increases.”

Brad Saluk and Chris Ewen, Vice Presidents, Association of Manitoba Municipalities

Access to broadband is critical to community sustainability across western Canada. While the federal government has provided a range of broadband funding over the past decade, it continues to miss the mark in improving connectivity in the most underserved areas. WCMA is calling on the Government of Canada to revisit their approach to connectivity to better support communities that need it most.

“Access to broadband for small, rural and remote communities across the Prairies continues to be a challenge despite several funding announcements by provincial and federal governments. The opportunity to connect with our peers from Western Canada provides immense opportunity to identify collaborative solutions to push the Government of Canada to distribute funding transparently and in a manner that supports improved connectivity in the most underserved areas.”

Paul McLauchlin, President, Rural Municipalities of Alberta

As western Canadians, the association representatives agreed on the importance of oil and gas in supporting Canadians’ basic needs and in helping to fund a nationwide transition to a net zero economy in the future. Oil and gas continues to be hugely important to municipalities across western Canada, and WCMA sees a need for the Government of Canada to better recognize the importance of the industry to Canada’s economy, and support its world class efforts to produce resources in an ethical and environmentally responsible way.

The annual WCMA meeting was a great opportunity for the associations to not only share concerns but build a stronger relationship. “We reaffirmed today that we have much in common and can have a strong voice when working together. It was a great opportunity to have an open discussion on how we can address issues impacting municipalities in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta,” explained Paul McLauchlin, President of the Rural Municipalities of Alberta.

“Western Canada’s municipalities are leaders in many areas, from renewable energy to mental health supports and many in between,” said Alberta Municipalities President Cathy Heron. “We made great progress on determining how to work with other levels of government on these key issues and we look forward to more collaboration in the months ahead.”