

## Minister and UBCM President Launch Work on New Deal

At a meeting last week, the new Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, the Honourable Murray Coell and UBCM President Frank Leonard agreed to work together to engage the Federal government in discussions about their New Deal. The New Deal was announced as part of the federal Throne Speech.

The speech said that *"the Government will work with provinces to share with municipalities a portion of gas tax revenues or to determine other fiscal mechanisms which achieve the same goals."*

The Premier has asked Minister Coell to work on the New Deal with UBCM. The Minister and UBCM President have asked a working group to return in two weeks with an outline of discussion points that could be presented to the federal government to initiate a process and framework to reach agreements.

The New Deal was one of the issues discussed at the meeting with Minister Coell along with a variety of short, intermediate and full term priorities.

Some of the other issues discussed were:

- Early announcement of small community protection grants
- Expediting the announcement of approved infrastructure grants
- Determine the status of the federal government's 2003 \$1 billion Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund (the federal Throne Speech hints that the commitments may be advanced)
- Complete the regulations to implement the Community Charter concurrent regulatory authority and establishing new financial liability limits and assent free borrowing room.

The President and Minister will arrange to meet with the Attorney General on civil liability, which remains a significant concern to local governments.

The Minister and President agreed that there was great potential for joint work between MCAWS and UBCM in the months ahead.

### BC CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

UBCM has called on the Prime Minister and federal government to establish the existing BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) as a national centre.

Following the series of public health crises experienced in Canada which continue to challenge the federal government, the Prime Minister has committed to strengthening the public health system by establishing a Canada Health Agency to link Canada both nationally and globally, in a network for disease control and emergency response.

It would be ideal to anchor this new initiative in BC, given the excellent centre for infectious disease control and research

that we already have in place. The BCCDC is the only provincial centre for disease control in the country.

BC is lobbying to have the national system centred in this province to build on the proven public health infrastructure and capacity that already exists. Given the importance of getting a new integrated system up and running quickly so future emergencies can be better managed, BC feels it has an advantage which should be utilized to the benefit of all Canadians.

UBCM has been invited to join Minister of Health Services Colin Hansen and federal Minister of State (Public Health) Carolyn Bennett to discuss BC's proposal.

### HOMEOWNER GRANT THRESHOLD

UBCM has approached the Minister of Finance with a request to increase the threshold at which the homeowner grant is reduced. Currently the homeowner grant is reduced by \$10 per thousand of assessment after a home exceeds \$525,000. Thousands of homeowners face loss or reduction of grants because of huge increases in assessment. The threshold has not been changed in seven years. This will be one of the issues that UBCM will be following on provincial budget day (Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>).