

2015 Association of Municipalities of Ontario Annual Conference



Every year, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) hosts an annual conference where municipal representatives, elected officials and staff from across Ontario attend.

The AMO conference is an opportunity to learn about best practices, new technology and most importantly, meet with government officials, including ministers and MPPs. This year, AMO held their conference in Niagara Falls with more than 1,600 municipal leaders attending to discuss issues affecting communities across Ontario.

I participated in this year's conference by attending meetings with my party's Leader Patrick Brown and our Progressive Conservative Municipal Affairs and Housing critic Ernie Hardeman. In addition to FONOM (Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities) and Eastern Ontario Wardens' Caucus, meetings were held with representatives from municipalities across Dufferin-Caledon, including the Region of Peel, the Town of Caledon, Dufferin County, Shelburne, East Garafraxa, Melancthon and Amaranth. The meetings covered many different topics, but there was a consistent theme about how provincial legislation and policies are impacting our communities.

AMO has a tradition of asking all three provincial party leaders to deliver speeches to the delegates. In his speech, Brown discussed the important relationship between municipalities and the province. He highlighted examples where businesses make decisions on where to locate, based on policies like hydro rates that are beyond the control of the local municipality, and yet have far-reaching implications. For example, when Windsor lost out on their bid for a new Jaguar Land Rover Plant and the Mayor's response was "There were other factors in play, beyond our control, that put us at a competitive disadvantage."

The provincial government doesn't seem to understand that these decisions are impacting our local communities and the need to improve Ontario's economic climate so that businesses will want to set up shop in our province.

Another issue raised in his speech that was well received by the delegates was the need to improve mental health services. Currently, there is a lack of funding for mental health services by the province which negatively impacts our municipally funded emergency services. As a result, mental health patients are reaching points of crisis and our emergency services are left to deal with patients and families who have no other option. It taxes our families that are left with no other option than to call the police, and it places added pressure on our police services because they are dealing with mentally ill people in crisis. We can do better. The all-party committee I sat on made 23 recommendations that would make a real difference in the lives of people suffering from a mental illness, and yet we wait for the provincial government to act. Patrick received a standing ovation from the delegates when he raised this issue, which speaks to how important our municipal leaders know it is.

A strong partnership between the province and municipalities is paramount if we want to strengthen Ontario and our communities. We must work with our municipalities and listen to their concerns so that together we can make the right decisions for our province and communities.