

LUMCO

Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario

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ONTARIO'S BIG CITY MAYORS WANT ISSUES FACING MAJORITY OF PROVINCE ADDRESSED

The Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO) met in Brampton on Friday May 23, 2014 to hear from the Provincial parties on their platforms, as they relate to Ontario's big cities.

Each of the party leaders were invited to attend or send a delegate. The Liberal Party of Ontario was represented by a Glenn Murray, MPP Toronto Centre, and former Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. The Ontario Progressive Conservative (PC) Party, Jim MacDonell, MPP Stormont – Dundas - South Glengarry, former Municipal Affairs critic, participated by phone. The New Democratic Party of Ontario (NDP) declined to participate.

"Although we are disappointed none of the leaders chose to personally attend, and one party skipped the meeting entirely, we're pleased the Liberals took the time to share their views with Ontario's Big City Mayors in person, and the PCs by phone," said Mayor Jeff Lehman, City of Barrie and LUMCO chair.

During the 2014 Provincial election, LUMCO's focus is on the following four key priority areas to Ontario's largest cities:

1. Gridlock and transit/transportation
2. The rising cost of emergency services
3. Job creation in Ontario
4. Affordable Housing

As Mayors heard in Brampton, each of the platforms have elements relating to these key priorities. Here is where the parties stand on Ontario Big City advocacy priorities and how Mayors are reacting.

1. Gridlock and Transit/Transportation

"As Mayors who represent 67% of Ontario's population, we are encouraged to see gridlock addressed in varying degrees in all of the party platforms," said Mayor Mark Gerretsen, City of Kingston. However, transit and infrastructure investments cannot be sustained over the long haul without sustainable, predictable funding."

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LUMCO Board Chair

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Mayors from Niagara, Guelph and Waterloo Regions pushed party representatives for improved GO rail service to those areas, an idea supported by all three parties. The Ontario PC plan includes \$2 billion per year in infrastructure and transit investments after the budget is balanced. The NDP would create a dedicated fund of \$29 Billion over 10 years for transit and transportation projects across the Province and begin flowing funds immediately. They also promise to boost transit investment by \$250 million annually to kick-start priority transit projects. On the critical issue of Toronto-area transportation, the Mayors are happy to see the Liberal party commitments to Regional Express Rail and sustained funding. The Liberal party plan includes \$28.9 billion for transit over 10 years, including \$15 billion for the GTHA.

2. The Rising Cost of Emergency Services

The arbitration system is broken, resulting in increasing costs for municipalities. The Liberals and the NDP are silent on this important issue, with the PCs saying they are committed to reintroducing legislation if elected.

"The Conservatives should be acknowledged for their consistent approach and draft legislation in the previous session with respect to Interest Arbitration," said Mayor Rick Goldring, City of Burlington. "Emergency services costs are skyrocketing—we need a sustainable system so we are not passing along undue costs to our residents."

3. Job Creation

Each of the parties has included job creation for Ontario in their platforms. Ontario Big City Mayors encourage Ontarians to carefully scrutinize these plans and the assumptions within them. The Mayors of Ontario's largest cities are requesting a Provincial jobs strategy, a long term vision and plan for investment that speaks to large and small companies, and suggesting Big City Mayors need to be at the table.

The central theme in the PC platform is their One Million Jobs Plan. However, Ontario's Big City Mayors are concerned with the proposed plan to cut 100,000 public sector jobs, and the inclusion of municipal staff in that promise.

"Municipalities are responsible to manage the affairs of our cities and we also do not run deficits," said Mayor Karen Farbridge, City of Guelph and Vice-Chair of LUMCO. "Requiring municipalities to cut important front line jobs will have a detrimental effect on the important services cities deliver each day directly to the public. Which services do the PCs think should be cut?"

Cities are the economic engines of Ontario—as such, Big City Mayors believe sustained employment growth is the most important issue facing the Province and its cities.

4. Affordable Housing

"Ontario is the only province where the cost of social housing is paid for by property taxpayers," said Deputy Mayor Norm Kelly, City of Toronto. "As Ontario Big City Mayors, we are calling on our provincial leaders to upload the cost of social housing and to work with us and the federal government on developing a long-term social housing strategy."

The Liberals are the only platform which specifically addresses the need for funding for more affordable housing. The Liberals recommit to the Investment in an Affordable Housing program for a 5 year, \$400 million investment.

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"Before heading to the polls, I encourage Ontarians to become informed on these issues facing big cities—specifically how each party plans to address them. Ontario's Big City Mayors want to be at the table with the next Provincial Government as a full partner in our efforts to grow the provincial economy and make Ontario the best province possible," Lehman added.

The Large Urban Mayors' Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO) represents 67% of Ontario's population with Mayors of 26 communities over 100,000 residents. LUMCO advocates for issues and policies important to Ontario's largest cities. Jeff Lehman, the Mayor of Barrie is the Chair of LUMCO. Visit ontariobigcitymayors.ca for more information.

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