



MP Mr. Kody Blois
Chair of Rural Caucus
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada, K1A 0A6

December 2, 2020

Dear Mr. Blois

Thank you for meeting with the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) on November 30, 2020 to discuss ideas for supporting Rural Fire Departments. We are so grateful to you and the Caucus for your attention, understanding, interest and leadership in this area.

We would like to follow up on the three areas of our discussion: the Gas Tax Fund; the Volunteer Firefighter Tax Credit; and the former Joint Emergency Preparedness Program. We attach for you a copy of our Pre-budget Submission which covers these and other areas, and address your questions below.

As it pertains to the Gas Tax Fund, you kindly asked us to consider a metric as a possible threshold for which departments might submit gas tax fund projects to their municipalities. There are many different metrics that could be applied. However, nearly all these would create arbitrary exclusions. We would therefore like to offer a somewhat different approach to ensuring the needs of all rural communities are met through this initiative.

Since the Gas Tax Fund would not require departments to compete with each other; since municipalities will choose projects; and since most fire departments are in rural areas, we believe it would be best if the Gas Tax Fund allowed all fire departments' infrastructure projects to be considered as potentially eligible by their municipalities and provinces. This would not add costs to the program or disadvantage any department. It would be a win for all communities in Canada. We are happy to discuss this further.

The second area of our discussion pertained to the Volunteer Firefighter Tax Credit. This tax credit is so much appreciated by the fire service and by the CAFC. Some of our Board Members were involved in its earliest negotiations. The challenge is now in the CRA rules and definitions.

Today, most volunteer firefighters receive some form of pay on call or honoraria. In some cases, this can be due to Provincial health and safety regulations requiring the volunteer firefighter to be registered under workers' compensation programs. Ironically, the mandatory or honorary pay can result in the

ineligibility of the volunteer firefighter for the credit. The credit could thus be improved by clarifying the definition of a volunteer firefighter and by exempting all income associated with the volunteer position. We would be grateful and pleased to assist in improving the volunteer firefighter tax credit, if there were a willingness. It is a very important program for rural communities in Canada.

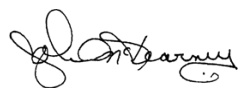
A similar area of concern occurred with Employment Insurance (EI). Under the former program, eligibility for EI was compromised by the volunteer firefighter pay. We acknowledge the changes made to the program at the end of the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) period. We are not clear yet on whether this will fully address the issue, but we acknowledge the changes in the right direction. We will be monitoring to see how these impact the fire service.

The third area we discussed was the possibility of introducing a modernized version of the former Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP). The original objectives of this program were to enhance local emergency preparedness and response capacity. Federal contributions for emergency preparedness projects under JEPP ended in 2013. At the time, the objectives were considered to have been met and funding was moved to other important areas such as critical infrastructure and urban search and rescue.

However, in the years past the sunset of this program, new needs have emerged. The role and expectations of the fire department have been evolving to respond to multiple hazards. The country's rural and volunteer fire departments are raising money for projects that used to fit under the JEPP program while still other needs emerge. While we are conscious of the role of the federal government, we offer that if 85% of the country's fire departments are already volunteer, it would become an issue of national security if we did not take multiple measures to help sustain them.

We hope that our views are helpful to you. As you know the CAFC has a large number of fire chiefs available to help our leaders formulate relevant policies that will support our country. Please feel free to let us know through our Executive Director, Dr. Tina Saryeddine tsaryeddine@cafc.ca, if you need more information. We are pleased to assist. We are very grateful for your leadership and outreach. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chief John McKearney
CAFC President
Whistler, BC.

CC: CAFC Board of Directors

Enclosures/attachments: CAFC submission to the Consultations in Advance of Budget 2021, Article from *Canadian Fire Chief Magazine* on Volunteer Firefighters