

**Former ROMA Chair Ron Holman Remarks  
2019 ROMA Conference  
Sunday, Jan. 27; 3:10 p.m.  
Sheraton Centre Toronto, Grand Ballroom Centre/West**

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***Chest against delivery.***

Good afternoon.

Thank you, Allan. And thank you for stepping in to serve as interim Chair. Your leadership and experience are much appreciated and essential as ROMA moves forward.

I also want to thank my fellow ROMA board members for their support and contributions.

Together we have had a productive four years. It's been a privilege to serve as your Board Chair.

Three years ago, ROMA took the leap and decided to hold our first stand-alone conference in decades.

The Board felt that the time was right for ROMA to stand on its own.

It was not an easy decision. But after considerable discussion the Board felt it would benefit ROMA in the long-term.

Rural matters needed a dedicated forum.

Rural communities needed a bigger voice.

Our objective was to bring a very rural lens to this event and in the process create a stronger rural voice.

You have proved us right. We have grown bigger with each passing year. This year alone attendance is up more than 20%.

As a result, we have become an even stronger advocate on your behalf. I am happy to report on key accomplishments.

We have taken the additional revenues generated from the conference to support a range of initiatives.

For example, we were able to provide support to both the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities and the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association, better known as FONOM and NOMA.

Also, we worked closely with both FONOM and NOMA on the previous provincial government's species at risk policy. In 2018, together, we successfully delayed their changes.

Forestry is a shared interest because beyond the north. The industry drives parts of the economy right across the province.

ROMA is also providing financial support to the Teeny Tiny Summits over the next four years.

These are mini-conferences tailored for the smallest of communities across the province of Ontario – those with less than one-thousand residents.

These were popular events in 2018, with hundreds of people attending.

ROMA's support is filling an important need.

We have also strengthened our ties to the Rural Ontario Institute.

ROI provides important leadership development and research for Ontario's rural communities. Their research bolsters our collective policy work.

They recently released their fact sheets for 2018 and I'd encourage you to check them out. There is great data there for understanding trends in rural communities.

Following the most recent municipal election, ROI also conducted a survey of rural Councillors.

There was a one-third turn over on rural Councils during this past municipal election. I expect the survey results will help develop programs and supports that better meet your needs.

On policy matters, Allan noted that ROMA was pleased to support Caledon's volunteers and AMO in a long-fought effort to protect double-hatter firefighters.

This was an enormous achievement for us all. The current provincial government should be applauded for its swift and decisive action on this important issue within its first six months.

Double-hatters provide essential experience and support to rural, volunteer fire services. Professional firefighters should have the right to serve as volunteers in their home communities -- without fear of dismissal or fines.

The Province also made improvements to interest arbitration for fire, including criteria to make sure the arbitrator considers a municipality's ability to pay and to explain their rationale.

This was a hard-won clash of interests with the union association.

Let's be clear - the criteria alone do not guarantee better arbitration outcomes. That rests with municipal governments - doing good homework and being well prepared.

Only then will arbitrators have a picture of our fiscal health, or lack thereof. And they will need to consider it in their decision making.

These are important wins. Yes – it has taken time and tenacity, but we have made progress.

There is, of course, also more work to do. No doubt, there will be new challenges to face.

I know that the ROMA Board and AMO will be there. As will other's in the municipal sector. "Togetherness" is a significant component of any success.

Allan has already shared some ROMA priorities, like natural gas expansion, the future of 5G and OMPF funding.

The Province developed guides for rural and northern communities, to add a common-sense approach to applying the Provincial Policy Statement, or PPS, outside high-growth areas. We need to encourage the use of these guides to foster growth and opportunity in rural and northern parts of our province.

It's been an honour to be part of ROMA. I am confident that the new Board will carry the baton with energy and enthusiasm.

If you are an eligible voter, please make the time to mark a ballot tomorrow for your ROMA Zone representative. It's critical to have strong voices around the Board table.

I'd now like to invite Afshin Majidi to the stage to deliver the Secretary Treasurer's Report.