



Media Release

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Powering Ontario's Economic Engine: WOWC Launches 2025–2027 Strategic Priorities at Queen's Park

Meetings with Provincial Ministers and Evening Reception Highlight Collaborative Work between WOWC and Province of Ontario

TORONTO — The Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC) brought regional leadership to Queen's Park on Monday, June 2, for a series of strategic meetings with Ontario Cabinet Ministers, culminating in an evening reception attended by Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs), staff, and key partners.

The Caucus officially launched its **2025–2027 Strategic Priorities: Powering Ontario's Economic Engine**, a forward-looking roadmap to support the long-term prosperity, connectivity, and resilience of Western Ontario. Representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities and 1.6 million residents, the WOWC is a strong voice for rural and mid-sized communities across the region, which collectively drive more than \$226 billion in exports through more than 250,000 businesses.

"This week marks a pivotal moment for our region," said Amy Martin, Chair of the WOWC and Mayor of Norfolk County, during remarks at the reception. "We are proud to launch our new Strategic Plan at Queen's Park, in partnership with the Provincial government, to help advance solutions for the people and businesses powering Ontario's economy."

As part of the day's advocacy, WOWC held targeted meetings with key Provincial Ministers to discuss the Strategic Priorities and identify opportunities for collaboration across multiple sectors, including:

- **Hon. Rob Flack**, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
- **Hon. Kinga Surma**, Minister of Infrastructure
- **Hon. Trevor Jones**, Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Agribusiness
- **Hon. Victor Fedeli**, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
- **Hon. Graydon Smith**, Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The WOWC's **2025–2027 Strategic Priorities** focus on four key areas critical to the long-term health and prosperity of Western Ontario:

1. Infrastructure Development and Funding

Rural municipalities are experiencing unprecedented growth pressures but lack the financial tools and support to maintain and expand critical infrastructure such as roads, water systems, broadband, and transit. The WOWC is calling on the Province to significantly increase funding and partnership opportunities to help communities upgrade aging infrastructure and invest in new projects essential to future development.

2. Housing Affordability and Availability

Western Ontario's housing market is outpacing infrastructure and affordability, making it increasingly difficult for workers, families, and seniors to find suitable homes. The WOWC is advocating for provincial support to help stabilize the housing supply, accelerate development approvals, and implement innovative financing models that ensure housing remains attainable and appropriately scaled for rural and mid-sized communities.

3. Workforce Development and Preservation

A resilient local economy depends on a strong, skilled, and accessible workforce. The WOWC is emphasizing the need for strategic investments in regional training opportunities, transportation infrastructure, and digital connectivity. Additionally, housing that supports workers and their families must be prioritized to attract and retain talent across sectors—from manufacturing and agriculture to healthcare and tourism.

4. Mental Health Services and Support

Municipalities across Western Ontario are increasingly on the front lines of a growing mental health and addictions crisis. With rising demands on social services and homelessness response, municipalities are calling for a coordinated, well-funded provincial approach. The WOWC is urging the Province to provide sustainable funding and wraparound supports that address the root causes and relieve local governments of disproportionate financial burdens.

“These are not just local challenges, rather they are Ontario-wide priorities that require meaningful collaboration between all levels of government – and we’re here to offer practical, evidence-based solutions that reflect the realities of Ontario’s municipalities,” said Chair Martin. “Let’s ensure that those powering Ontario’s economy have the infrastructure, people, and support systems they need not just to keep going—but to thrive. By working together, we can continue to power Ontario’s economic engine.”

The WOWC remains committed to its core values of non-partisanship, regional unity, and solution-oriented advocacy, and looks forward to ongoing collaboration with the Province of Ontario.

For more information on the WOWC and its 2025–2027 Strategic Priorities, visit: www.wowc.ca.

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About

The ***Western Ontario Wardens' Caucus (WOWC)*** is a not-for-profit organization representing 15 upper and single-tier municipalities in Southwestern Ontario, representing more than 1.6 million residents. The WOWC aims to enhance the prosperity and overall wellbeing of rural and small urban communities across the region. Caucus members work collectively to influence federal and provincial legislation and programs through advocacy, research, analysis and education. For more information, visit www.wowc.ca.

Photos

Photo 1: WOWC Chair, Mayor Amy Martin; Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rob Flack



Photo 2: Image of Strategic Priorities Postcard



Photo 3: Warden Luke Charbonneau Bruce County; Minister of Natural Resources Mike Harris; Mike Scheiner, Leader of the Green Party; Warden Janet Horner Dufferin County; Warden Andrea Matrosovs Grey County; WOWC Chair Amy Martin Norfolk County; Minister of Rural Affairs Lisa Thompson; MPP Will Bouma (Brantford-Brant), MPP Robert Bailey (Sarnia-Lambton), Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing Graydon Smith, MPP Brian Riddell (Cambridge)

