

Reeve's Message

February is a crucial month for residents of the Municipal District of Bonnyville. In fact February 21, is a crucial day for our future as an independent municipality.

The Progressive Conservative (PC) Party of Alberta is holding its nomination day for the Bonnyville-Cold Lake Constituency on February 21 at the Cold Lake Seniors Centre (located in Cold Lake North, in the Harbourview Community Centre 1301- 8th Street). At publication time, two candidates had thrown their hats into the ring – Dixie Dahlstedt and City of Cold Lake Mayor Craig Copeland.

As you know, for the past seven to eight years, Cold Lake Council, led by Mayor Copeland, has made all kinds of efforts to access large amounts of money and land from the M.D. Mayor Copeland has talked about dissolving and then splitting the M.D. in half, annexing for a “land bridge”, annexing for growth and lately, promoting a regional government composed of the M.D., City of Cold Lake, Town of Bonnyville, Village of Glendon and the two summer villages – Bonnyville Beach and Pelican Narrows.

The M.D. of Bonnyville Council believes it must remain an independent municipality. Over the past 10 years, the M.D. has shown it is more than willing to partner and cooperate with its urban neighbours to provide improved and cost effective services to residents in this region. These partnerships, such as doctor recruitment and the Centennial Centre, have proven to be highly successful.

When Mayor Copeland is championing regional government, he uses Lac La Biche County, where the smaller Town of Lac La Biche amalgamated with the larger Lakeland County, as a successful model. Unfortunately, research tells us a different story. Lac La Biche County, with a population of 12,220 (according to their 2013 Municipal Census) is struggling to provide appropriate services to both its rural and urban residents. It is our understanding that the rural residents are not pleased with the reduced services they are experiencing. In the model championed by Mayor Copeland, the new regional municipality would encompass a population of over 36,000 people, the majority of whom would be urban dwellers. Services to rural residents would surely be reduced, and our taxes would definitely be increased.

Another model Mayor Copeland promotes is Strathcona County, forgetting that Strathcona County was formed to counteract the power of its large urban neighbour, the City of Edmonton. Currently Strathcona County is fighting regionalization moves by the City of Edmonton. Regional government is not a term that Strathcona County is promoting, nor supporting.

Council believes the M.D. should remain its own entity. Our rural needs are different than those of urban folks, and we need to govern ourselves accordingly. M.D. Council governs in a fiscally conservative manner. We've made it clear on many occasions that Council does not spend more than it makes. This Council lives within its means. Sometimes that means making hard choices. As Council looks ahead to low oil prices, those choices are certain to come into play. The “need to have” will take priority over the “nice to have”. Infrastructure must come before recreation, roads before another field house and water and waste services before another arena or a pool.

That being said, this Council is committed to keeping the mill rate stable for the rest of this term. We will continue “to live within our means” while continuing with our plans to not spend our reserves and continue on with our gravel stockpiling program.

The M.D. is also facing complicated development issues. Council recently came back from an agriculture conference in Edmonton where it learned that 1.3 million acres of agricultural land in Alberta has been turned over for urban use in the last year. The recent annexation proposal from the City of Cold Lake is requesting an additional 3,200 acres (20 quarters) of M.D. farmland be turned over to the City of Cold Lake. I say additional, because they currently have more than that in vacant land within the city. Once this agriculture land is lost, it's gone forever. Currently Canada is one of seven countries that can feed itself, but how much longer will that stand if we continue to take land out of production? Council has to re-evaluate how it views farmland and how it plans to protect farmland in the future, and also protect future farming generations.

Protecting farmland is just one of the rural issues that sets the M.D. apart from its urban neighbours. In reality, rural municipalities are continually protecting a way of life that is constantly coming under siege from our urban neighbours. Choosing a Progressive Conservative MLA that understands and supports our rural needs is critical to the M.D.'s survival.

M.D. Council is urging residents to purchase a \$10 Alberta Progressive Conservative Party membership by going to www.pcalberta.org in order to vote for the candidate on February 21 that will support and protect rural interests and is committed to improving the region through municipal cooperation and partnerships.

Make your vote count in this important nomination process to choose the next local candidate to represent the Progressive Conservatives in the upcoming provincial election. I know that not all residents are PC supporters, but don't let that stop you from helping choose a candidate that will represent our rural interests. It's important to exercise your right to vote, even if your party of choice is not the PC Party. Ten dollars is a small price to pay for democracy.

I fully intend to vote in all the parties' nomination races that will be held in the Bonnyville-Cold Lake constituency for the candidates that will protect and support our rural way of life. That is the biggest advantage of living in a democratic society. Reeve Ed Rondeau