

**PROTECTING CANADIANS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

**PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION**

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS**

**TO**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**HOUSE OF COMMONS**

**- Filed August 14, 2009 -**

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August 14, 2009

Mr. James Rajotte, M.P.  
Chair  
Standing Committee on Finance  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
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Dear Mr. Rajotte:

On behalf of the 1,000 Chief Fire Officers comprising the membership of the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC), it is a pleasure to present this pre-budget submission.

Our two recommendations to the Standing Committee were derived from extensive surveys of our members conducted in the past few months.

This submission is entitled *Protecting Canadians and Their Communities*. It is heavily oriented toward addressing that issue on behalf of both the citizens of Canada and the 108,000 members of the Canadian Fire Services who protect them. That title has important ramifications for both the Fire Services and the Government of Canada.

On behalf of the Canadian Fire Services in general and the membership of CAFC in particular, I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the contents of this submission with the Standing Committee during its pre-budget consultations this autumn.

Yours sincerely,



Fire Chief Bruce Burrell  
President, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs

(i)

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) is a national organization composed of 1,000 Chief Fire Officers from all provinces and territories. This submission reflects the results of our recent pre-budget survey and of a survey of the Volunteer Fire Services conducted a few months earlier.

Protecting the lives and property of the citizens of Canada is a joint responsibility shared by the Government of Canada and the Fire Services. The Fire Services largely provide that protection at the community level. Our pre-budget survey showed that 95.2% of responding Fire Chiefs believe the federal government has a financial role to play in ensuring a basic level of protection from fire and other perils.

Despite the huge spectrum of reasons why Volunteer Fire Departments are experiencing problems in recruiting and retaining members, personal income tax relief is viewed almost universally as the vehicle to best help address them

Results of the Association's pre-budget survey indicated that 91.5% of respondents stated that personal income tax relief for Volunteer Fire Services personnel is seen as very important. Our first recommendation, therefore is as follows:

**The 2010 Budget should provide substantial personal income tax relief for all volunteer firefighting personnel.**

The Joint Emergency Preparedness Program currently makes available \$8.4 million annually for emergency preparedness, Urban Search and Rescue and critical infrastructure protection projects from coast to coast. Approximately \$5 million of that amount is designated to emergency preparedness and critical infrastructure protection projects each year. Although CAFC has requested an increase in the level of JEPP funding in each of its pre-budget submissions beginning in 2003, the \$5 million remains in effect and is being eroded in its usefulness with every passing year.

With almost 3,500 Fire Departments in Canada, \$5 million does not go far. Also, these scarce JEPP dollars must be shared with other orders of government and other municipal departments, including police, emergency medical services, public works, waterworks and emergency management organizations.

Our pre-budget survey showed that 74.7% of respondents view an increase in JEPP funding as very important while a further 19.3% see it as somewhat important. Thus, our second recommendation is as follows:

**Increase the funding available to Fire Departments through JEPP in the amount of \$20 million**

## **A. THE CANADIAN FIRE SERVICES: DEMOGRAPHICS**

The Canadian Fire Services are composed of some 108,000 men and women. Of this total, 78 per cent (84,314) are volunteer firefighting personnel while the remainder are full-time personnel. Collectively, these individuals are members of 3,492 Fire Departments; 91.2 per cent of which are Volunteer Departments; 6.1 per cent are Composite Departments; and the remaining 2.7 per cent are Full-Time Departments. A Composite Fire Department has both Volunteer and Full-time personnel as their members. The citizens of 3,492 Canadian communities rely on their local Fire Services for the protection of their lives and property.

## **B. THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS**

CAFC is a non-partisan national association, formed in 1908. It's 1,000 members are located in every Canadian Province and Territory. In addition to the Fire Chiefs and other Chief Fire Officers of hundreds of Canadian municipalities, members also include Fire Chiefs from Canada's First Nations, industry, airports, seaports, major health care facilities and Canadian Forces establishments. CAFC is the only association that speaks for all elements of the Fire Services in Canada.

The title of this year's pre-budget submission is *Protecting Canadians and their Communities*. It is an agenda for action, establishing what the Government of Canada must do on a priority basis to protect the right of Canadians to safety and security. It concurrently calls on the government to ensure that the men and women of the Fire Services receive the support they require to furnish this protection without unduly imperiling themselves.

## **C. PRE-BUDGET MEMBERS' SURVEYS**

This submission is based heavily on the results of two 2009 surveys conducted by CAFC. The first of these was carried out in May and was designed to demonstrate the importance of personal Income tax relief for the Volunteer Fire Services. It was responded to by 650 Volunteer and Composite Fire Departments in Canada.

The second was conducted in July and was intended to provide input on a wider variety of issues pertaining to the 2010 federal Budget. Completed surveys were received from the following types of Fire Departments: Full-time, 16.3%; Composite, 39.5%; and Volunteer, 44.2%.

#### D. PERSONAL INCOME TAX RELIEF FOR VOLUNTEERS

Of the 108,000 estimated Fire Services personnel in Canada, 21.9 per cent are full-time employees and 78.1 per cent are volunteers. In no other emergency first responder service in Canada do willing volunteers play a more significant role.

CAFC's survey of the Volunteer Fire Services included both Volunteer and Composite Fire Departments. Analysis of the Volunteer Fire Services segment has been completed. It has yielded important data of which the Standing Committee should be aware as follows:

- A total of 521 Volunteer Fire Departments from every province and territory participated in the survey. They represent 16.4 per cent of the 3,184 Volunteer Fire Departments in Canada. CAFC regards the 521 survey participants as a valid statistical sample of the entire Volunteer Fire Services in Canada.
- A total 14,541 volunteer firefighters and officers were members of these Volunteer Fire Departments in 2008. If they represent 16.4 per cent of the total number of volunteer firefighters, our extrapolation calculates a total of 88,700 volunteer firefighting personnel in Canada, close to our statement that the Volunteer Fire Services are composed of 84,314 firefighters and officers.
- The total 2008 operating budget (excluding the budget for capital acquisitions) of these 521 Volunteer Fire Departments was \$28,042,444, or an average of \$56,535 per Department. The total compensation for the 14,541 Volunteer firefighting personnel was \$4,679,149, 16.7 per cent of the total operating budget. It was an average of \$9,434 per Department.

The complete analysis of CAFC's Volunteer Fire Services survey had been filed with the Minister of Finance. A further copy will be made available to the Standing Committee, if this would be deemed helpful.

CAFC's survey indicated clearly that the Volunteer Fire Services in Canada are under stress for a variety of reasons ranging from an inability of Volunteer Fire Department members to find work close at hand; to the competing demands of families; to aging local populations; to inadequate reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, etc. Important, however, is the fact that, despite the huge spectrum of reasons why they are experiencing problems in recruiting and retaining members, personal income tax relief was viewed almost universally as the vehicle to help address them, as the following table demonstrates:

	<u>Recruitment</u>	<u>Retention</u>
No help	4.4%	3.7%
Minor help	24.8%	21.3%
Major help	70.8%	75.0%

The Association’s pre-budget survey of Full-Time, Composite and Volunteer Fire Chiefs asked the degree of importance they attached to CAFC’s policy seeking personal income tax relief for Volunteer Fire Services personnel. The widespread support for that policy demonstrated in the following table confirms that this is regarded as an extremely important issue throughout the entire Canadian Fire Services.

Very important	91.5%	Somewhat important	4.9%
Somewhat unimportant	1.2%	Unimportant	2.4%

**Recommendation #1**

**The 2010 Budget should provide substantial personal income tax relief for all volunteer firefighting personnel.**

**E. JOINT EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS PROGRAM**

Since 2002, CAFC has consistently urged that funding under the Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) should be increased. JEPP is the primary vehicle used by the Government of Canada “to enhance the national capability to manage all types of emergencies and to ensure a reasonably uniform emergency response and recovery capacity across Canada.”

Literature describing JEPP states that, “approximately \$8.4 million is made available annually for emergency preparedness, Urban Search and Rescue and critical infrastructure protection projects from coast to coast.” Through JEPP, approximately \$5 million of that approximate \$8.4 is made available for emergency preparedness and critical infrastructure protection projects each year. Although CAFC has requested an increase in the level of JEPP funding in each of its pre-budget submissions beginning in 2003, the \$5 million remains in effect and is being eroded in its usefulness with every passing year.

With almost 3,500 Fire Departments in Canada, \$5 million does not go far. When it is recognized that these scarce JEPP dollars must be shared with other orders of government and other municipal departments, the inadequacy of JEPP financing is underscored. For example, at the municipal level, available JEPP money can be distributed not only to the Fire Services but to a wide range of other functions, including police, emergency medical services, public works, waterworks and emergency management organizations.

Respondents to CAFC’s survey of the Volunteer Fire Services indicated repeatedly that a lack of up-to-date equipment and apparatus is regarded as a major impediment to the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighting personnel for a variety of reasons, including:

- Volunteer firefighters and their families are concerned that conditions are not as safe as they should be.
- Morale suffers when volunteers respond to emergencies with equipment and apparatus that are less effective than they should be.
- Training is impeded when equipment and apparatus are significantly dated.

Despite issues such as these, JEPP funding is underutilized by Volunteer Fire Departments for two reasons. First, the total amount of available funds is so low that applications from smaller Departments are unlikely to succeed. Second, the application process itself is sufficiently complex to discourage most Volunteer Fire Chiefs.

While the primary funding mechanism used by the Government of Canada to support the Canadian Fire Services is JEPP, its relevance has been undermined by federal unwillingness to maintain the available money at required levels. An increased financial injection is required to restore the meaningfulness of JEPP. It is required to ensure that the Canadian Fire Services are prepared to deal with large-scale emergencies at the municipal level.

CAFC's pre-budget survey indicated that 74.7 per cent of respondents regard an increase in JEPP funding as very important while an additional 19.3 per cent view it as somewhat important.

### **Recommendatio #2**

**Increase the funding available to Fire Departments through JEPP in the amount of \$20 million and ensure that 50 per cent of that total is set aside to be used exclusively by Volunteer Fire Departments for the purposes of training and equipment acquisition.**

## **F. THE IMPORTANT FEDERAL ROLE**

The November 2008 Speech from the Throne stated that "Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and communities." That statement of philosophy coincides perfectly with the mandate of Fire Departments across Canada: to protect the lives and property of Canadians within their municipal jurisdictions.

Our pre-budget survey this year asked Fire Chiefs whether they believe that the federal government has a financial role to play in ensuring that all Canadians have the right to a basic level of protection from fire and other perils. That position was supported by 95.6 per cent of survey respondents.

CAFC recognizes the fact that municipalities are the creatures of their provincial or territorial governments. That does not mean, however, that the Government of Canada

can simply believe it is fulfilling its fundamental role of protecting its citizens just by transferring revenue to the provincial and territorial levels of government. Rarely do these transfers find their way to Fire Departments at the municipal level.

This brief has demonstrated increased JEPP funding is regarded as the most beneficial spending initiative that could be undertaken by the Government of Canada in support of the Canadian Fire Services. The second most important spending measure identified in our pre-budget survey that the Government of Canada could undertake to protect its citizens would be to have it become financially responsible for ensuring that all rural and remote communities are able to provide basic fire protection.

The fact that such protection does not exist for every Canadian should be a source of concern for the Government. That many of these rural and remote communities are on First Nations land should be regarded as a serious deviation from the Throne Speech statement that Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and communities.

In addition to adequate JEPP funding for Fire Departments located in rural and remote communities, there are other steps that the Government of Canada could take that would be significantly beneficial. It is not the purpose of this submission to discuss in detail all the steps that the Government of Canada could take to assure citizens in rural and remote regions that they are safe. Rather, it is to state that CAFC knows what these steps should be and would be prepared to work with the appropriate Department to develop strategies for providing such assurance.

**Recommendation #3**

**Budget 2010 should include funding for the development of a plan to ensure that Canadians living in rural and remote communities have access to basic fire protection services.**

**G. CONCLUSION**

CAFC wishes to thank the Standing Committee for its consideration of our positions. We look forward to meeting with the Committee during its public consultations to examine these issues further.

All of which is respectfully submitted,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Fire Chief.

Fire Chief Bruce Burrell

President, Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs