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2011 Federal Election Platform: Canadian Fire Services

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) is seeking a commitment from each political party to support the CAFC's two priority issues identified for the 2011 federal election.

- 1. The introduction of a \$3,000 income tax credit for volunteer firefighters who perform more than 200 hours of service in a given year.**
- 2. The designation of a 20 MHz segment of the 700 MHz radio spectrum to support the mission-critical public safety needs of emergency first responders.**

VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTER TAX CREDIT

Since 2003, the CAFC has advocated for tax relief for Canada's volunteer firefighters. In the most recent Parliament, Canada's Fire Chiefs called for the introduction of a \$3,000 tax credit for volunteer firefighters who perform more than 200 hours of service in a given year. While this issue has previously received support from all parties, the March 22nd federal budget was the first time the Government of Canada introduced tax relief for volunteer firefighters.

- **The CAFC is calling on all parties and candidates to commit to supporting a \$3,000 tax credit for Canada's volunteer firefighters who perform more than 200 hours of service in a given year.**

The Volunteer Fire Service plays a systemic, essential role in the Canadian Fire Service. Ninety-one (91%) per cent of all Canadian Fire Departments are staffed by volunteers and more than seventy-eight (78%) per cent of Canada's firefighters are volunteers.

Volunteer firefighters are becoming harder to find and harder to keep. Out of pocket expenses, inadequate equipment and resources, and the time spent away from families make it difficult to attract and retain volunteer firefighters. Without these volunteers, communities may lose their only emergency responder service, and may no longer be sufficiently protected from fire and other emergencies.

While the Government of Canada currently allows volunteer firefighters to earn \$1,000 from their Fire Departments tax free, this is of limited value as the vast majority of Fire Departments don't provide stipends. The proposed tax credit would create a national standard for Canada's volunteer firefighters.

Public opinion research commissioned by the CAFC demonstrates broad public support for the proposed tax credit for volunteer firefighters. Overall, nearly 70% of Canadians strongly or somewhat supported a tax credit for volunteer firefighters, even when informed of the maximum

direct cost to the
and urban (67%)
(74.3%), followed

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EMERGENCY FIRST RESPONDER RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

The availability of the 700 megahertz (700 MHz) radio spectrum presents a unique opportunity for all public safety agencies across Canada and North America. It is imperative that the Government of Canada seize the opportunity to reserve a 20 MHz segment of the 700 MHz spectrum for the use of emergency responders.

- **The CAFC calls on all parties and candidates to commit to the reservation of a 20 MHz segment of the 700 MHz radio spectrum for the use of emergency first responders.**

The deployment of international standard-based wireless broadband networks with access to a coordinated and contiguous block of radio spectrum with sufficient bandwidth will allow for seamless roaming and interoperability. It will justify the provision of economical mission-critical communications tools necessary for those who protect, respond and react on a daily basis.

First responders need the right tools to protect and save lives as well as for their own protection. Robust state-of-the-art public safety communications are essential to provide the public with the necessary level of service, protection and security. A 20 MHz designation of the 700 MHz spectrum will ensure that Canadians receive the best coordination of public safety services.

Reservation of a 20 MHz segment of the 700 MHz spectrum is supported not only by the CAFC, but by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Emergency Medical Services Chiefs of Canada, who are collectively referred to as the Tri-Services Chiefs. Together, the Tri-Services Chiefs recognize that this action will contribute to the safety and security of Canadians and Canada's first responders as well as enhance interoperable communications between the three services.

Without the support of Industry Canada and Public Safety Canada, the reservation of a 20 MHz segment of the 700 MHz bandwidth will not materialize. All candidates should be committed to working with the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Public Safety in the next Parliament to make this issue a priority