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Photo of the Day

### Paul Martin reiterates pledge to remit some gas tax money to cities

By GREG JOYCE  
• PM avoiding transfer-of-power talks

VANCOUVER (CP) - The next federal government will ensure municipal funding is reliable and that will be achieved partly by Ottawa remitting a portion of the federal gas tax to municipalities, Paul Martin said Thursday.



Liberal leadership candidate Paul Martin addresses a news conference on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Monday. (CP/Jonathan Hayward)

"Our goal has to be to make municipal funding more predictable and reliable and yours to control," Martin told hundreds of delegates at the annual Union of B.C. Municipalities convention.

"One part of the answer is sharing a portion of the gas tax we collect at the federal level," said Martin, who won almost 90 per cent of the delegates chosen last weekend for November's leadership convention.

Martin, who will succeed Prime Minister Jean Chretien, began his speech by telling delegates it was his "formal debut" speech since the delegate selection process.

He acknowledged that municipalities fall under provincial jurisdiction but said the federal government could work more with the other two levels of government.

He provided few details of how much of the tax the federal government would share or how soon and acknowledged there would be "many obstacles along the way."

But he was adamant and received loud applause when he emphasized it would happen.

"We are going to provide Canadian municipalities with a portion of the federal gas tax."

In a later session with reporters, Martin was still vague on gas tax details.

"I've said it is a portion and it would be phased in over time

1993

1983

1978

1973



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and these are negotiations that will have to arise when we sit down with the municipalities and provinces."

The former longtime finance minister and Quebec MP for LaSalle-Emard stressed the importance of improving the "partnership" between Ottawa and the provinces and municipalities.

"I believe the future of the country is going to be set by communities large and small," said Martin, who a day earlier toured the sites devastated this summer by one of the worst forest fire seasons in B.C. history.

More than 230 homes in Kelowna alone were wiped out and thousands of people were evacuated from towns and cities in the Interior.

Martin has talked previously about a "new deal" for municipalities, and said the country's prime minister needs to speak regularly to municipal federations in all provinces.

"And second, a federal finance minister needs to know how a budget affects cities."

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities said Martin's speech was what it wanted to hear.

"We are obviously pleased with Mr. Martin's directness and continued commitment to a new deal for Canada's municipalities," Yves Ducharme, federation president and mayor of Gatineau, Que., said in a prepared statement.

Martin reiterated proposals he made at the federation's annual meeting in Winnipeg last May, including an offer to share the federal fuel excise tax with municipal governments and the establishment of new mechanisms for intergovernmental relations.

Martin, who received a standing ovation before he had said a word, made an overture to British Columbia in particular, telling delegates that B.C.'s sense of alienation was not a myth.

"It's real," he said.

He said that feeling might be due to the "historic tendency in Ottawa to treat regional issues that arise in Central Canada as national issues, whereas too often national issues in B.C. are relegated to regional concerns."

He specifically mentioned fisheries, the softwood lumber dispute and the pine beetle infestation that has destroyed huge chunks of B.C. forests.

The Liberal party holds only 15 seats in Western Canada, including six in B.C.

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