



Lorne West *for*
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Thank you President Gord Colwell and Alberta Fire Fighters Executive for this opportunity to be here today. I would like to also Thank Local 209 President, Ken Block and the Edmonton members for hosting us, it is truly good to see Alberta gathering momentum and gaining solidarity, I think we will all win and garner successes as a result of your coming together in Alberta.

I have known many of you for quite some time now, but for those that don't me, my name is Lorne West, and I am currently the President of Surrey Fire Fighters Local 1271. In some ways I am a little surprised to find myself here today. Although I have been encouraged for some time to step up, I had work to do back home, both in my Local and personal within my family. I am extremely humbled by the support and encouragement I have received to enter as a candidate for the 6th District Vice President, but I thought the time it would take to complete my work would have prevented me the opportunity.

I felt strongly that I needed to conclude our Local contract negotiations and deal with the devolving of the volunteer component of the Surrey Fire Service, without the distractions of a campaign. I needed to focus on the task at hand, the tasks that my members expected of me. I am very proud to say that last month our city council approved budget to staff the last remaining political stronghold of volunteer fire fighters, and have set funding for strategic planning that will see the devolution of paid-call members in Surrey. Two weeks ago we successfully ratified a renewed contract that made Local 1271 members the highest paid fire fighters in BC, and in almost ever aspect provided our members with the best IAFF contract in BC. With that done, I spoke at length to Terry Ritchie to seek his insight and advice to better understand the workload and responsibilities of the position, and then I sought input from my members. Over the past two weeks, I have spoken to all three Canadian Vice Presidents, our Canadian Director Jim Lee, Michael Crouse in Washington and finally our General President Harold Schaitberger. I needed to understand both his expectations, and he mine.

My decision was then very carefully considered with my family, and we together made the decision that we are prepared for the workload, responsibilities and the challenges that the 6th District will face in the next four years. There is no doubt we have our challenges everyday in the fire service, but the contemporary and current struggles we are facing will test us, like never before. You heard it loud and clear this morning, Alberta was comparing themselves to Saskatchewan and BC on ambulance governance models.

But what your guest speaker also said is that the RHA's see an opportunity for revenue, the cities see an opportunity for savings, and the Provincial Government a political windfall with their civic relationships. The problem is that it is all smoke and mirrors, nothing short of a strategic deception. I don't pretend to be an expert on each of our regions, but BC has made that mistake, Alberta appears poised to make it and it appears the jury is still out in Saskatchewan. There is no windfall and when the cities realize that, it is our members who pay the price not the decision makers in the legislature. This is but one example of how issues cross provincial borders and for that matter the three Canadian Districts as well. Why we need to collaborate together and call on the IAFF to assist us and develop a common strategy that is in the best interests of our members.

I strongly believe that political action is the only way we can achieve the will to succeed with our decision makers. I first cut my teeth on politics when at 18, I successfully lobbied for land development and rezoning in the city and motivated the provincial legislature to amend the land use act. By the time I was 21 and a rookie fire fighter, I became confident we could influence decision makers. I have spent my entire adult life since, doing just that. After almost 25 years of representing fire fighters, dispatchers, prevention, EMS and other related emergency service and public safety issues in Surrey and recently in other cities, I look forward to facing that challenge together with you across our district.

Of the many issues we face the one fundamental issue that is critical to our success is collective bargaining. I have successfully negotiated collective agreements from the smallest BC local of 5 members to the second largest being Surrey at 350. I have assisted or led bargaining in no less than a dozen Locals across different regions and concluded over 30 agreements. But what still eludes us is parity with police, or parity with Ontario. If we did the math in BC alone to achieve parity would place 21 million dollars more in our member's pockets annually, taken across this District we would more than double that.

But as able as all of our candidates are here today, no one person can achieve that. In Alberta, I suspect that you more than the rest of know that, more than ever, as you gain momentum from reunification. As you grow in strength and influence, so will your successes. If we do that together across our district so will our successes. I am committed to the success of this district, but I am also committed to my family and, I will not try to replicate Terry's efforts for the past 18 years. I know I can't. I can't hit the road and be on your doorstep as frequently as he has been, and I don't have the experience that Terry has. Perhaps in time I may, but in the meantime I also want to watch my kids grow and enjoy a family life in balance with my Union duties.

I believe our General President Harold Schaitberger will allow us in the District to determine how we want the IAFF represented. Clearly we need a strong presence in the small Locals, we must do all we can to assist them, but they will not succeed if our larger Locals don't. The IAFF and the presence of our District must also be in the large Locals just as strongly, if not even more so. That is not to say that we loose our Local autonomy, no quite the contrary, unity is not uniformity. I suggest that we need to build a consensus on critical issues with the larger Locals, Provincial Associations and Regional Districts. After all, running the District is not about the V.P., it is about you our affiliates, and your members. What are your issues and how do you want them represented, and what resources can we draw on from the IAFF to get you there.

I have called on the IAFF at every turn as a Local President; I have been to Washington and seen first hand what they can do. Without their help we would have never achieved the success we have had in Surrey, their GIS mapping, research capacity, public relations guidance and EMS support boggles the mind; our staff in Washington and Ottawa are truly experts. So much so that any informed Fire Chief will now come to the Local and asks for the Local to seek the IAFF resources.

When I asked the IAFF to take advantage of the Roy Romanow Royal Commission on Health Care, they not only presented a national IAFF position on pre-hospital care but were given audience and status with Jim Lee presenting a well written piece that is now on record nationally, and that paper has formed the basis of our written position within BC, which we presented to the core review of the Ambulance Service. The expert staff of the IAFF hit the road running on that one, and I am confident that we can build on that in support of each of our Locals across this District as we all face the pre-hospital care debate with great anxiety.

The National Building Code was recently under review and amendments made to reduce our prescriptive based fire codes to subjective based. British Columbia and Ontario followed suit and it can only be a matter of time before we are faced with the problems caused by subjective or performance codes in all of our provinces. When I raised this issue locally it was swept under the carpet as a non-issue. But imagine if you will responding to the Station Night Club in Chicago a few years ago. In that case prescriptive codes were not enforced, but with performance based codes, what was prescribed may not exist any longer, because an engineer determined the need based on a different occupancy requirement that our inspectors were unaware of. When we received little or no response locally we asked the IAFF and again, literally within days the IAFF was on record expressing their concerns in expert testimony in committee in Ottawa.

I think the point I am trying to make is that it takes a team and no one person or one Local can take it on by themselves! I believe we need to mentor, groom and provide the experience to a number of key members within our district to become our District experts. Our District is ripe with talented members that are just waiting to release their talents, and we need to capture that talent and get it working for us across the District. Who better to represent our issues than our members? By empowering our Local leaders we are empowering our Locals to succeed. With each outing we will gain in sophistication, and presentation. As more Local leaders gain more experience, the successes will be achieved throughout the district down to the smallest Locals. I want to be your next 6th District Vice President, but I want us to succeed as a District team, and I want you to determine who we need on that team of provincial IAFF representatives.

I believe our objectives are simple enough, but the obstacles gigantic. By our very own competitive nature we become too parochial at times, and in our effort to win we lose. Don't get me wrong, competition is healthy and can motivate success sometimes, but we must do a better job of not allowing it to become corrosive. We are faced with a future we cannot see or predict and a present that is challenging our past. Whether it be pre-hospital care, integrated dispatch centers, bargaining, pension matters or any number of the other issues we are faced with every where we turn today we are faced with the pressure to change.

We are also faced with challenges internally within the IAFF and as a District we need to see what we can do together to scrutinize those challenges and become stronger for it. We need to grow our District, I am not familiar enough with the demographics throughout the District, but in my neighboring communities there are volunteer paid-call members providing the only fire protection to communities with populations of over 100,000 people, and emerging small communities wanting to staff fire departments seeking some help and guidance on how to get there, we need to be there and push for more IAFF members in our existing Locals. And then there is Quebec, I believe we need to do more to reach out to our past affiliates in Quebec and try to bridge that gap. Alberta has done it, you have reunified, and we need to learn from that experience to grow the IAFF across Canada.

I know our General Secretary Treasurer Vinnie Bollon has tried hard to gain a foothold into the charge card business in Canada without success, and our IAFF Financial Corporation has been a great benefit to our American counterparts, but we need to build on that in Canada too. Perhaps it is not possible in the current US configuration but I am sure we will have members somewhere in this District that will have ideas on how we might be able to make some inroads for Canadian members. The IAFF is a big business and requires enormous funding; funding that is our members' dues. We must always be mindful of that, and carefully scrutinize how we conduct our business. The 6th District needs to function in a collaborative way with the other Districts as well, their issues become ours, and our theirs in so much as they can.

The 6th District is like a rope with the many strands being each local that together makes us strong, and together we are just one large strand in the rope called the IAFF.

I look forward to hearing your questions and meeting you all throughout the next few months to discuss your issues. I also look forward to the opportunity to take on the challenges, the hard work, and the experiences, of doing the work as your next IAFF 6th District Vice-President, I want to do the job, I don't merely want the job! I want to earn your vote and support on August 19th, in Boston at the 47th Biennial Convention. I am asking you for your support to be your next IAFF 6th District Vice President.

Thank you all again for your hospitality and this opportunity to speak to you.