

August 23, 2011

Construction industry pays tribute to Jack Layton

KELLY LAPOINTE

staff writer

Jack Layton's presence will be felt for years to come.

His legacy according to industry stakeholders was that he was a committed advocate for infrastructure.

The leader of the New Democratic Party and official opposition lost his second battle with cancer in the early morning of Aug. 22 at the age of 61.

Michael Atkinson, President of the Canadian Construction Association, called Layton a committed individual who fought passionately for what he believed in and fought for a better life for all Canadians.



JACK LAYTON

Former NDP leader

“He was always a political leader who understood very well the linkage between the quality of Canada's infrastructure and the ability to provide a safe and healthy and environmentally friendly environment for all Canadians. He was not a politician that we had to spend a lot of time talking about the importance of infrastructure to.”

Before taking his seat in the House of Commons as leader of the NDP, Layton served as President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) in 2001. That's when the organization really started to hit its stride, said current FCM president Berry Vrbanovic.

■ [Ontario New Democratic Party unveils bicycle infrastructure, energy platforms](#)

Notably, Layton advocated for the Gas Tax Fund, an important source of funds for Canadian municipalities, which was ultimately introduced by Paul Martin's Liberal government, continued and made permanent by Stephen Harper's Conservative government.

During his time at the FCM, Layton laid the groundwork for the Green Municipal Fund that was implemented by the Jean Chretien government and then became a \$550 million endowment, which is now managed by the FCM.

■ [Canadian Construction Association calls for municipal revenue solutions](#)

“For municipalities, that has helped us make some inroads in the infrastructure deficit that the country’s facing. I think that while Jack’s work has helped lay the foundations for that, I think the greatest legacy that he can leave us is for us to continue that and to make sure that we continue to move forward on the important issues that can help build strong communities for our citizens,” said Vrbanovic.

Layton started in politics in the 1980s, becoming a Toronto city councillor. “He was a tireless advocate for cities and communities throughout his political career,” said Andy Manahan, Executive Director of the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO).

“As a councillor in the City of Toronto he was instrumental in the adoption of cycling infrastructure, including bike lanes. Over 20 years ago, he was also very supportive of redevelopment of the railway lands which of course resulted in thousands of residential units being built. In addition to making downtown Toronto a more vibrant place to live, there are many developers who owe him a debt of gratitude for that.

“While Jack Layton was criticized for certain policies and positions that were unpopular at the time, his legacy will be that he was ahead of the curve on a number of environmental and economic initiatives.”

Many say Canada is a better place thanks to Layton’s influences.

“Obviously it’s a great loss for Canadian communities; it’s a great loss for Canada as a whole. I know there are many municipal-elected officials across the country who held Jack near and dear as a friend and watched his career progress with admiration and with pride,” concluded Vrbanovic. “We all lost a dear, dear friend.”