

**Third Session – Forty-First Legislature**  
of the  
**Legislative Assembly of Manitoba**  
**DEBATES**  
and  
**PROCEEDINGS**  
**Official Report**  
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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Forty-First Legislature**

| <b>Member</b>            | <b>Constituency</b>  | <b>Political Affiliation</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| ALLUM, James             | Fort Garry-Riverview | NDP                          |
| ALTEMEYER, Rob           | Wolseley             | NDP                          |
| BINDLE, Kelly            | Thompson             | PC                           |
| CLARKE, Eileen, Hon.     | Agassiz              | PC                           |
| COX, Cathy, Hon.         | River East           | PC                           |
| CULLEN, Cliff, Hon.      | Spruce Woods         | PC                           |
| CURRY, Nic               | Kildonan             | PC                           |
| DRIEDGER, Myrna, Hon.    | Charleswood          | PC                           |
| EICHLER, Ralph, Hon.     | Lakeside             | PC                           |
| EWASKO, Wayne            | Lac du Bonnet        | PC                           |
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| FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.   | Assiniboia           | Man.                         |
| FONTAINE, Nahanni        | St. Johns            | NDP                          |
| FRIESEN, Cameron, Hon.   | Morden-Winkler       | PC                           |
| GERRARD, Jon, Hon.       | River Heights        | Lib.                         |
| GOERTZEN, Kelvin, Hon.   | Steinbach            | PC                           |
| GRAYDON, Clifford        | Emerson              | PC                           |
| GUILLEMARD, Sarah        | Fort Richmond        | PC                           |
| HELWER, Reg              | Brandon West         | PC                           |
| ISLEIFSON, Len           | Brandon East         | PC                           |
| JOHNSON, Derek           | Interlake            | PC                           |
| JOHNSTON, Scott          | St. James            | PC                           |
| KINEW, Wab               | Fort Rouge           | NDP                          |
| KLASSEN, Judy            | Kewatinook           | Lib.                         |
| LAGASSÉ, Bob             | Dawson Trail         | PC                           |
| LAGIMODIERE, Alan        | Selkirk              | PC                           |
| LAMONT, Dougald          | St. Boniface         | Lib.                         |
| LAMOUREUX, Cindy         | Burrows              | Lib.                         |
| LATHLIN, Amanda          | The Pas              | NDP                          |
| LINDSEY, Tom             | Flin Flon            | NDP                          |
| MALOWAY, Jim             | Elmwood              | NDP                          |
| MARCELINO, Flor          | Logan                | NDP                          |
| MARCELINO, Ted           | Tyndall Park         | NDP                          |
| MARTIN, Shannon          | Morris               | PC                           |
| MAYER, Colleen, Hon.     | St. Vital            | PC                           |
| MICHALESKI, Brad         | Dauphin              | PC                           |
| MICKLEFIELD, Andrew      | Rossmere             | PC                           |
| MORLEY-LECOMTE, Janice   | Seine River          | PC                           |
| NESBITT, Greg            | Riding Mountain      | PC                           |
| PALLISTER, Brian, Hon.   | Fort Whyte           | PC                           |
| PEDERSEN, Blaine, Hon.   | Midland              | PC                           |
| PIWNIUK, Doyle           | Arthur-Virden        | PC                           |
| REYES, Jon               | St. Norbert          | PC                           |
| SARAN, Mohinder          | The Maples           | Ind.                         |
| SCHULER, Ron, Hon.       | St. Paul             | PC                           |
| SMITH, Andrew            | Southdale            | PC                           |
| SMITH, Bernadette        | Point Douglas        | NDP                          |
| SMOOK, Dennis            | La Verendrye         | PC                           |
| SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.  | Riel                 | PC                           |
| STEFANSON, Heather, Hon. | Tuxedo               | PC                           |
| SWAN, Andrew             | Minto                | NDP                          |
| TEITSMA, James           | Radisson             | PC                           |
| WHARTON, Jeff, Hon.      | Gimli                | PC                           |
| WIEBE, Matt              | Concordia            | NDP                          |
| WISHART, Ian             | Portage la Prairie   | PC                           |
| WOWCHUK, Rick            | Swan River           | PC                           |
| YAKIMOSKI, Blair         | Transcona            | PC                           |

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, October 11, 2018

*The House met at 10 a.m.*

**Madam Speaker:** O Eternal and Almighty God, from Whom all power and wisdom come, we are assembled here before Thee to frame such laws as may tend to the welfare and prosperity of our province. Grant, O merciful God, we pray Thee, that we may desire only that which is in accordance with Thy will, that we may seek it with wisdom and know it with certainty and accomplish it perfectly for the glory and honour of Thy name and for the welfare of all our people. Amen.

Please be seated.

### Introduction of Guests

**Madam Speaker:** Prior to moving on with the morning's business, we have some guests in the gallery that I would like to introduce to you.

Seated in the Speaker's Gallery, we have with us today representatives from Proton Ventures of the Netherlands accompanied by the former MLA for Arthur-Virden, Mr. Jim Downey.

And, on behalf of all honourable members here, we welcome you to the Manitoba Legislature.

### House Business

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (Second Opposition House Leader):** Yes, Madam Speaker, on House business, pursuant to rule 33(9), I'm announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered on next Thursday of private members' business will be one previously put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont). The title of the resolution is Immediate Action Needed on Climate Change.

**Madam Speaker:** It has been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one previously put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface. The title of the resolution is Immediate Action Needed on Climate Change.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY

#### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

**Madam Speaker:** Moving now to orders of the day, private members' business.

**Mr. Matt Wiebe (Deputy Official Opposition House Leader):** Morning, Madam Speaker. I'd like to ask for leave to move to debate and second reading on Bill 233, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act.

**Madam Speaker:** Is there leave this morning to proceed with second reading of Bill 233? Agreed? *[Agreed]*

### SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

#### Bill 233—The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act

**Madam Speaker:** Moving to second reading, then, of Bill 233, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act.

**Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto):** I move, seconded by the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), that Bill 233, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'assurance-maladie, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

#### *Motion presented.*

**Mr. Swan:** I'm pleased to introduce Bill 233 for second reading today. The bill is really very simple. It prevents a government in Manitoba from imposing a health-care premium or, more properly stated, a health-care tax on residents to enjoy health insurance.

There hasn't been a health-care premium in Manitoba since 1973, when the then-Ed Schreyer NDP government eliminated them. And, of course, we didn't have a health-care premium through various provincial governments of different political stripes.

And we probably wouldn't be debating this bill if the Premier (Mr. Pallister) hadn't publicly mused about turning the clock back to before 1973 and imposing a health-care tax on Manitoba families. He flip-flopped on a dime. He then tried to back off on his flip-flop, and I'll cover that a little later in my time this morning.

It's really very simple: the pass of this bill will prevent future governments from imposing health-care premiums. And, as I said yesterday on first reading, any member of this House who

truly supports the idea of universal public health-care insurance will surely be in support of this bill.

Now, how is it that we're talking about a tax that hasn't existed in Manitoba for 45 years? Well, that's all the Premier (Mr. Pallister). Last September, the Premier discussed with media the possibility of imposing a health-care tax on Manitobans. And, as usual for the Premier, he didn't mince words. And I quote: it's most certainly a tax increase. There's no doubt of that, and I don't think we should couch it in any way different from that. End quote.

Provinces that impose health-care premiums—and there aren't many of them—charge premium rates generally based on annual income. The tax is stated to help cover a portion of the cost of a province's health-care services, although whether that actually happens in those provinces is frequently up for debate.

In some provinces, people whose annual income is below a certain threshold do not pay the premiums. In Ontario, people begin to pay the health-care tax once their income is greater than \$20,000, which is much less than someone working full-time at minimum wage—as long as Ontario still has a minimum wage. On the other hand, there often—there's often a maximum premium, so that middle-income earners actually pay the same premiums as the very wealthy.

Health-care premiums are a dying breed in Canada, which made the Premier's comments last year even stranger and which also make this bill even more relevant. Quebec had health-care premiums until 2015. In 2016, the then-Liberal government eliminated the premiums and retroactively rebated to Quebecers the amount paid in 2015.

Alberta had health-care premiums until 2009, when they were eliminated by the then-Progressive Conservative government. However, in 2015, the then Progressive Conservative government announced they would reinstate health-care premiums. The decisive victory by Rachel Notley NDP put an end to any talk of bringing back health-care premiums in Alberta, at least for now.

British Columbia still has health-care premiums, leaving them standing alone with Ontario. After the victory by John Horgans' NDP, which was a little less decisive but still satisfying, BC's health-care premiums were actually reduced by 50 per cent, effective January 1st, 2018, and there will be further

moves towards eliminating health-care premiums by 2020.

As the Premier said himself, health-care premiums are a tax. One of my best friends moved out to BC several years ago. As a chartered accountant, he's rather aware of the different tax rates across provinces, but he told me he was very surprised when he moved to Kelowna and all of a sudden discovered he had to pay substantial health-care premiums to the government of BC for his family.

When he first got there, it was \$1,800 after tax dollars every year, the same as every other BC family earning at least \$42,000 a year, which is not very much money, especially not in British Columbia. As of January 1st, 2018, that amount was reduced by 50 per cent, but he wondered why the health-care premiums collected by the BC government never seem to turn up in those inter-provincial tax comparisons, and you know, I don't agree with the Premier on much, but I think he and I would agree we don't know why that would be the case either.

Our friends in Ontario pay the premium too: up to \$900 per person as a deduction from pay and pensions as part of income tax in Ontario.

Now, we know the Premier retreated from the comments he made. He flipped and he flopped on his plan on October 24, 2017. And why did he do that? Well, that was the very day an Opposition day motion was to be debated calling on the government not to institute health-care premiums.

And at first, he seemed to be very, very strong on that point, and he tweeted—or someone tweeted for him, which may be the case: we are committing to not introduce a health-care premium. And that was about an hour before the House was to sit that afternoon.

Now, to the sometimes surprise of members opposite, Hansard records things members say and the way that members vote. And I found my comments from that afternoon in the House, and I'm just going to read a little excerpt of what I said, because it's very topical with some of the issues that have come up, even in the last week.

\*(10:10)

And I'm not going to even speak about which member had the unfortunate job of being the first backbencher to speak, but I went on to say: I wanted

to gauge what I should say by whether the government was going to support this opposition day motion or not. And after listening carefully to every word the member—and I'll leave out which member it was—said over the past 10 minutes, I'm still not sure what the government's going to do on this motion. And I have the feeling, as I look around the Chamber today, that they're not sure what they're going to do about this motion.

And I must—I have to admit, I feel some sympathy for the backbenchers in the government caucus who we know are excluded from decision-making; who are excluded from the discussions and who are just as surprised as we were on that day back in mid-September, when the Premier (Mr. Pallister) strolled out in front of the media and announced he was going to consider a health care premium in Manitoba for the first time since 1973. And I appreciate for the member's opposite, that would not have been an easy day, and I'm certain the weeks afterwards have not been easy in their own communities, as people, as they have us, have expressed their view on the idea of a health care premium.

And my leader, the member for Fort Rouge (Mr. Kinew), and I called on all members to speak with one voice that afternoon and, indeed, we did. There was a vote on the resolution and it passed. It passed by a vote of 53 to nothing—which is worse than my worst nightmares in—on Labour Day in Regina. It was 53-nothing, which was great, but then we heard what the Premier had to say. And, once the vote was done the Premier said, well, we're not going to impose a health-care tax in the first term, but, you know, if we get a second term, you know, all bets are off.

So, even though it seemed the House was speaking with one voice, the Premier has refused to confirm this isn't something still on the table. And that we tried to get the current and the former minister of Finance to clear that up. We've tried to get the former and current ministers of Health to offer something more than that and they haven't.

It's very, very clear that a health-care premium would not be in accordance with Manitoban values. And I was very pleased, we were joined yesterday by Brianne Goertzen of the Manitoba Health Coalition which represents a diversity of stakeholders including the community workers and everyday Manitobans who are concerned about health care, and she had some very strong quotes—

and I quote Ms. Goertzen as follows: Health-care premiums are a financial barrier to accessing health care and Bill 233 ensures Manitobans can rely on universal public health care no matter the dollar figure in their back—in their bank account. It is imperative that at a time of uncertainty in our health-care system, Manitobans are assured this government values the principle of universality in our health care and supports this amendment.

And she went on to say: This bill is straightforward and allows all political parties to put partisan politics aside and demonstrate clear support for universal, public health care, free from financial barriers created by health-care premiums. Health-care premiums adversely penalize all Manitobans and their families.

Well, I don't know if I can say it any better than that. So let us move ahead today with some unfinished business.

As many of us work to improve our universal health-care system, Madam Speaker, by perhaps a national Pharmacare program, for example, let's speak with the same voice to protect health care. Let's speak with the same voices we did last year and pass this bill on to committee, and let's make it very clear that there will be no health-care premiums in Manitoba ever again.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

### House Business

**Madam Speaker:** Prior to proceeding, I would like to clarify something announced earlier this morning.

The private member's resolution announced by the Second Opposition House Leader (Mr. Gerrard) was mistakenly announced as having been previously debated; this was in error.

For clarity, then, the resolution to be considered on the next Thursday of private members' business will be one put forward by the honourable member for St. Boniface (Mr. Lamont), entitled Immediate Action Needed on Climate Change.

Thank you.

### Questions

**Madam Speaker:** A question period of up to 10 minutes will be held. Questions may be addressed to the sponsoring member by any member in the following sequence: first question to be asked by a member from another party; this is to be followed by

a rotation between the parties; each independent member may ask only one question; and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

**Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** The NDP party seems to continue to break parliamentary privilege by discussing their bills before they're introduced. Yesterday, again, in the Rotunda, they were discussing this bill before we even sat in the House to hear the bill introduction.

Why does the member opposite think he's above the rules of the House?

**Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto):** I can assure the minister that we did not discuss any bill in the Rotunda yesterday.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Yes, I would ask the member for Minto who's put forward this excellent bill, just what all would be included in premiums, right? Would tray fees be included, but—or we would just have premiums like where—in—for instance, in Alberta or other provinces?

**Mr. Swan:** Yes, I thank the member for River Heights for the question.

This would not cover tray fees. This would only include, as was the case in Manitoba before 1973, having an assessment, whether it's paid directly to government as in BC, or whether it's taken off your paycheque, as it is in Ontario, simply for the privilege of having health-care insurance in Manitoba.

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** Despite paying some of the highest taxes under the NDP's decade of decay and spending the most on health care, Manitoba still ranked last in health-care performance. What improvements to his party's decade of decline will this legislation accomplish?

**Mr. Swan:** It'll prevent the Progressive Conservative Party of Manitoba from charging families up to \$1,800 after-tax dollars for the same services they were getting before. That's what it'll do.

**Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas):** I'd like to ask the member how health-care premiums would affect low-income and fixed-income Manitobans here.

**Mr. Swan:** Well, I thank the member for Point Douglas for the question because I know how concerned she is about the people in her community

who experience many of the same issues that people in my community do.

In Ontario, as I've said, the Ontario government, under both Liberal and Conservative governments, impose a health-care tax. It starts to be payable—and I hope the member for—well, I hope the members opposite listen, because I know what big fans they are of Doug Ford. Maybe he'll do something about it; maybe he'll make it worse. You start to pay the health-care tax at \$20,000 per year. That's not even equivalent to someone working full-time, earning minimum wage. So we think it hurts people of low income disproportionately.

**Mr. Tom Lindsey (Flin Flon):** What actions has the Premier (Mr. Pallister) taken to embrace a two-tier, American-style health-care system so far?

**Mr. Swan:** Why, it's going to—we could use the rest of this morning talking about that.

Look, the first thing was him coming out, I think to the surprise of every single member of that House, I think to the surprise of his staff, to muse now about having a health-care premium that hasn't been in place in Manitoba in 45 years. There's been a number of things. An example of that would be privatizing outpatient physiotherapy and occupational therapy, things which were covered within the public system until the Premier decided to take an axe to it. Individuals are now required to pay for a lot of those services on their own. If they have private insurance, they may get covered for a bunch of it. If they don't have private insurance, they are now looking at potentially thousands of dollars in costs.

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** The member's very concerned, of course, about increasing costs for low-income people but, yet, when they were in government, ambulance fees went up and up and up. And under our government, we've been able to put a cap on that, and we're working to bring them down.

How come you weren't worried about ambulance fees, but you are worried about insurance fees?

**Mr. Swan:** Well, we're very worried about the Premier's musings, which he hasn't clearly entirely abandoned, which would result, potentially—if the Liberal BC model or if the Conservative model in Ontario is followed, would result in every single family in the province of Manitoba paying \$1,800—potentially, as in BC, \$1,800 after-tax dollars every year, simply for the privilege of having public health insurance.

**Mr. Lindsey:** I'm wondering why the member for Minto thinks that it's so important to bring this forward now. Why is it that important that we need to talk about it?

\* (10:20)

**Mr. Swan:** Well, because of the quotes they put on the record, which were actually very topical. We have a Premier (Mr. Pallister) who tends to speak first and then think about the result after—

**An Honourable Member:** It's a waste of time.

**Mr. Swan:** And—well, I hear the member for Brandon East (Mr. Isleifson) saying it's a waste of time; it was a waste of time for the Premier to step out and talk about having a health-care premium if he didn't actually intend to do it. It seems like there was a waste of time for the Premier to spend a year talking about—*[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Swan:** —carbon pricing to then suddenly, on a dime, turn around and now say that wasn't going to be done and he's going to allow Justin Trudeau to decide how the tax is going to be assessed on Manitobans.

So the Premier's own words and his actions and his reversals and his doubling down makes it very—

**Madam Speaker:** The member's time has expired.

**Mrs. Smith:** I'd ask the member, you know, how—why would a two-tiered, American system—style health-care system be bad for Manitobans?

**Mr. Swan:** Well, I thank the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) for the question because you really 'stricks' the heart of what New Democrats are all about.

We believe that your right to get quality, timely, accessible health care close to home should not depend on what's in your wallet or what kind of credit card you have. It's your right as a Manitoban. And every time this government—this PC government cuts more things out of the public health-care system and requires people to pay, they're putting up more barriers from people enjoying health care which is, we believe, their right.

**Mrs. Cox:** Madam Speaker, the federal government is only funding 19 per cent of health care here in Manitoba.

I'd like to ask the member if he will commit to calling on the federal government to make more

significant contributions to Manitoba's health care and be a full health-care partner here in Manitoba.

**Mr. Swan:** Well, it really is the worst of both worlds when we have a Liberal government in Ottawa that doesn't care about health care and a Progressive Conservative government in Manitoba that doesn't care about health care.

It's strange, of course, that the same government which will tell you that a 1 per cent increase in education spending is a historic increase in education will at the same time say that a 3.5 per cent increase in funding for health care from the federal government is somehow an abdication of responsibility.

Actually, neither the federal government nor the provincial government at this time get it. We're hoping that will change federally and, in 2020, that will be changing provincially.

**Mr. Ted Marcelino (Tyndall Park):** This is a leading question that could be answerable by a yes or a no.

Do you think that if the Conservative caucus votes against this bill, do you think they have in the back of their mind a sense that it will be—come to pass? This premium on our health care? *[interjection]*

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Swan:** Well, I know it's a leading question. It's hard to give a yes or a no answer when we try to anticipate what members of—the backbench members of the PC caucus are thinking.

I don't know what was going through their heads when the Premier came out and suddenly announced there was going to be a health-care tax. I don't know what was going through their heads when he came out an hour before the day we were going to be debating this budget and said there won't be a health-care tax, but then later on in the day said, but wait, if there's a second term. I don't know what they were thinking when he came out and said there was going to be a made-in-Manitoba carbon tax that would be higher than the Trudeau tax in the first year.

I don't know what they were thinking last week when the Premier said, you know what, we're not going to do this, we're going to let Justin Trudeau

decide how the carbon tax is going to be assessed and collected in Manitoba—

**Madam Speaker:** The honourable member's time has expired.

**Ms. Morley-Lecomte:** The NDP's record on health care, particularly the high costs and low quality of service, left a negative impact on Manitoba.

Why does the member opposite think he is in a position now to be giving our government lessons on health care?

**Mr. Swan:** Well, it's actually very easy.

The Premier (Mr. Pallister)—[interjection]

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Swan:** It's very easy. Last year, the Premier surprised everybody, including members of his own caucus, by musing about imposing a health-care tax that hadn't existed in Manitoba since 1973. And then, when we actually took steps to bring in a resolution, the Premier suddenly flip-flopped that very day and said, well, there won't be one. But then said, oh, but I only mean for this term. If we get another term, all bets are off—we might have a health-care premium.

We're going to stand up for Manitobans. I hope the backbenchers opposite who get left out of all the decisions step up and protect Manitobans as well.

**Madam Speaker:** The time for questions has expired.

### Debate

**Madam Speaker:** Debate is open.

**Hon. Cathy Cox (Minister of Sport, Culture and Heritage):** Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to put a few words on record here this morning.

I am very proud of our Progressive Conservative government's record on honesty and transparency.

Last year our Finance Minister and all of the Progressive Conservative members here in the Legislature reached out to over 30,000 Manitobans through many, many platforms in an effort to hear directly from Manitobans on how to best shape and grow this very, very wonderful province.

Our Progressive Conservative MLAs from across the province hosted dozens and dozens of prebudget consultation meetings and town halls right in their communities because our government

believes that Manitobans know best how to spend their money.

We received an overwhelming amount of online responses and listened to Manitobans at their doors and in our offices, and I can tell you that at my office in River East I had many, many individuals coming forward and telling us what a wonderful job we're doing and how proud they are of us making these important decisions on behalf of all Manitobans. And, surprisingly, Madam Speaker, many of those responses came from public servants who provided important insight on how we could improve our province for the betterment of all Manitobans.

It's unfortunate the members opposite, they chose to avoid participating in those important meetings because, judging from the recent polls that we just read the other day in the paper, they really do need to start listening to Manitobans.

Our Progressive Conservative government heard loud and clear from Manitobans on the issue of health-care premiums, and while the NDP members are aware of our position, I will again reiterate for their sake: there will be no health-care premiums in Manitoba under our Progressive Conservative government.

Madam Speaker, our government inherited a huge financial mess thanks to the NDP's 17 years of mismanagement. Under the NDP our debt more than doubled in less than five years and it's obvious the NDP was spending willy-nilly. They had no plan. Capital projects weren't approved based on a value-for-money audit or a return on investment. They used the accounting practice called spend and tax, and under the NDP's watch the government deficit would have ballooned to \$1.7 billion.

And I am so proud to say that thanks to our government's diligence our province is now on the road to recovery. Our 2017-18 year-end and financial results show a summary deficit of \$695 million, which is even lower than the budgeted deficit of \$840 million, Madam Speaker.

Under the NDP the rainy day fund was nearly depleted. Their excessive year-after-year spending significantly impacted our debt-financing costs, and thanks to them, Madam Speaker, Manitobans spend nearly a billion dollars a year financing our debt, money that could be better used on new schools or personal care homes right here in Manitoba.



The NDP reached into the pockets of Manitobans and increased taxes every chance they could, Madam Speaker. Even when the NDP said they wouldn't raise the PST, they did, and each and every member of the NDP voted in favour of raising the PST to 8 per cent. It was unanimous.

They didn't care how it impacted single-income moms or young families trying to make ends meet. They dug into the pockets of each and every Manitoban in an effort to subsidize their spending problem. As a matter of fact, the NDP raised taxes 15 times in 14 years, and, Madam Speaker, Manitobans endured an 18 per cent increase in fuel taxes during the NDP's term.

The NDP even expanded the PST to include home insurance, disability insurance and even health insurance. They imposed an extra 8 per cent on these important necessary products that guaranteed Manitobans security at often the very lowest times in their life when they needed to have insurance for fires, for disability, for health insurance when a family member became ill. They didn't care; they imposed 8 per cent tax on that, Madam Speaker.

\*(10:30)

And the leader of the NDP opposition even suggested Manitobans should pay an estate tax. Taxing the dead—what a sad and desperate concept, Madam Speaker.

Our government is spending more than ever before on health care, and we are seeing results, unlike the NDP, who spent the most per capita on health care, yet were rated dead last in terms of health-care results.

Under the NDP, Madam Speaker, Manitobans were paying the highest ambulance fees across country. I am proud to say that our government has committed to reducing those fees by 50 per cent for Manitobans.

And, Madam Speaker, I can tell you that when I went to the doors in the election in 2016 and talked to those seniors, they raised that issue with me over and over again. They raised the issue of those ambulance fees. Many of them actually chose not to take an ambulance to go to the hospital. They risked their lives and had a family member or a friend or a neighbour drive them because they couldn't afford that over-\$500 fee for an ambulance. It's very sad that the members opposite chose to raise those rates to be the very highest all across Canada. And I'm

proud of our government for making those important changes.

ER wait times have decreased, and MRI wait times have seen a 30 per cent decline under our PC government, which shows that our plan to improve health care is really working, Madam Speaker. Recently, I had the opportunity to visit a family member at a hospital. And I can tell you that the service that those nurses and physicians, health-care aides are providing is just fantastic. I can't say enough about the important work that those individuals do each and every day to ensure that they provide service, they provide care, and, quite often, they provide a little bit of love for those individuals who are in the hospital. So I would like to say thank you to each and every one of them for the outstanding job that they do, each and every day, on the floors of our hospital to ensure that Manitobans receive the best care possible.

And, Madam Speaker, we know that under the NDP government, Manitoba came in last in many, many key sectors, not only health care but education as well. But we hear no solutions from the members opposite. One of the sectors, as I said, was health care. But members opposite, they don't want to acknowledge the 17 years of mismanagement while they were in government. They only want to talk about what we're doing here in Manitoba and all of the wonderful improvements that we're making here on behalf of all Manitobans.

And, again, I have to stress the fact that we're listening to Manitobans, Madam Speaker. We're transparent in the way that we govern, you know, unlike the members opposite who chose to, like I said before, increase the PST. They went to the doors and said that they wouldn't do it. What happened? Unanimous vote: Each and every one of them voted in favour of that 1 per cent increase.

So, Madam Speaker, I am proud of our government. We're fixing the finances. We're repairing the services, and we are rebuilding the economy. Our government is making important, tough decisions, something the NDP proved incapable of. Our province has committed to not imposing health-care premiums, and, unlike members opposite, we will keep our promises.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Madam Speaker, I rise to put a few comments on this resolution. Manitoba Liberals are in support of this resolution and don't believe that health-care premiums provide an advantage or a benefit and they

certainly are a cost to individuals. And so we support this resolution and thank the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) for bringing this forward.

I do want to make a few comments on the importance of having quality health care in our province. I received a call yesterday from a woman who—she and her family have had quite a lot of experience with our health-care system over the last number of years. And she commented to me that though there continue to be exceptional individuals in the health-care system who are still very kind and compassionate, that what she has observed, since the Conservative government was elected, is a sea change. And that sea change has been to a system where people are more rushed, people are less caring, people are less compassionate and they are caught up sometimes—because they are short of staff—with the situation, which has in some areas become quite chaotic. And the health-care system is suffering. And I would caution the members opposite to pay attention, to make sure that our system continues to be kind and compassionate, or returns to being kind and compassionate after the chaos of the changes that they have instituted.

For varied reasons, her family has seen more delays. I won't go into this. I will mention that this woman was almost in tears as she talked about her experiences with health care under the Conservative government.

I would add to this and go further to talk of the importance of having adequate staff. It's very difficult to have a really kind and compassionate health-care system when there are not enough staff. We have all heard about, because they've been discussed in the last little while, situation in St. Boniface where there's not been sufficient staff and so the result has been a dramatic increase in the number of mandatory overtimes.

When people who have worked a shift are told that, sorry, you can't go home, you can't rest, you can't be with your family, you can't attend to commitments that you've already made, you must be here for another eight hours—these sorts of mandatory overtimes are really very problematic and they are a sign of a health-care system which is not being organized, managed well, is not functioning well.

And the nurses who are mandated to have these extra overtime hours—at the end of the second shift they will be often very tired, exhausted. One of the lessons that people need to remember in health care is that it's really important that the caregivers—now,

whether that's family caregivers, whether that's health-care professionals, but that caregivers—it is important that their health is looked after. And part of that—and much of that we leave to individuals.

But, certainly, we need a system which considers the health of the caregivers as well as the health of those who need it, and if we don't look after the health of the caregivers first, then it's very difficult for us to be looking after the people who need help adequately and well.

One must remember that, in an airplane, you always are told to make sure that if you're the adult and you're travelling with a child or somebody who is—has a disability and can't help themselves, get—look after your oxygen mask first. And then you can make sure that your child or the person that you're caring for has their oxygen mask looked after. If you do it the other way around, it's a potential disaster.

So what we need to make sure is that we have much more of a focus on the health of caregivers, we don't forget how important it is, if we're going to have really good, kind and compassionate care, that we manage human resources well and that we're thinking about the health of the caregivers first and the health of the people who need it second—and very importantly. But these two go together, and it is vital that we're making sure we're looking after both, because the second can't come if you don't look after the first.

\* (10:40)

We've seen this not only in St. Boniface, but we've seen this in other areas. We saw this within the last year at the Lions Prairie Manor in Portage la Prairie. And one of the major concerns there has been how things have been staffed, the consistency of the staff, because when the staff is consistent, they get to know the individuals at the Lions Prairie Manor, and they're much better able to tailor the care that's provided to the individual needs of the individuals.

If you are constantly shifting staff—and this was one of the problems at the Lions Prairie Manor, and there was a big report on this, that if you're constantly shifting staff, they can't get to know the individuals they're caring for in the same way and in a way that really is optimum for care.

So, again, an emphasis on making sure that the health-care staff, the health-care professionals, are looked after well, that our human resources are cared

for, because this is a fundamental aspect of having a good system which works.

So I support this resolution. I thank the member for bringing this forward, and I'm glad to see that the government also supports this resolution.

**Ms. Janice Morley-Lecomte (Seine River):** I want to thank the members for giving me the opportunity to put a few words on record with regards to Bill 233, The Health Services Insurance Amendment Act.

I am sure that most individuals can recall a story of a friend or family member who was away on holiday and, while vacationing, they experienced an unfortunate health issue. The costs could vary depending upon the medical procedure or procedures, but a cost was applied to the visit. Health is a huge concern, and everyone will prepare for the inevitable in the case that they are in need of out-of-country medical.

Madam Speaker, as Canadians, we are known for our health-care system. Individuals have enjoyed the benefits of medical advice from some of the best professionals in this field without the costs that others living abroad may have to pay. Our health service was first set up in Manitoba on July 1st, 1958.

Through time, the Medical Care Act eventually evolved out of the many discussions that took place. This act has been in place to offer the medical services that we, as Manitobans, enjoy.

Accessing an emergency room, going to a QuickCare clinic, needing hospital care, X-rays, medical tests, treatments—these are just a small number of the medical services available to Manitobans without there being any cost attached to the service.

The luxury of knowing you can be seen by a doctor or nurse and receive the necessary care is part of our culture—no, it has become a part of who we are. We are known for our health-care system, a system that provides the necessary coverage to everyone, regardless of their age, occupation, address and culture.

It is a universal health-care system which is there for all to access. These services are free to Manitobans and are available any time someone is injured or needing medical attention—free to ensure that not one person is unable to receive the medical care they need.

Madam Speaker, one may ask, how can we enjoy the health benefits that are available to everyone, young and old? Well, the answer is simple. Our government has committed to ensuring that all of its citizens are able to have access to health care. We look at the people in our province and value them as unique individuals, individuals which could be anyone's friend or family member, a part of a big family, a part of our family.

Our government looked at the services everyone was receiving and asked how we could better deliver our services without compromising any of the health-care programs already in place. How could we improve on our health-care system?

Careful consideration had to be used, as Manitobans expected a system that would improve their health and still provide quality care. Yes, after 17 years of NDP government, some tough decisions needed to be made about the future of health care in Manitoba. The NDP did not make a single tough decision while in government.

We had a plan, and our plan to provide better care is working. Winnipeg Regional Health Authority emergency department wait times show an 18 per cent drop in median wait times since August of 2015. For anyone who has had to suffer through an accident and attend at an emergency room, waiting to see an attending physician is, to say the least, not pleasant. So seeing a decrease in wait times is a definite step in improving health-care services.

Madam Speaker, a decrease in ambulance fees has benefited many who have had to use an ambulance. I have heard from constituents how the lower cost of ambulance fees has benefited them. Some of these constituents are senior citizens who seek medical attention but would not call an ambulance because of the fee. They would call a cab, family member or a friend to take them to the hospital, or simply wait and hope that whatever was wrong would right itself.

Waiting is not the answer for a sick person who needs medical attention. The drop in ambulance fees has made it more affordable for individuals to call for the emergency help they need. This decrease promise was 50 per cent by the end of our first term. We are at \$340 and will reduce the fee to \$250 for an ambulance, and that is 50 per cent by the year of 2019.

Madam Speaker, to further assist with medical needs of Manitobans, our government

has hired 29 full-time paramedics, with 60 more paramedics to be hired in 2018. This is a commitment to ensuring response times are reduced and our loved ones' health concerns remain a priority.

Under our government, MRI wait times have declined by 30 per cent as of July 2019 when compared to July 2017, showing that what our government is doing is clearly working. The commitment to ensuring our health-care system meets the needs of the patient continues to evolve as we make progress in our provincial health-care system.

We made a commitment to improve patient access and wait times for surgeries, including hip and knee replacements and cataracts. We have received the final report of the wait time reductions task force report. Acting on the recommendations of that report will help us in achieving our goal of shorter wait times and better care sooner.

We know that cleaning up 17 years of mismanagement sometimes involves making tough decisions, something the NDP proved themselves to be incapable of. Madam Speaker, when we were elected, we promised Manitoba the most improved province in Canada.

Health care is a huge part of our budget, and it was an area that needed improving. Our government has taken what was broken and found a way to improve the services and supports in place for Manitobans. This was all done without any health-care premium being applied.

These services were provided through the same health-care facilities, with the same professional individuals performing the procedures, without any added premiums. Manitobans wanted a health-care system which met their needs, and our government has been able to provide this service.

Madam Speaker, to support this statement, our government has held prebudget consultations. These consultations provided Manitobans with the opportunity to share their views on a range of options for sustaining health-care services. We have heard loud and clear from Manitobans, and there will be no health-care premium in Manitoba.

We sought out the views of Manitobans, and we are listening to them. I repeat, there will be no health-care premiums in Manitoba.

This is the third time the NDP have raised this issue. We have been clear: this is not a route we are exploring.

Thank you.

**Mr. Ian Wishart (Portage la Prairie):** I have pleasure to stand and put on the record here a few words regarding Bill 233, the health care–Health Services Insurance Amendment Act, but I think previous speaker did a really great job, in terms of outlining where our government is, in terms of position.

\* (10:50)

And, certainly, the members opposite, I think, sometimes forget what they'd left for Manitobans when they went out of government and our government came into play, that they left a financial situation that they were unable to deal with, that they were afraid to deal with, and really, they're in a campaign. I think we all saw that their only path forward that they could imagine was promise things that they couldn't afford yet again.

And had we had been in the unfortunate situation to have to deal with another NDP government, I'm sure that our financial situation now would be even more challenging than it is. We were on track to have a deficit in the coming year of approximately \$1.7 billion. That's more than \$1,000 for every man, woman and child in Manitoba, an unsustainable path forward. And I think—I know that they struggle with the whole concept of a carbon economy and green plan and sustainability, but financial sustainability seems to be beyond them as well.

Some of what they're trying to do here is to make sure that there's an absolute, that we would never look at a health-care premium, and we have made it very clear that we're not moving in that direction. But it is one of the options that any government should at least look at because you can learn things by examining the options.

And probably the most relevant example, and fairly current, is the whole concept of P3 schools. We had a very long look and a good study done on P3 schools. We did not choose to go in that direction, but we did learn an awful lot about how to tender for services in the area of school construction and services that the previous government had never bothered to examine because ideologically they were opposed to the concept of P3 schools. So they

wouldn't even look at it. They just basically said, well, we're—you know, we won't go over there, so we won't even examine what we could learn as part of the process.

And we learned quite a lot, something that has led us to a process of tendering for seven schools that'll probably give us the result in terms of lower-cost facilities for education now and into the future. And lot of that was learned by looking at the different tendering processes that could be put in place and learned during the examination of the option of P3 schools. Now, no one has said that we won't use the concept of P3 somewhere in the future, whether it's for education or whether it's for highways or whether it's for other types of construction, because we did learn that they have certain limitations, but they also have certain advantages in certain situations.

And so, by examining the options, you very often learn an awful lot more not only of what you haven't—the road you haven't travelled down in the past and the options, but learn more about what you can do to improve the management and the situation of what you're currently doing. And as a government, that's the challenge that we are faced with. We have an education system, we have a health-care system, both of which that have a lot of challenges to be faced. They're both very expensive systems. You know, the member for Minto (Mr. Swan) was very quick to point out, well, he talks to people that moved to BC and they had a health-care premium for the first time and they didn't, perhaps, realize they were getting into that, though if they're moving, you would think they would've done the research ahead of time to know what special costs.

But I have also run into people that moved to Manitoba from eastern Canada and didn't realize that there would be a education tax applied to their dwelling because they don't do that down there; it's unheard of. And yet previous government pushed and allowed, in many ways, that to increase dramatically over their period of time in the government, and it has become a financial burden that we hear about all the time and—from different—not only from taxpayers but also from property owners all across the province because it's an additional bill that they have to budget for and one that they have relatively little control over. And it continues to go up, often well beyond the rate of inflation.

And it's interesting when you look at what increases have occurred in terms of property taxes from education. There is actually no correlation whatsoever between the increases that the Province have put into education and the increases that occurred in property taxes; they seem to go up no matter what. And, certainly, we need to look at the costs in that regard.

The member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard)—and I appreciate his interest in the Lions Prairie Manor. I know, as MLA for that area, that we have had a number of issues there over a long period of years. I have met with the families from that that have—people are residents in that facility a number of times over the years, and a big part of the issue is the lack of consistency in terms of senior staff, particularly nursing staff.

And the solution has always been to go to agencies and hire agency staff to come in. And they are very qualified people, but they're not familiar with the residents, and that becomes the challenge that they need to face.

And I suspect in many ways because of our physical distance and geography, it's very easy for a small city like Portage just to say, well, we'll just hire agency and bring them in. They're available, they'll come on almost no notice, and it avoids mandatory overtime, and it avoids having to try and find other staff in the community when there's often is staff in the community, and we have certainly have been training a large number of nurses.

We have special courses for nurses through Red River College there in Portage that have been full, in fact, have waiting lists on them for a number of years. And we've been trying to increase their capacity and have successfully increased the capacity a little bit each and every year for the last couple of years, increased the capacity so that we have more resources in terms of nursing staff within the community, something that I think is clearly a need now and into the future.

But it's very relevant to the discussion in that we need to make sure that we try and find the efficiencies, try and find the solutions, but never forget that care comes principally from the people that are in a community, and the focus has to be on providing it from the community.

I am reminded, I guess, a little bit by all of the ER discussion and the wait time discussion, and we made progress on that, but as a rural—lifelong rural

resident, I recall the number of ERs that have been closed across the province in the last 20 years. Over 25 of them across the province in various places under the NDP government.

And something that they forget to talk about, and people in some parts of the province with nearly a two-hour drive to the nearest ER. And certainly we appreciate the better ER services that are available now in locations, and the ambulance services that have improved so that the health care actually comes to you now. When an ambulance pulls up at an accident or at home, when they're called to that, the health care has arrived. You don't have to worry about, well, that's half way there, you're going to have a long trip ahead of you hopefully to get you there in time.

Now I know that we're running out of time here for me to speak to this particular issue, and that there are an awful lot of people that want to speak to this particular bill, but I would like to put on record the fact that we are listening to Manitobans.

We have heard during the consultation, not only the budgetary consultations but other consultations, the concerns of Manitobans. So we certainly are a very listening government, and it is important that we do that. And we will continue to do that, something that the previous government, I know, had lost their way on.

Thank you.

**Mr. Shannon Martin (Morris):** I always appreciate the opportunity to talk about the dichotomy, which is the NDP when it comes to issues of, you know, protecting low-income people and protecting Manitobans in general from fees and taxes.

I mean, just yesterday, the NDP were up on their feet demanding action on poverty and said, you know, well, you've had two years. While conveniently obviously forgetting the fact that they had 17.

And under 17 years of NDP mismanagement, the situation obviously only worsened for people of low income and fixed income, Madam Speaker.

\* (11:00)

In fact, we became, unfortunately, the child poverty capital of Canada under the NDP. Now as our minister of family services noted, we no longer

have that title. And there is no denying, Madam Speaker, that there is much more work to be done.

Now the issue at hand—

**Madam Speaker:** Order, please. The hour is now 11 a.m., and time for private members' resolution—when the member is next up, he will have nine minutes remaining in debate.

## DEBATE ON RESOLUTIONS

### Res. 3—Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities

**Madam Speaker:** Resuming debate now on the resolution before us this morning is the resolution on restoring public transit funding for municipalities, standing in the name of the honourable member for Rossmere, who has six minutes remaining.

**Mr. Andrew Micklefield (Rossmere):** It's been a while since we've been discussing this, so I do want to review what it is we're talking about.

The resolution put forward by the member opposite accuses our government of reducing funding for transit. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth.

Clearly, it's really no secret that good governments have to make difficult decisions and, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth for the 17 years of NDP mismanagement. Hardly a difficult decision was made in that time and that created a tremendous lag that created a tremendous amount of decay, an awful amount of debt. We saw the debt double—more than double during their reign, and we saw our economy tank and our services fall into disrepair. We inherited no end of leaky roofs, buildings that were in all kinds of disrepair and a number of things needed to be adjusted.

*Mr. Doyle Piwniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair*

One of the things that we have been listening to the municipalities about is the nature in which funding is handled that is passed on from the Province to the municipalities, and so one of the changes that's been made is that instead of earmarking funds—saying to the municipalities, you have to spend this money on this thing and that money on that thing, we're giving municipalities some choice. We're giving them the discretion; they can choose how they spend funds which flow through provincial coffers to their own budgets, and

that's being welcomed by municipalities. There are a number of examples of that.

But I do want to quote the mayor of Winnipeg, Mayor Brian Bowman, who said on May the 3rd of 2016, and I quote: The Progressive Conservatives had a significant announcement on fair say, those were his words—a single basket for funding, an easier process which will help us get more value for dollars.

Now, the mayor has no political allegiance. Obviously, he does not identify with any party. But we find here that he is saying that the process that we have instigated is easier, that it's fair—which will help us get more value for dollars. I continue to quote him here. We're expecting, as a result, that we'll be able to really stretch the hard-earned tax dollars that are being sent to the provincial government a lot better in terms of being able to spend it on priorities of our citizens in our city.

The mayor, though, did raise this more recently on April the 11th of last year, and I quote again: Bringing the provincial budget into balance is something Winnipeggers should be desiring and taxpayers should be desiring. So you're right in terms, we didn't see the increases, but just to see given the times we're in when they're trying to bring their budget into balance, that the levels for operating and capital are maintained is something we should be welcoming.

I would point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that, under the NDP, funding was raised and raised and raised and raised and raised with no watch on where this was heading and, curiously, they poured all kinds of money into transit and saw, really, no results. Ridership leveled—remained level for many, many years and has remained at that amount ever since. No matter how much money they put into this they can't make it any better.

We're letting the City have a fair say in how the money is spent. We're actually purchasing 70 new buses. We have put \$27.4 million to support public transit infrastructure projects. This is not a slash of any kind. This is an increase. In fact, there's nearly eight—or, certainly, \$7.68 million in additional direct funding for bus purchases since taking office. This is not a reduction. This is an increase.

We see that provincial operating grants to Winnipeg Transit increased from \$22 million in 2006 up to nearly \$40 million in 2016. That's a 75 per cent increase under the NDP. Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is

hardly sustainable. On their way to 100 per cent increase. Where does it stop? Does it ever stop? Do you just keep pouring money into transit and buses? Clearly not.

And, by the way, it needs to be pointed that it's not the government that's pouring this kind of money in. It's the taxpayer. Taxpayers are subsidizing some of these services at an unsustainable rate and the NDP kept writing the cheque, and another one, and another one after that.

Madam Speaker, we believe in a more balanced approach. We believed in a more stable approach. And the Mayor is onside. Other municipal leaders are onside. And we are investing in transit. We have funded projects, such as Rapid Transit, the Waverley Underpass and I already mentioned, the new buses.

We've seen fares rise under the NDP—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable member's time is up.

Any other speakers?

**Mr. James Allum (Fort Garry-Riverview):** Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. You go to the back bench, and you're—almost certainly, you can't be seen. But I'm pleased to get up and speak to this outstanding resolution which I thought, coming to work this morning, that would enjoy the full support of every member of this Legislature who wants to be understood to be a progressive representative of their communities and ensure that we live in a modern and vibrant city here in Winnipeg, or in Brandon, or even for the extensive bus fleet in Flin Flon.

But I take it, from listening to the member for Rossmere (Mr. Micklefield) this morning, who is a member representing an urban city riding, then does an about-face on his own constituents and suggests, quite strongly, that he won't be supporting this resolution. That is unbelievable. For a city MLA to abandon his own constituents and not support a simple, fair, 50-50 funding arrangement between the Province and the City. What does that say about that member? It means he's going to have a four—short four years in this Legislature.

How about the member for St. James (Mr. Johnston)? What about him? Why didn't he get up and speak to this resolution? Why isn't he standing up for residents in his part of the community to ensure when they come from St. James, all the way down to come to work or go shopping downtown that they can get on an

affordable transit system. But he's nowhere to be seen. And you want to know why that is? Because he drives that big horking car to work, every single day. He doesn't get on the bus, nor does he care about public transportation in this city. And I see him driving that big, horking car every single day, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And so we know how this happened and why we had to hold off the bits of legislation for this year, even though the government wasn't prepared and dragged their feet and then finally, after months and months, finally decided to release it in the hot, dark days of summer.

But we remember how this happened. The Minister for Sport, Culture and Heritage and all the other things that she apparently represents, got up today and talked about transparency. Well, let's remember how this cut was made. Buried so deep in the bits of legislation from a year ago we had to get a front-end loader to find it, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's how deeply it was buried. When we went out and told the media about it, they said, you're kidding. Where do you find that? We showed them. We went through page, after page, after page, after page, after page. Something like page 78, I think, before we finally got to it. They said they couldn't believe it. They said, this is a decades-old agreement between the Province and the City to do the right thing on behalf of commuters and behalf of those who are on low income, of modest means, who use public transportation every day to get their families to services of wellness, to get to work every day, to get to recreational outings.

\* (11:10)

We—I knew a young boy who went to Churchill but lived in Point Douglas; took the bus with his hockey equipment every single day. That's the kind of person that we need to ensure has an affordable trip on a bus, each and every day, and what happened instead? The government broke their commitment to that 50-50 promise, broke that funding arrangement and set the public transportation back in this city, not merely one decade, but back into the 20th century and even further behind to the horse-and-buggy days. That's a shameful record.

Now, we know that the former Finance minister lacked transparency on this issue. That's why he hid it deep down in the BITSA legislation, and so I had more hope when there was a Cabinet shuffle that maybe the new Finance Minister would have a different sensibility about this issue, Mr. Deputy

Speaker, because he was, of course, a council member representing St. James, I think it was, for at least a couple of terms. And so I had some high hopes that a former councillor of the city of Winnipeg would represent the importance of that 50-50 funding arrangement.

But then we did a little bit of research, looked him up on Google, and you know his record on public transit is absolutely brutal. You know, he actually opposed rapid transit in this city. Do you know what's worse than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The new Finance Minister opposed—opposed—ensuring an affordable bus pass for students at the University of Winnipeg. That speaks volumes to me about the quality and the character of the Finance ministers, both old and new, when it comes to supporting people who actually need this service.

And so we said, you know, you break that funding arrangement, you break that 50-50 agreement, transit rates are going to go up. Sure enough—that's exactly what happened. I'm sure no member of the other side of the House actually knows how much it costs to get on the bus now.

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Allum:** Ah, they—oh, you see? They do know. Do they every actually get on the bus?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes, just last week.

**Mr. Allum:** Just last week. Well, I'm proud to say that the member for—

**An Honourable Member:** Radisson.

**Mr. Allum:** —Radisson actually, one time, got on a bus.

I worked at City Hall—[*interjection*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Allum:** —for 15 years—[*interjection*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Allum:** —the minister of municipal government says to me. I worked at City Hall for 15 years, and I either took the bus or I rode to work every single day, because that's how it works for people of modest means.

I don't know what Cadillac or what limousine the minister of municipal affairs drives in each and every day. He's now riding his fleet transportation every day, but, if he genuinely had experience riding the bus—[*interjection*]



**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Allum:** –if he genuinely had experience riding the bus, he would know—he would know—by looking at the multiple and diverse faces on the bus, each and every day, how absolutely essential that that 50-50 formula agreement was to ensuring affordability for passengers all across this city, and yet they abandoned that very commitment and, worse, they were—lacked transparency and buried it deep, deep in the budget implementation bill.

So we didn't need the government last week or the Premier (Mr. Pallister) last week to flip flop on his carbon tax to understand and to recognize that the government had no commitment to addressing climate change, because the first shot off the bow in that particular issue with this particular government was the abandonment of this 50-50 agreement because it suggested quite clearly that they don't believe in public transit. They don't believe in its importance in addressing climate change, and they don't believe that it's a central, central way of operating in a modern, vibrant city.

Now, members on the backbenches of this government, another member from Southdale, another urban city MLA who's abandoning his constituents, can do the right thing this morning. You can actually do, for once—one time only—do the right thing. After I sit down, after I'm done, we can bring this matter to a vote, we can support this resolution, and we can return the 50-50 funding formula as it ought to be then, now, and tomorrow.

Let's do the right thing today. Let's support this resolution.

**Hon. Jeff Wharton (Minister of Municipal Relations):** Well, thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it's certainly a pleasure to rise today and put a few facts on the record regarding our government's improved partnership and relationship with not only Manitoba municipalities but the City of Winnipeg as well. And, certainly, the member from Fort Garry-Riverview probably isn't aware of what building relationships is about, because for 17 years the mess that we have to clean up with our municipal partners is incredible.

And the more we dig in, the more we understand that there just wasn't any collaboration or consideration for any of the issues that surround our municipalities, including the city of Winnipeg. When we took government, this relationship, again, was just a mess. It was a disaster. It was in a shambles.

Over the last 15—matter of fact, and I bring this up in the House quite often, on the 15th annual AMM convention, the previous NDP administration announced that they would be amalgamating all Manitoba municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with populations less than 1,000 residents. Well, to put that mildly, this took municipal councillors and mayors and reeves completely by surprise. Here they are, going to be celebrating 15 year working together in collaboration, 137 municipalities working hard to ensure that their residents are getting the services that they respect and they expect every day, and what do they do? They say, guess what, we're going to amalgamate you. We're going to force it on you. We're not—we don't care about your neighbouring municipalities or their 'demograph' or the history that they had when they, you know, when they were developed over 100 years ago—plus—in some cases, well over 100 years. They didn't care about that. They just cared about, well, look, it's 1,000. We're going to amalgamate. You guys will figure it out.

Well, that's not how we work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this side of the House. We work in collaboration with our partners. And, quite frankly, there was no consultation. We know that. We know that now. There never has been on that side of the House. Consultation is devoid of the members opposite, for sure.

When PC MLAs challenged the NDP, as a matter of fact, right here in this House when they were in government, you know what they called them, Mr. Deputy Speaker? They called municipality leaders—they called them howling—howling—coyotes.

**An Honourable Member:** Not the Phoenix Coyotes.

**Mr. Wharton:** Not the Phoenix Coyotes, but howling coyotes. What—that is sheer disrespect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of our elected governing officials that govern almost 60 per cent of this province.

A quote from former AMM president, Doug Dobrowolski, reflected on the NDP's forced amalgamation policies in the following: We are concerned that the provincial government is choosing a path that will destroy this relationship and respect for years to come.

They didn't even listen to Mr. Dobrowolski at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They continued to force this amalgamation down the throats of these hard-working elected officials and their staff. We can't forget that the CAOs and the staff members of

all these municipalities show up for work every day on behalf of the constituents to ensure that they're preparing their councillors and reeves with the best information so that they can make the most informed decisions for the members of their communities.

The decision to amalgamate should rest with the municipal governments—we agree. This was from Doug Dobrowolski. He said, look, we have no problem with amalgamation. We absolutely agree that we need to look at more regional focus to be sustainable for the long haul. But we need to make sure that we're at the table. We know what our partners need. We know the certain challenges that they have. We want to make sure that we can move forward in a collaborative way with them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, not being forced to move to another community and amalgamate on the eve of the 15th AMM convention.

Our party ran on a promise to give municipalities fair say on issues in their communities, and that's exactly what we're doing. We're doing things like listening, like the members opposite cannot do.

I would also like to point out that other members in this House, of our PC team, of course, features a number of MLAs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that actually have served the public before they were elected to serve here in this great Legislature. And I'll go on to name them because that's important to do, to get on the record that the Minister of Crown Services (Mrs. Mayer) was former Louis Riel School Division trustee; the Minister of Finance (Mr. Fielding), former Winnipeg city councillor; MLA for St. James, former St. James-Assiniboine school division trustee; the MLA for Interlake was a councillor; the MLA for Dauphin was a councillor; and MLA for Brandon East also served as a councillor.

And I can tell you that I was privileged as well to serve four years on the Town of Winnipeg Beach councillor and two years as deputy mayor. And that was a humbling experience for us. It's the grassroots of politics. Those are where the decisions—the core decisions are made, and they need a partner in the provincial government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that's exactly what we're providing, unlike members opposite.

\* (11:20)

Our strong commitment to fair say in response to very damaging policies of the NDP government

that were ignored entirely—ignored. They actually hung up the phone. Can you hear that? It was hung up, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There it is. It just hung up. You can hear it again. The NDP hung up on municipalities. After 17 years, the NDP were clearly—this was clearly a mess to clean up. There was no relationship to speak of with local councils.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have taken action to restore the—and repair the relationships with our municipal partners. Last year, we introduced basket funding model to allow greater flexibility for municipalities to allocate funding according to local priorities. This is a very important step.

We collaborated with municipalities, including the City of Winnipeg, by the way, who recognizes that they have now the full authority to make decisions in their operating basket that is best for the community, while the RMs—we hear it all the time that one of the best moves that they ever—we ever made as government, unlike forced spending and political 'idoly'—basically, what they did was that whatever felt—they felt good about, the NDP, they would force it on our municipalities, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to essentially say, you know what, no, we don't like what you're thinking; we're going to think for you.

Well, that's wrong. I'm standing here today to tell you that that is wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Nobody—no municipality or elected government, grassroots governments in this province should be forced. They're at the table for fair say. We are building on that fair say; we are building on that basket funding model.

In fact, the—we—the member from Fort Garry-Riverview talks about—of course, talks about restoring transit funding. Well, I can tell you that overall the city enjoys some of the most generous funding relationship compared to other provinces, again, in any major urban centre throughout Canada, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In fact, the City of Winnipeg ended 2017 with a \$15-million surplus. Let me repeat that: The City of Winnipeg ended last fiscal 2017 with a \$15-million surplus. Means the City of Winnipeg is doing their job. They're definitely doing their job and they're given fair say in order to accomplish the goals and, of course, the priorities for Winnipeg—city of Winnipeg residents.

Growing up in the city of Winnipeg for over 30 years of my life, I—you know, I spent the last 20 years in the Interlake, and I'm proud of having the opportunity to not only have an urban

upbringing, but also now enjoying a rural upbringing as well, and my kids and my family are enjoying it, too. But I can tell you that there is a balance, obviously, in governing. And something that was devoid of the members opposite for 17 years—striking a balance for them was just not in their vocabulary.

Overall, our government is a massive supporter of transit. We've said it before; I'll say it again. Our government provides nearly \$3 million more than the NDP did—ever did for Winnipeg Transit operating. And now City Council can allocate even more provincial grant money, if they choose, thanks to the government's commitment to fair say. Fair say is an important part of the relationship.

Our government is also making record investments in supporting transit. Let me just name a few: investing well over \$200 million in major transit projects across Winnipeg, including bus rapid transit phases 1 and 2; \$27.4 million to support Public Transit Infrastructure Fund, including 70 new bus purchases, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and another \$7.68 million in additional, direct funding for bus purchases since we took government. Last year, through our Public Transit Infrastructure Fund, 13 projects with a total eligible cost of \$131 million were approved in the city of Winnipeg.

If that's not building capacity and a relationship, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I don't know what is. Our PC government has invested more dollars in public transit than opposition ever did when they were in government. We have delivered for Winnipeggers on transit users across the province. Nearly \$7.8 million in funding has been allocated to 51 transit-related projects outside the Perimeter.

And again—I know I'm running out of time. I'd love to talk for another hour, but I'll get a few of these on the record: other notable investments were \$500,000 for new transit buses in Brandon; \$178,000 for upgrades in Flin Flon bus garage; \$376,000 for new transit bus in Selkirk and \$100,000 for new Handi-Transit bus in The Pas; \$550,000 for four projects in the city of Thompson.

It can go on and on and on. I'd gladly have the opportunity, hopefully, to talk about this issue again. Thank you.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The honourable minister's time is up.

**Mr. James Teitsma (Radisson):** It's a pleasure to be able to get up on this topic this morning and to speak about transit use. I believe I may have surprised the

member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), as he somehow didn't think I would know, or in fact any of my colleagues would know how much, you know, bus fare costs these days.

But, yes, we all know how—exactly how much it costs; it's on the record now, and, certainly, I was aware because I just took it last week. And I'm thinking we might be hard pressed to find other members opposite who have done so. Certainly, the member for Fort Garry-Riverview didn't reveal the last time he took transit, but in any case, certainly, for me transit's always been a part of my life. I've—ever since I was six years old I took the bus to school, transit bus to school and—when I didn't walk or bike, that is, of course—and then continuing on through university. I had probably one of the harrist commutes one could imagine since I started out in Transcona and then went to school at the University of Manitoba; so that's a fair hike. And then I had a job just north of the airport on—out on—past—down Burrows and towards Kenaston there. So that was quite the hike for me every day, three long bus commutes, no question I would be spending four hours a day, most days, on the bus as I went about my daily work.

So I have a lot of experience as a user of transit, and I also have the distinct pleasure of having Belinda Squance as my constituency assistant. She works faithfully in my office and does an excellent job each and every day, and today she also took the bus as she does every day to come to work. She has chosen not to own a vehicle at this time of her life and she takes transit virtually everywhere. So she's got a lot of experiences, and I've asked her and I've asked other users of transit. I've got two children who rely on transit each and every day to get them to their universities, one to the University of Winnipeg, one to the University of Manitoba.

I speak with transit users regularly about what's important to them and what improvements they'd like to see being made in the transit system. Because I think what we have under 17 years of NDP government was—sharp increases in funding, certainly, 75 per cent, I think, over a 15-year period; the funding increased and increased and increased and increased following this formula that they seemed to be beholden to. But what actually happened to the experience, the day-to-day experiences of transit users over that time period? That's what we have to ask ourselves and, unfortunately, the answers are not—they're not particularly positive.

There's been rising issues with transit users not getting buses on time, buses being missing, with transit users experiencing, you know, inadequate service in all sorts of levels, and not just that the buses were late or missing entirely, but also that more and more people were getting on the bus and refusing to pay. And this is a problem that's been highlighted in the media quite often. And then, perhaps, in addition to all that, you have less people riding the bus in general. This is a surprise. It should be a surprise to all of us because in the face of all these trends that we're seeing happening under the NDP government in Winnipeg, increased funding, spend, spend, spend, decreased service and, really, a poor experience for all with decreased ridership and less people choosing to take the bus. What's the backdrop of that at a national or even an international level, and the answer is that the tools were there; the tools were there to improve transit. So 17 years ago, 20 years ago, the option of, you know, being notified on your smartphone when the bus is going to arrive wasn't there, but it certainly is there today. And I think people have an expectation and not an unrealistic expectation that they should be able to know when their bus is going to come, and that if it's three minutes late they should be able to know that too. These are good things and I think we want to get to a transit system that's going to be able to give that kind of reliability, that kind of information to the ridership.

\* (11:30)

And, I think, beyond just the technological improvements that we've seen, we've also seen an increased focus globally and nationally on what's good for the environment and doing things that are green and, certainly, you know, walking, biking, taking the bus are greener alternatives than driving, you know, gas guzzling vehicles; we all understand that. We know that, and we have to make decisions in our own lives and—about how we're going to reduce the carbon footprints of our own families and what approach that we might want to take. But this is a trend that should, ostensibly, have increased transit ridership, and yet in the face of that, ridership in Winnipeg has declined, despite massive increases in funding under the previous NDP government.

So then the question is, well, what needs to be done? I've already outlined a couple of suggestions but I'm not really going to get too far into it because what needs to be done is for a provincial government to respect the authority and the responsibilities of a municipal government. That's what our government

does. Certainly the minister who spoke has been very clear about the relationship that's been developing and evolving and improving between the Manitoba government under our Premier (Mr. Pallister) and our new government and municipalities throughout the province, including Winnipeg.

When we see an improved relationship, a respectful relationship, that we also understand that the responsibility for improving transit, the responsibility for making sure that the transit users' needs are being met, the responsibility for enhancing the technological foundation for transit so that users can be notified of when the buses are going to be arrive and what issues there might be in the system, the responsibility for ensuring that ridership is increasing and that people are finding transit to be a positive alternative in our city. That responsibility lies squarely with the City of Winnipeg. And we as a government respect that. We believe that that indeed is their responsibility. We certainly communicate that to them regularly, and we're pleased to see that they're taking that responsibility increasingly seriously.

And we hope that after the municipal elections coming up this next month that that trend will continue, that care and detail, the governance that's necessary to improve transit for people in Winnipeg, people who are my constituents, and constituents of so, so many of my colleagues here, as well, will be met, that those needs will be met and that the system will improve.

And, once again, we come down to a fundamental misunderstanding of how to improve services. The members opposite seem to think that the only way to do so is to spend, spend, spend; keep pouring more good money after bad and just expect that that's magically going to address the problem. In fact, I think last year I even heard one of their members claim that the value of a product was proportionate to the amount of effort and money it took to produce, as if the idea of doing things more efficiently, or the idea of automation or other improvements was somehow completely irrelevant.

And so, of course, they, using that kind of a philosophy, would believe that, yes, spending more money is somehow making things better, but we on this side of the House, we don't believe that. We believe in results. We believe that the way to measure the effectiveness of government programs is by looking at the results. And you see that across our government, the way we look at improvements that

we're making to health care, you see that in the improvements that we're making in our overall financial situation; you see a respect for the dollars that the taxpayers are paying. And that respect simply wasn't present under 17 years of NDP government.

So once again I do want to wrap up with comments that reflect the fact that transit is important in our city, here in Winnipeg. We want to make sure that we have a good transit system and certainly the amount of funding that we're providing as a provincial government to assist the city in providing transit services is higher than it's ever been; it's \$3 million than it's ever been under an NDP government. And I think that that certainly represents a commitment.

But at the same time I think what has happened, and while being careful not to necessarily take credit where credit is not due, I think what we've seen here is that for the first time in now, I believe, 18 years, a comprehensive review is being conducted about transit operations. Is that a coincidence? Ah, I'm not sure it is. I think it may, in fact, be a direct result of the improved relationship that our government and our Minister of Municipal Relations (Mr. Wharton) has affected with municipalities across this province, and especially with the City of Winnipeg.

So I thank the member for bringing this matter forward and for giving us the opportunity to discuss it, and I certainly look forward to having an improved transit service for my children and for myself and for my constituency assistant, Belinda Squance.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Jon Reyes (St. Norbert):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak this morning on the member's resolution 3, restore public transit for municipalities. We have been debating this bill for a while now, and I simply share the same comments as my colleagues on the government's side, this side of the House.

And first of all—and most importantly—our government is proud to have delivered strong support for public transportation in Winnipeg since taking office, and we will continue to do so.

Back in 2016, prior to the election, part of our plan for a better Manitoba was a fair say to municipalities. Our plan stated a new Progressive Conservative government will give municipalities a fair say by developing a new partnership process

with the association of Manitoba 'municipalities' and the City of Winnipeg to establish basket funding model and lessen the frustration of application funding approach.

Note the word frustrating, because that was the kind of ideological steps the former NDP operated on. Under the NDP, they took a top-down approach with municipalities, forcing amalgamations with no consultation or regard for local conditions.

Our 2016 election plan for a better Manitoba also had a PC government. When elected to work with AMM and the City of Winnipeg to prioritize capital projects based on a return-on-investment model in advance of major capital decisions, not for short-term political motivation, as had been practised under the Selinger NDP, which the member from Fort Garry-Riverview, who's putting forward this resolution, was a part of.

When the mayor of Winnipeg saw our 2016 plan, he even stated, and I quote: It's the strongest, clearest position we've seen to date from any of the parties. Shortly after the election, he then goes on to say, the Progressive Conservatives had a significant amount on fair say, a single basket for funding, an easier process which will help us get more value for dollars. We're expecting, as a result of that, we'll be able to stretch the hard-earned tax dollars that are being sent to the provincial government a lot better, in terms of being able to spend it on priorities and our citizens in our city.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind everyone we must work together in the best interests for the people of Manitoba, the municipalities, the City of Winnipeg, not for self-interest and by taking shortcut approaches, as the former NDP government had done.

Good governments like our PC government make the difficult decisions necessary to ensure the protection of sustainable quality services for their citizens, for Manitobans, and like I have said time and time again, we knew on this side of the House we were moving into a fixer-upper type of house when we were moving in.

We knew that there was going to be a lot of fixing to do when we took over as a government, but the reality is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we inherited a financial mess where indeed a lot more fixing had to be done and continues to get done to get this house in order, to get our province back on track, and that is what our PC government is doing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you just have to look at the first point of the member of Fort Garry's resolution—of Fort Garry-Riverview's resolution: "WHEREAS the Provincial Government has ended a decades long funding agreement with municipalities to pay for half of operating funds for public transit services."

This former tax-and-spend NDP government wants to continue their ways of unsustainability and damage-beyond-repair approach. We will simply have none of that. We can't afford it, and that is why we have taken a more sustainable and fair approach when dealing with municipalities and the City of Winnipeg, which includes historic investments in public transit infrastructure that will deliver lasting benefits for Winnipeggers.

Part of our support includes: honour a commitment of \$62.3 million in provincial funding; the Winnipeg stage 1 bus rapid transit project; and we have committed to fund \$136.7 million for Winnipeg's stage 2 bus rapid transit project; a \$27.4 million to support public transit infrastructure, fund transit projects which include 70 new buses; also another \$7.68 million in additional direct funding for bus purchases since taking office.

Provincial operating grants to Winnipeg Transit increased from \$22 million in 2006 to more than \$40 million by 2016, as my colleague from Rossmere had mentioned. That's an increase of a whopping 75 per cent.

That was under the tax-and-spend NDP government that the member of Fort Rouge was a part of: high spenders, and not thinking about the future. As we know, no results to show for, only poor results. And, under his watch, when he was Education minister, we were last—10 out of 10—amongst provinces in reading, math and science.

\* (11:40)

But back to this resolution and what Manitobans want to hear and see: results. That's why I chose to serve, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I want to achieve results and be part of a team that was results-driven, and we have that on this side of the House.

For the best interests of Manitobans and, in this case, the City of Winnipeg, last year, through the Public Transit Infrastructure Fund, 13 projects with a total eligible cost of \$131.1 million were approved in the city of Winnipeg. This was made possible by working together, by collaborating with the other levels of government.

Our government is committed to working with all levels of government, and, by doing so, we brought home \$65.5 million to support transit and active initiatives in the city. These are positive results, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Also, let's not forget the total funding for municipalities outside of Winnipeg where the totals are roughly \$7.8 million. This funding was made possible through—you guessed it—three levels of government working together. Fifty-one projects have been approved, 17 are complete, and 26 are under way. Those are positive results.

But, time and time again, we hear the doom-and-gloom rhetoric of the NDP members and sometimes from our Liberal members, but that's how Liberals are; one day they go this direction, sometimes they go another direction, but that's the Liberal way.

But back to some important matters through that our PC government has taken care of, and will continue to take care of. We listened to municipalities and have moved to an unconditional operating basket-funding approach so municipalities can set their own priorities creating less red tape for the city and giving them the fair say they deserve.

We launched a single window intake for our community, developed programs. This was launched after extensive consultations with community organizations, where we were told to reduce red tape and streamline the application process.

The NDP took a top-down approach with municipalities, forcing amalgamations with no consultation or regard for local conditions.

Under the NDP, the province provided municipal operating grants, the top-down, itemized approach which outlined exactly how the funds were to be allocated by each municipality, forced under the previous NDP government to be the only province with legislation regarding P3s which discouraged projects and was extremely top-heavy and riddled with red tape.

The NDP spent \$75 million less on core infrastructure than they committed in 2013-14, the year of the PST hike. So much for thinking about low-income Manitobans. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear all the NDP cared about was staying in government at all costs and, may I say, at high costs, costs that were unsustainable for the future—for the future of the next generations to come.

But we'll fix those NDP mistakes. Our PC team knew that there would be a lot of work to clean up with the mess we were left with, a lot of hard work but, like my colleagues, I'm a hard-working guy. I love to serve, whether it was my days as a banquet server in the hotel, serving my country around the world when I served in the Canadian Armed Forces, running a small business to serve and taking care of my clients, serving community through the non-profit organizations I was involved with, and now serving with a great group of colleagues on the government side for the people of Manitoba.

We will get it done and we will get it done right. We have begun the hard work the day we came into office to repair the damage and correct the course for a sustainable future, and we will continue to do so for a better Manitoba.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Any other speakers?

**Mr. Brad Michaleski (Dauphin):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for giving me a chance to get up and talk about this resolution on transit funding.

My background includes eight years of municipal council with the RM of Dauphin and there, we know, we didn't have transit in the council that I dealt with, but we dealt pretty closely with the City of Dauphin, which also didn't have a transit system like Brandon or Winnipeg.

But I can say those eight years, we were—had a great deal of frustration dealing with the NDP government at the time, and I was really encouraged by the approach that our government took towards basket funding and letting the local councillors that knew what was going on on the ground, whether it was roads or whether it was drainage or whether it was various other things—the airport funding. Like, there seemed to be a very heavy top-down decision-making that was coming out of the NDP government at the time, and it was incredibly frustrating for us as councillors to have to deal with that.

So, when we hear comments from the NDP calling the municipal elected officials howling coyotes, believe me, we were trying to howl and we were trying to get the attention and the respect of the NDP government at the time, but it certainly just—it just wasn't working.

So—and then, of course, probably the cherry on top of the cake was the forced amalgamation that

they forced on many rural municipalities that really showed a high level of disrespect for the municipal elected officials that run for small communities and small towns in—across rural Manitoba. And, when the NDP basically disregarded what was going on, the work that was being done, and just slammed that shut by—and without debate and slammed down forced amalgamation across rural Manitoba, was probably the biggest slap in the face that the NDP could ever do to rural Manitoba.

So—but we'll get back to the basket funding. The basket funding was—is a good concept, and I—and it's good to see that the City of Winnipeg, Mayor Bowman, is in support of basket funding. And again, I'm of belief that the elected officials that are closest to the ground, closest to the people, whether it's in rural Manitoba or in the city, they're able to talk at a grassroots level with the concerns and they're able to make the decisions that are important for their ratepayers at the best possible location.

So the City of Winnipeg transit, I understand, has recently undertaken a comprehensive review of its existing transit service, with a focus on maximizing the efficient use of existing resources within a new fiscal environment. And that's so true. Again, if you're on a council level, I can relate to these words where a lot of the municipal councils—again, I can speak for a lot of the rural ones, maybe not so much for the Winnipeg ones, but I imagine it's exactly the same thing—that they are people that maximize the use of public dollars and they really try to get the best use of public funds to do the best work that they can with the means that they have.

And, of course, a new fiscal environment is—our government inherited a mess and—a fiscal mess that needs to be addressed. So it needs to be—everybody needs to take an—a responsible approach to the situation, the financial situation that exists, and we need to be able to address that in a responsible way. Putting your—putting up an argument that, you know, we're—we must restore this funding really does do a disservice to the reality—the economic reality that we face following 17 years of NDP.

So—but I do know transit—again, I haven't taken transit and—for a very long time, I should say, but I know my son routinely took to the bus from near University of Manitoba to downtown quite regularly, and I know it's a very important part of Winnipeg transportation system, but, once again, sounds like, again, the Winnipeg—City of Winnipeg is in favour of the basket funding model.

\* (11:50)

And, you know, again, with a \$15-billion–\$15-million surplus, that's—does say that the City of Winnipeg has the management and the reserves to decide whether, and what level, transit funding should be funded, by the city or the users. And they're in a good position to make that decision. It's not up to the NDP to come along and say we must have a deal with the provincial government because that's, again, very disrespectful to the City of Winnipeg council, and councils and elected officials at the municipal level right across the province.

So total funding approved outside of Winnipeg—I've just—sorry. *[interjection]* But, no, I was just reflecting on the eight years that I did spend in RM council and how difficult it really was and to deal with the NDP government at that time. I just remember the—a lot of the funding cuts that they did towards infrastructure, towards—they did towards water control infrastructure, and it's—*[interjection]* Yes, it was very, very difficult to be dealing with the NDP on anything that didn't—that affected rural Manitoba.

So I'm really glad that our government is taking a very responsible and respectful approach towards dealing with the provincial government, and our relationship with the municipalities is one that we know is very important for building a stronger Manitoba economy.

So, with that, thank you.

**Mr. Reg Helwer (Brandon West):** I'm pleased to rise today to speak to this private member's resolution on transit funding.

And it—when I listen to the opposition it's typical NDP politics. You know, just hand the money over and ignore it, keep raising taxes, keep handing more and more money over and don't care about the results, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That's what we saw all the time in their budgets and they want to continue doing that.

Obviously, we want something that's a little more functional, and I think the process we've put in place here is definitely more functional. We see municipalities being more cautious of their spending, paying attention to how they're spending.

Indeed, you know, the previous government used to come out with grants and say to the City of Brandon or the City of Winnipeg, you know,

here you go, you've—we're giving you money for 10 buses; and the City would say, well we don't want to buy 10 buses. We want to buy eight buses. That's irrelevant; we're going to give you money for 10 buses. You have to buy 10 buses. And then the next year same type of thing and the City would say, well, we need to buy more buses. Well, that's no good; this is all the money you have. So now that the cities are able to make their decisions, the municipalities are able to manage their money better, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are able to purchase the buses. They are able to fund the routes that they need and we see that it can work much better.

You know, I think, growing up in Brandon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we usually rode our bikes downtown to the theatre if that's where we were going, but if we had money we'd take the bus and it's always an adventure. And we used to ride buses all over Brandon to go to places that we used to as well.

And, indeed, when I did move into Winnipeg for employment in the '80s there, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was fairly easy to take the bus to work and—although I do recall when I lived in Osborne Village coming back from work and it was easier to get off at Great West Life and walk across the bridge to home than it was to ride the bus over the bridge. I usually beat it by a good 10 minutes because of the traffic delays there.

But, you know, as we moved out to further away from downtown, there are a couple of great routes that I would take to work downtown at the Royal Bank. And I often found, I had a job that sometimes I had to take the car because I had to go out into the rural areas of Manitoba and other times I would work downtown. So I would find that I took the bus, it usually took about a half an hour. If I drove the car it would take about 20 minutes and then about 10 minutes to figure out where to park and—because I didn't have monthly parking available. So, you know, about the same length of time, but then, of course, I'd have to leave and go out into the rural areas, and taking a city bus doesn't work all that well when you have to go visit bank branches out—throughout Manitoba.

But, you know, I do recall sitting on the bus, and there was an interesting—to me—perspective on who was friendly and who wasn't. People that—no offence to either newspaper—but people that read the Winnipeg Free Press were a little less friendly than people that read the Winnipeg Sun because people would open the Free Press wide and take up the



whole seat and not allow anybody to sit beside them. And people in the Sun—of course, it's a smaller tabloid edition, and maybe they just wanted to talk about sports anyway. But those are the things that I used to observe on the bus and who I could sit beside and talk and meet, and it was always a great way to meet new people and some very interesting people that are on their way into work, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or on their way home, of course.

So we are working very hard here to repair the finances. You know, it's a tough road because the previous government put us in so deep into debt, and there are still surprises. Every Tuesday when we meet in Treasury Board, and any of the members would attest to that, there are still surprises that come forward, agreements that they signed that, you know, weren't analyzed properly, that the due diligence wasn't done, and we're still paying for the bad decisions that they made. And sometimes there's really nothing to show for it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, on this side, there is a good work being done by the Minister for Municipal Relations. He has great relations—relationships built with all the municipalities, unlike the previous government, when we saw a very raucous time in the Legislature here when they surprised everyone that they were going to merge municipalities and not advise them, not pay attention to them and certainly not listen to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because that is what we heard from municipalities all across Manitoba.

They were being forced to do this without any proper analysis that it was the right thing to do in that municipality, to put these two together. It was just forced on them by the former government. And they listened not at all to the municipalities, other than—I do believe they called them howling coyotes, and if that's what they thought of them, well, we know how that worked.

I have great respect for our municipal politicians, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are the people that everybody knows how to get a hold of, everybody knows that if you're in—live in that municipality or that city, you know that they can likely have an immediate effect on your issue, and

they do intervene a lot with the public and advance the necessary things that need to be done.

I know all of our councillors in Brandon very well, and I know they're very—work very hard to represent the citizens in Brandon. And, you know, transit is one of the issues, obviously, that they hear from people on. And we just did the tour not that long ago of some of the new transit stops that were funded in Brandon, the new shelters that were funded by the provincial government with solar panels to enable the lights in there, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So, you know, a little bit greener there is the way we're looking at that. And, you know, the whole transit system in Brandon, I think, has been working quite well with the way that the city council has determined it should be, because they're the ones that should be in control of it as opposed to the Province dictating what should or shouldn't happen.

I'm sure you can probably think back, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we had trolley transit in Winnipeg here and the wires used to extend across the street and Hudson Bay, over and down, and the trolley car, the city buses, would come down with the trolley mechanism and attach to those wires and run down there. I thought it was a fabulously interesting thing as a young person watching it.

I see that, you know, the city of Toronto still has that type of thing, and occasionally they jump off the wires, and the driver has to get out and hoist them down, then crank them back up, and you see the sparks fly and it's—could be quite an exciting time, but it does seem to work for the city of Toronto. I know people have been advocating it here, but it was a bit of an eyesore, if people remember it, with all the wires that were running about downtown and elsewhere. Maybe not the best process, but certainly maybe more economical at some times than a diesel bus. Of course, now we have—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order.

When this matter's before the House, the honourable member for Brandon West (Mr. Helwer) will have two minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 p.m., the House is recessed and stands recessed 'til 1:30 p.m.

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA**

**Thursday, October 11, 2018**

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