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of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS
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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Forty-First Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
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
FIELDING, Scott, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	PC
FLETCHER, Steven, Hon.	Assiniboia	Ind.
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
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HELWER, Reg	Brandon West	PC
ISLEIFSON, Len	Brandon East	PC
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LAGIMODIERE, Alan	Selkirk	PC
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
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MAYER, Colleen	St. Vital	PC
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SMITH, Bernadette	Point Douglas	NDP
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SQUIRES, Rochelle, Hon.	Riel	PC
STEFANSON, Heather, Hon.	Tuxedo	PC
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	NDP
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WOWCHUK, Rick	Swan River	PC
YAKIMOSKI, Blair	Transcona	PC
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 5, 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. Good morning, everybody.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I ask for leave to move to our private members' Bill 219.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave this morning to proceed with Bill 219? [*Agreed*]

SECOND READINGS—PRIVATE BILLS

Bill 219—The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear)

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): I move, seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith), that Bill 219, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Fontaine: I'm pleased to rise in the House today to bring forward comments and participate in some healthy and robust discussion in respect of Bill 219, a ban on inappropriate or unsafe footwear.

I have to say that I actually have worked in the restaurant industry for well over 10 years when I was younger and, as a student, I was a server. And, certainly, being a server is a really good job to have when you're a struggling student and you're able to put in your six or eight hours of your shift and you're actually able to leave with some cash in your pocket and not having to wait every two weeks for your paycheque.

So it is actually a time in my life that I actually look fondly upon. I had some really amazing customers that were repeat customers, and there's quite a skill to being a server. Actually, in fact, most people don't realize that you're also a seller. You're trying to upsell your tab so that you can get a bigger tip. And so it was—it developed a lot of skills.

I'm really blessed that all of the restaurant industry places that I worked did not require that I was to wear heels. There would have been no way for me to be able to work, you know, a two- or four- or six- or eight-hour shift in heels, which is in contrast to what we see today in respect of several big restaurants that we have not only here in Manitoba and in Winnipeg, but across Canada, where we see young women who are required to wear, at a minimum, an inch heel, upwards of three inches.

And sometimes when I'm out for supper and I look at these young women and I think to myself—because I remember my days of serving, and I remember that, actually, one of the biggest components of my uniform was my footwear. And I can tell you that even though I love my heels—I'm rarely without my heels—it is my choice to wear my heels, and it certainly wouldn't have been my choice to wear them as a server. I always had flat shoes because it's actually a lot of work and a lot of stress on your body. There would be days that my lower back was really hurting; my legs were killing me at the end of a shift. There would have been no way for me to be able to do that job in heels. And therefore it would have put me at a disadvantage in respect of supporting myself through university or, even when I was a young mom, being able to support some of the needs that my son had.

So, when I see young women today being forced to wear heels, it does really—in many respects it's actually shocking that in 2018 we still see what I would suggest to the House is discriminatory in nature. It is discriminatory towards women that they're required to wear heels in performing and executing their duties as a server or as a hostess.

I will share that—I want to just put on the record—I'm not going to actually speak too long, but I do want to put on the record how other folks across the

country have been viewing the mandate for women to wear heels.

Joanne St. Lewis is a professor and teaches law at the University of Ottawa. And I want to quote—because I think that it highlights where this is also situated. It's not only a workplace safety issue, that women have the right to be safe in executing their duties as an employee of a particular restaurant, but it also goes to intrinsically sexualizing women in the restaurant industry. And I can tell you that, while there's maybe not that much discussion on it, working in the restaurant industry is a very sexualized space in many respects. I cannot tell you how many times I was hit on by customers that I didn't really want to be hit on, and that was wearing flats and wearing pants and having my hair back in a bun.

We see now that women are required to wear short skirts. Often, if you go into restaurants, you'll see women that are required to, again, wear heels and really dress themselves up. And so, Joanne St. Lewis, she says, and I quote: You are sexualizing them to such a degree they are to look inviting and appealing. You might as well put a sign saying tolerance of sexual harassment is a part of this job. End quote.

So, I think that that's important to recognize, that heels and some of the uniforms that we see in some of these restaurants intrinsically create an unsafe space where young women are sexualized in just doing their job. Nobody wants to be sexually harassed in doing their job and performing their duties.

* (10:10)

I would suggest to you, and many, actually, across the country would suggest, that it's also violating women's human rights because men are required to do the same job but are not required to wear—or sexualize their clothing. They're certainly not required to wear heels. And I know that it seems ridiculous that we would suggest men wear heels, but certainly this goes to the core that why, then, is it acceptable for women to be mandated to wear heels in performing the exact same duties as their male colleagues?

It is discriminatory, and certainly we can do better in 2018. To that end, I also want to acknowledge two young women in Manitoba, Amy Tuckett-McGimpsey and Allison Ferry, who actually in 2016 put a petition together to demand that—

urging the Manitoba Human Rights Commission to note that this is a violation of women's human rights. And I just want to acknowledge them in my comments because I think that any opportunity that you have to be able to lift up women that are trying to create a better workplace free from sexual harassment is a good thing.

And I do want to just quote for the record Amy Tuckett-McGimpsey, and she says, and I quote: I think women deserve to have labour rights. They deserve to have a safe working environment. They deserve to have a working environment that's free from sexual advances, discrimination and sexist dress codes. End quote.

We know that BC has a ban on high heels in the workplace. We know that Ontario is in the process of considering legislation for also banning high heels. Certainly, Manitoba has an opportunity today to be among the very few jurisdictions that understand and see this as a human right for women and see that in 2018 we really do need to end practices that sexually—that sexualize women and that discriminate against women and keep women safe within the workplace.

Miigwech, Madam Speaker.

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 one question. And no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): I have to say I'm a little bit confused. The member just talked about legislation to ban high heels in the workplace. But I'm wondering if she could clarify, does her bill bring about—would it be a prohibition of requiring a worker to wear footwear so that it would be a requirement—or a ban on mandating high heels, or would it be a ban on high heels?

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (St. Johns): Actually, the Minister for Status of Women is entirely correct. I should have qualified that it is a ban on mandatory requirement of women wearing high heels.

Certainly, as I said in my opening comments, I love my high heels. They are my choice to wear.

And if you're working as a server or a hostess and you still choose to wear high heels, then all the power to you. But this change is about ensuring that women are not required or mandated to wear high heels if they do not want to wear high heels.

Mrs. Bernadette Smith (Point Douglas): I just want to commend the member from St. Johns for bringing this bill forward.

I'm wondering if she could tell us what type of footwear could be considered unsafe that is currently not covered under the workplace health and safety act.

Ms. Fontaine: Again, as I've said, I think that it's important to recognize that there are many establishments that mandate and require women servers and hostesses to wear upwards of an inch to a maximum of three inches high heels, and that is specifically what we're talking about today. I think that most in the Chamber would agree that three-inch high heels is not conducive to a safe working space for women in Manitoba.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Again, I agree with everything the member has said, with the one exception: I do not understand how anyone could love high heels. They make no sense. They are ridiculous. They're not practical. And I don't even think that they're attractive. So how on earth can the member sit in this place and say that she likes high heels? They should be banned—banned, I say—banned.

Ms. Fontaine: Well, I appreciate the member's question and I have to say that actually for me when I was growing up, my mom always wore heels and it was something that—I don't have too many fond memories of my childhood or, in particular, my mom, but my mom was beautiful and she always wore high heels. She always made sure that she looked respectable, and so for me when I wear my heels, first off it makes me a little bit taller, but it actually is a connection to my mom that I have and I have very few connections to my mom.

Ms. Squires: I appreciate the clarification from the member and I would also like to respond to the member for Assiniboia's question and how could anybody love high heels. I, too, love my high heels. I wear them frequently. They are actually sometimes a little comfortable, but I have to say I've never been mandated to wear my high heels and that's the difference. It's always been a choice of mine to wear high heels and I think they're beautiful.

But my question for the member is: How many stakeholders did she consult with and how many workplaces in Manitoba actually mandate the wearing of high heels in the workplace?

Ms. Fontaine: I thank the member for the question.

Certainly, I think that this is a discussion that's been going on not only here in Manitoba with a variety of stakeholders, and I did mention a couple of women, but there are quite a few restaurants that I've had conversations with who do not require that their servers wear heels, recognizing that it's an unsafe practice for their workers, and again, it is a discussion that's going on across Canada, recognizing that it causes quite a lot of pain for women hostesses and servers to wear heels.

So it's been going on for several years and I suggest that Manitoba can, like I said, take a lead, where in this province we understand the right of women to be safe in the workplace.

Mrs. Smith: I can tell you that I just spoke with one of my constituents who has a 16-year-old daughter that was asked to wear or was—it was mandatory for her to wear a miniskirt above the knees as well as high heels in order for her to be employed. This young woman went to her mother, got the advice that she wanted the choice.

So I'm wondering if the member can talk specifically about the impacts women working in the service industry and what that would do.

Ms. Fontaine: So I know that there's actually several women that choose not to take the employment with a particular industry if they're required to wear high heels. In fact, as the member for Point Douglas just said, that young woman, her mom said she couldn't take that job. So it actually has a very tangible effect, then, on your finances and the jobs that are available to you. It limits, then, the jobs that you can apply for if you're not willing to do an eight-hour shift in three-inch heels.

So it certainly has an impact on the finances to a young woman and it certainly has an impact actually on the welfare of your feet as well and your lower back, and we can go on.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): I did have a question for the member from St. Johns, but I, too, just wanted to respond for—from the comment that the member from Assiniboia made and I can tell you I, too, choose to wear my high heels, and the reason

why I choose to is because it is incredibly empowering and it builds confidence.

Now, my question for the member is: Could you please share with us what inspired the bill?

Ms. Fontaine: Again, I think that every time I've—and miigwech for that, I love my heels too—but I think that every time I go out and I eat and I see young women wearing these heels, it really—I don't have daughters. I only have sons. So nobody's going to mandate my sons wear heels. If I had a daughter, I would be really offended that my daughter, in order to have a livelihood, was forced to wear heels, and, you know, as legislatures—legislators, I think that we have a responsibility to everybody's daughters to make sure that they're safe in the workplace and so that is really the motivation for this piece of legislation.

Mrs. Smith: Could the member from St. Johns tell us how this bill would work towards gender equality in the workplace?

*(10:20)

Ms. Fontaine: Well, certainly, as I said in some of my comments, we see that there are two sets of practices or standards for men and women working in the service industry. And I think that if you're—if you take out the equation, which intrinsically creates a sexualized space for women, you're intrinsically creating equity among both male and female staffers in respect of these industries.

Again, we don't ask men to wear heels. And I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, you know, perhaps we should in the sense that I don't know how long they would be able to last, and then maybe some of the management would see that it's not fun to wear heels for, you know, two- or three- or four- or five-hour shifts. So that intrinsically creates a more equitable space for women and men in the workplace.

Mrs. Smith: Can the member tell us what workplaces would be influenced by this amendment?

Ms. Fontaine: So, again, I think that one of the main places that we're seeing this, and I know that everybody in this House has probably seen it as well, is certainly the restaurant industry. When you walk in, you see hostesses right away wearing heels, you see your server wearing your heels. And I think that that is a prime example of where this legislation will have a good impact on.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): I might as well throw my comments on the record that, from time to time, even being six feet tall, I do wear heels because I like how they feel, I like how they look and it's my choice to wear whatever footwear is comfortable for me, and I echo those very comments. So that puts me just a little bit taller at six-one and a bit, depends on the height. But, well, look out. Here I come, so.

Can the member please tell me, does this bill only pertain to restaurants or does it cover other sectors? What are—what is your thoughts on that?

Ms. Fontaine: Certainly, it covers all sectors, but—and I would suggest probably most in the House, I mean, I don't think we've seen nurses wearing high heels or police officers wearing high heels. So, again, it would cover all sectors, but it is specifically—or it is geared towards women that are working in the service industries, but all over.

Madam Speaker: The time for questions has expired.

Debate

Madam Speaker: Debate is open.

Hon. Rochelle Squires (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): It—I have to say that this legislation that we're debating this morning is a very intriguing piece of legislation that could possibly enhance workplace safety for women. And so I'm interested in hearing the dialogue from members on the floor and having this discussion more broadly with Manitobans.

But I also—I'd like to start off by acknowledging how many private members' bills have been used as tools in this province to make a difference in the lives of women. And, to that end, I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, from the bottom of my heart for your private member's bill in 2011 that created the Sexual Assault Awareness Month, and then even going back further, your private member's bill in 2006 that created legislation for protecting women who were patrons at licensed establishments against date rapes. So those are two exemplary examples of how private members' bills have worked to advance women's rights in the province, and I am eternally grateful and want to thank you for that.

On the broader issue of workplace safety for women and creating safe spaces for women to go to work and to pursue their opportunity for employment to achieve equity with their male counterparts in the workplace, wherever that workplace may be, is an

issue that our government is very committed to and moving forward in and taking steps to ensure that we are not only being leaders here in our House, but throughout the province in that regard.

When it comes to safe workplaces, I find it just absolutely appalling and almost mind-boggling that as little as two or three years ago and going back a few years, women who held this very seat that I now stand in were not safe in their workplace, that they were being harassed and that they weren't protected. And I find that just appalling because I know, and since the day I assumed my space in this Legislature, that I have had legions of people that I could turn to when I need support. And recently our government did bring about initiatives to enhance workplace safety, with our Premier (Mr. Pallister) and our Finance Minister's no-wrong-door approach in this House and making sure that women, when they come to work in this space, that they are felt—that they are protected and free from harassment.

And I know that whether it's—if it comes to staff members or other elected officials or guests in the gallery who shout, watch your back when you leave this place, and then go and spray paint obscenities on my constituency windows, I know whenever anything has happened to me, I have had multiple doors to walk through. In every corner of this building, there is a door that I can walk through and get the support that I need and know I've got legions of people who have my back.

And I hope and pray that it is the same experience for every one of my colleagues and everybody who works in this building as a staffer—everybody who comes to this building feels that same sense of safety. And our goal in government is to play a leadership role and ensure that our civil service is a—our workers in the civil service are afforded that same protection and anti-harassment policies that would help them.

I know some of our rural councillors are struggling with some of the issues that we've grappled with, and my heart goes out to the rural elected officials. And we're working with the AMM and hoping to play a leadership role in making those places safe for women.

Turning my thoughts to this bill, there is a lot of vagueness when it comes to Bill 219 that I would like to have clarified as we move forward. For starters, who is it that would get to decide what is an unsafe—what is unsafe footwear and what is inappropriate footwear? And would—how would

those parameters be applied? What industries would be affected? I do believe that the spirit of this legislation would impact the hospitality industry most predominantly, and I know—I've witnessed it first hand when I've been out at establishments. In fact, last night I went out for dinner with my husband after a long day at work and the servers that had taken care of us, I noticed their footwear and it seemed to be what would be comfortable. I would believe that any server who worked eight hours a day on their feet—any footwear would be uncomfortable after a while. And I certainly salute the servers who provide us exceptional service when we go into establishments for their efforts and being on their feet for that length of time and the work that they do to provide us with the nourishment and refreshments that we're seeking.

But I do believe that there have been instances in the past where the server's choice of footwear has not been afforded to them, and I do know that in other jurisdictions and in—that have brought in legislation to that effect, to make sure that there would be no imposition—a mandatory imposition—that you must wear these shoes when you come to work. I find that absolutely appalling, that anybody would ever tell anybody that an employer could have that authority to mandate high heels during their shift.

And, again, like I said in my earlier comments, I have worn high heels almost every day of my life; I have suffered ill effects from that. I've suffered bunions and blisters and aching backs and all those great things that go along with wearing high heels. But it's always been a choice, Madam Speaker, and that is where my mind goes to all the women who don't have the choice—or, presumably don't have the choice. I haven't done my research in regards to the member opposite's bill. I haven't held consultations, but presumably it would be women and girls that would have had their choices removed in certain circumstances.

And, like the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) had brought up, a girl—a 16-year-old girl being told that she has to wear a miniskirt to come to work—I have three stepdaughters and, you know, heaven help the employer who would tell my stepdaughters that they had to wear a miniskirt to work.

* (10:30)

So I do think we need to move in this area in some regard and we always have to be careful of the unintended consequences of legislation. We have to

make sure that legislation affects the people that we need it to affect the most, that brings about changes where we need those changes and be mindful of unintended consequences.

And, so, I am intrigued about the conversation that will ensue in regards to Bill 219 and how we can make workplaces safe for women and girls. And we want those experiences for those girls, like the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith) had brought up the 16-year-old girl entering the workforce for the very first time, we want that experience to be a positive one and so that she may grow and flourish in her career and achieve her destiny.

And I've often said and I believe fully that the gap in pay equity between men and women are often a result of harassment that goes on in the workplace, that if a woman is feeling harassed, she is going to be suppressing her own abilities and her own ambitions for fear of having a spotlight put on her and warranting further harassment.

So, again, like I said, Madam Speaker, I'm intrigued about any initiative that would make workplaces safer for women and girls and I just want to thank the members opposite for bringing this forward for discussion in this House today.

Ms. Cindy Lamoureux (Burrows): It's good to rise and speak for just a moment on Bill 219, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear). We will be supporting this bill and I'd like to thank the member for St. Johns (Ms. Fontaine) for bringing it forward.

I echo a lot of the comments being made, except for I wasn't hit on as much growing up, but I think that was more attributed to my tomboyish demeanour myself. But it was interesting for me, Madam Speaker, when the bill was first introduced because I've always heard the other side of this issue. I had friends growing up, and even now, who sometimes make comments about, oh, I have to wear these rubber soles underneath my shoes or these clog shoes in the restaurant because when they're going back and forth in the kitchen but they don't like them. But I can appreciate why they're implemented.

And I think about my friends who work in the offices at warehouses and they're forced to wear steel toes. Again, they don't always love it. It might be a little more expensive, but it's for the safety of the employee and I think that it's really good that these rules have been implemented.

With this new bill, it's important that there is a balance. There's some sort of formality, and we're looking forward to the submissions that will come at the committee stage. It's a lot of the questions that the minister was just asking as well. We need to know where are the lines. How will these rules be established? And, ultimately, employee safety is our No. 1 priority, and no one's job should be jeopardized because of this. So we are happy to support the bill moving to committee stage. Thank you.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Assiniboia): Again, I'd like to congratulate the member for bringing this bill forward. And, you know, sometimes things don't work out on partisan lines and this is going to be one of those issues because Bill 214 on the Order Paper is a bill that is very similar to the bill that we're talking about now. And I just left it on the Order Paper waiting for the right opportunity to bring it forward and I guess that's going to be this afternoon as it deals exactly with the issue that is being discussed but in a different way. The wording is different, which might address some of the Minister for the Status of Women's concerns. And there are several drafts of the bill from different angles that I have run through Legislative Counsel, which maybe will also help deal with concerns that the member from—that all members have raised.

But my motivation for bringing forward a bill—because let's face it, not only do—you know—never worn high heels and the shoes that I use right now never touch the ground, ever. But I do work with a lot of young people, mostly female, who take care of me. And one of them is a dear—has been with me for over a decade and is our friend. Many of you may know her, Marlee. She wears high heels all the time. And, quite frankly, it drives me nuts because it just doesn't seem safe. We could be here or trucking through a snow bank or some—like, the Folk Festival going through the mud, or going through a cobblestone street in Ottawa, or some other far-flung place. We could even be going on a hike and Marlee always wears high heels. Like, we go to the beach and Marlee will be wearing high heels. She loves her high heels, and I gather from the conversation this morning that she's not alone. But it doesn't take away from my personal view that high heels are ridiculous in every way.

Now, if people want to wear high heels, that's fine. If they find them empowering, that's fine. Whatever.

But to be forced to wear high heels in the work place, that is not fine. If you want to wear them voluntarily, fine. I look at society, shows like *Sex in the City* that seem to perpetuate this high heel thing. Or you watch *Jurassic Park*, do you notice the main actress in *Jurassic Park*—the last one, the last version of *Jurassic Park*—that actress was running away from a variety of dinosaurs and the entire, you know, the bad guys and car wrecks, and she did it all in high heels through the whole movie. Like, what signal does that send?

An Honourable Member: Girl power.

Mr. Fletcher: As you can—someone called out it signals girl power, and I would say, okay. Maybe that's one of the super powers that women have that this guy just doesn't understand.

But, nevertheless, forcing women to wear high heels is not appropriate.

So I'm going to be tabling the bill, and I'm dubbing it Marlee's law in honour of my caregiver, who's been with me for over a decade and wears high heels. I bet she even wears high heels to bed. It's just ridiculous. The—but she's a wonderful person.

Now, if people would like to find our more about the high heels, I have a website, Marlee's law, but I also have a website—and wait for this—using emojis. You can use—if you go to the emoji of the burning emoji and the high heel emoji-dot-ws that will take you to more information about high heels and—or you can go to—if you type in the heart emoji high heels, it'll take you to an anti-high heels website.

* (10:40)

So I've really had a whole campaign around encouraging other views on high heels and, again, you know, we've had some fun this morning talking, but it is really to protect the integrity and health of women in the workplace. The—you'll see that there are some exemptions in my bill this afternoon, but I'll wait 'til this afternoon to table it.

And, in the few minutes I have left, I do want to honour Marlee, my friend and caregiver for over a decade, and doing all the things that she does for me from her high heels, and her remarkable sense of balance is—will become legendary, I think, because there's a lot of awkward things that happen with caregiving and she's been able to do it all with high heels.

And I want her to know that high heels are not necessary when she works with me. I've been telling her this for 10 years, and I was hoping that introducing a piece of legislation to force her to at least know that there are options would encourage her to maybe buy a pair of sneakers or slippers or whatever. But there are other footwear available that are not high heels and meet all the objectives.

I hope that the Minister of Status of Women, the Opposition House Leader and all other interested parties can come up with wording that the House can support. And as a guy, let me know—let us all know what we can do to help. I think we can get this one through, meeting the needs of all those involved. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Marlee.

Madam Speaker: Are there any further speakers on this debate? Is the House ready for the question?

The question before the House is second reading of Bill 219, The Workplace Safety and Health Amendment Act (Inappropriate or Unsafe Footwear).

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): Is there leave to call it 11 a.m.?

Madam Speaker: Is there leave to call it 11? *[Agreed]*

RESOLUTIONS

Res. 3—Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities

Madam Speaker: The hour now being 11 a.m. and time for private member's resolution, the resolution before us this morning is the resolution on Public—Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities, brought forward by the honourable member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum).

Ms. Nahanni Fontaine (Official Opposition House Leader): I ask leave to move—Madam Speaker, I ask leave for the member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe) to move PMR 3, Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities, on behalf of the member for Fort Garry-Riverview.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave for the member for Concordia to move private member's resolution 3, Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities, on behalf of the member for Fort Garry-Riverview? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): I move, on behalf of the member for Fort Garry-Riverview (Mr. Allum), and seconded by the member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith),

WHEREAS the Provincial Government has ended a decades long funding agreement with municipalities to pay for half of operating funds for public transit services; and

WHEREAS this cut to transit was buried in a massive omnibus bill which also included an across the board cancellation of growth funding formulas for municipalities; and

WHEREAS the in year transit cut has forced the City of Winnipeg to consider increasing fares by up to 25 cents, which would put an undue burden on transit users, especially low income families, seniors, students and newcomers; and

WHEREAS the City of Winnipeg has also been forced to consider service cuts to a transit system that users report as already overcrowded and infrequent because of this Province's cut; and

WHEREAS the City of Winnipeg has warned that reduction in service could mean laying off up to 120 transit drivers, and cancelling service on nearly 60 routes; and

WHEREAS cuts to transit presents barriers for Manitobans commuting to work or school, looking for jobs or trying to access health care; and

WHEREAS many Manitobans are concerned that the Provincial Government's cut will discourage commuters from choosing public transit over fossil-fuel burning cars; and

WHEREAS a commitment to transit would bolster Winnipeg's economic competitiveness and help attract new and vibrant business to the market; and

WHEREAS the Premier has failed on his election promise to protect the front line services that are relied upon by Manitobans.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the provincial government be urged to immediately reverse its decision to cancel the public transit funding arrangement—sorry—agreement with the City of Winnipeg and commit to long-term, predictable, growth-orientated funding for municipalities.

Madam Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe), on behalf of the honourable member for Fort Garry-

Riverview (Mr. Allum), seconded by the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mrs. Smith),

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the provincial government be urged to immediately reverse its decision to cancel the public transit funding agreement with the City of Winnipeg and commit to long-term, predictable, growth-orientated funding for municipalities.

Mr. Wiebe: It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to rise this morning in the House to speak to this particular resolution, which, as I mentioned, was brought forward by my friend and colleague from Fort Garry-Riverview, but something that I'm certainly passionate about, and I would imagine many members of our caucus would certainly be interested in and passionate about on behalf of their constituents, because it really is something that touches so many Manitobans and so many of the folks that we represent in the constituencies that our caucus represents.

This is a move that I think took a lot of Manitobans by surprise. It was a change that, I can tell you, was certainly not something that I picked up on during the election campaign. This wasn't something that I heard the members opposite going door to door, knocking on every single door and saying, look, we're planning on cutting funding to transit and we're hoping that transit fares go up, and oh, there's going to be some service cuts too. How does that sound? Would you like to vote for us? I don't remember anyone saying that and I certainly don't remember the Premier (Mr. Pallister) going out in front of Manitobans—you know, I can't remember if it was a three-point plan, or a two-point plan or maybe a no-point plan, but anyway—I don't remember the Premier going out and saying, look, our No. 1 priority is going to be to cut funding to transit. I don't imagine that that's something that would've been very popular at the time.

And certainly, now that this is something that Manitobans are actually feeling in their pocket books right now, I can tell you that it's not something that they would support at all.

Mr. Doyle Pivniuk, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

The other side of the coin, of course, of folks who wouldn't support this, would be the municipalities, you know. And this is a government that came in saying, look, we want to make sure we consult, we want to make sure that we reach out. And, in fact, one of the things that they talked about

right, you know, within the first, you know, couple days of being elected—and I think that message has maybe gotten lost along the way, but—they said, look, we want to provide stable funding and stable predictable funding for the things that Manitobans count on and the things that municipalities have to provide for their citizens in a modern, growing economy. And one of those things would be—would certainly be—would be transit. And the government said this a priority for them, and yet, when you had an arrangement, a 50-50 funding arrangement that had been in place for so long with our municipalities, that had been so relied on by those jurisdictions and had been seen as so important to the growth and the future prosperity of our province, that's the first place that this government looked to cut. And so municipalities are feeling it very acutely.

And, you know, I mean, we hear just this week that the Premier (Mr. Pallister) has a problem meeting with certain municipal leaders, certain important municipal leaders, like the mayor of Winnipeg. And I'm wondering, if he did sit down with the mayor, would, you know, would he have received that message from the mayor and would he have acted on that message, I'm sure, that would've come from the mayor, saying that this is a priority for the City of Winnipeg; this is something, in fact, that they're looking to invest more in, to make transit more used and more accessible to many people, for a variety of reasons, which I do hope to get into this morning. Would he have received that message, would he have listened and would he have reacted?

* (10:50)

Well, we can actually just look at how this bill was brought forward and how this change was made to maybe get a glimpse to how this government—how proud this government was of this change.

Did they go out, you know, to the media, stand out in the rotunda and say, look, we're cutting transit funding, we think this a priority of Manitobans, we think this a priority of municipalities. We're doing it, we're proud of it. Did they do that? No.

Did they go out to their constituents and say, look, this is not what we campaigned on, but we are willing to make this change. We're going to make this change that's going to raise your transit fares and potentially cut services. Is this something you support? They didn't do that.

Did they bring it in this Legislature as a bill that we could debate, that we could talk about, that we

could bring people down, that we could have a real discussion about? No, they didn't even do that, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, what they did was they stuck it in the middle of an omnibus bill and hoped that nobody would notice and hoped that it could just get through without anybody paying attention. Well, actually, someone was paying attention, more than a few someones. A lot of people were paying attention.

And, in fact, on a bill that, you know, under most normal years in this place would be something that—when we have public consultation or public hearings here at committee stage, probably wouldn't have gotten much attention—it was something that brought people down to the Legislature. And time and time again, we've had people concerned with this issue come to this building to make their voices heard, to make it loud and clear to this government that this isn't a change that anybody voted for, and it's a change that nobody is asking for.

So that was the context. It wasn't a proud moment for this government. It was something they were trying to sweep under the rug and I can imagine why. I can see very clearly why. And I can see clearly why because of the experience I've had just over this last couple weeks, myself and my family. And that is that, due to a medical situation, we found ourselves in a one-vehicle home—in a one-driver home, I should say, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, I've got two little kids, as everybody knows. We're whisking them here and there all the time, you know. We're a busy household, as I would imagine most families with young children are. And so, when we found out that my wife wouldn't be able to drive, we really felt that and we looked at what the options available to us were.

Well, of course, the first thing that we thought of was Winnipeg Transit and our ability to access that service. We live in a community that has great bus service right outside our door—comes downtown. We have a lot of opportunity to use that. We live in a community that's very walkable, but we—anywhere we—else we need to go, we can use that transit. So it was important to us, and all of a sudden we realized how important it was and we started looking at, oh, wait a minute, budgeting this out, this is going to take a bit of a hit. Transit fares just went up. This is going to impact us.

So the routes impacted us, the fares impacted us. But I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, the fares didn't impact us nearly as much—or, nearly at all in

comparison to my constituents. And that's where I come back to and that's why this is so—this particular change has been so egregious.

We did spend some time in the Concordia Hospital emergency room just the other day. And when you're stuck in the emergency room for a while, you have a chance to talk to other folks that are in there. And it struck me: in the time that we were there and the number of people that were there—which wasn't that many, but there were some folks in there—we've met two people who had taken the bus down to the emergency room. One young man had broken an ankle on the slippery sidewalks. Tough guy, came in hobbling in, you know, he was ready to go but he took the bus because that was his only way to access health care. The other one was an elderly gentleman who also took the bus and didn't have any other means to get into a hospital.

So it just drove home how important transit services is and, more importantly, how important it is to keep it affordable.

Now, I see my time is getting very short, and that's the problem with only having 10 minutes here in this House. [*interjection*] And I thought I heard a leave over here—I can keep going, but maybe I'll just keep it to two minutes because I know others want to speak.

But I will say that how this ties into the overall government's lack of vision in terms of their green plan just adds insult to injury when it comes to what Manitobans are being asked to pay. So now every Manitoban is being asked to pay a carbon tax—put a price on carbon that will hopefully incentivize a usage of green technology and a transition to green energy and sustainable energy usage.

So, at the same time that Manitobans are being asked to transition, to maybe to look at different options rather than taking their own personal vehicle absolutely everywhere, at that exact same time and at a time when the government of Manitoba has the revenue put before it that could be invested in things like Winnipeg Transit, it has made the absolute opposite choices, instead taking that money, put it into general revenue, doled out a couple bucks to Manitobans and hoped that they wouldn't notice. Well, the gas tax that this government has brought forward is being acutely felt by Manitobans, and at that same time, when they're starting to feel it and they're looking at other options and they're seeing what fits in their budget, at the same time, the transit rates are going up.

So this government's priorities are all wrong. It's all wrong because it's not looking at the impacts to the average Manitoban. And it's all wrong because it's not looking at how transit can be part of a real sustainable green plan in this province, and it's all wrong because this government is hiding and trying to sweep this one under the rug. Maybe nobody'll notice.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr. Wiebe: We'll jam it in the middle of an omnibus bill and hope nobody notices. We noticed, Mr. Speaker. The people of Manitoba noticed, and we're going to fight this bill.

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

Questions

Mr. Deputy Speaker: A question period up to 10 minutes will be held, and questions and—be addressed in the following sequence: the first question to be asked by a member of the other—another party. Any subsequent questions must follow a rotation between parties. Each independent member may ask one question, and no question or answer shall exceed 45 seconds.

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): Question for the member, and I do have some knowledge of this; I used to be a city councillor for eight years, so I can ask some of the questions. I guess, No.1, something this government's very proud of is the fair say in terms of the approach with municipalities.

Just wondering why you, as a government, did not support fair say that allows the cities to flexibility in terms of their—how they spend the money?

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Well, I have to admit, Mr. Speaker, I was a little surprised to see the minister rise to ask a question, but I do appreciate that he has this experience.

So I welcome him as part of this debate. I think he was a part of a council that also supported the Fair Share campaign. I'm wondering if the minister also supports fair share for municipalities.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): I want to thank my colleague for speaking so well and passionately to this important issue. Members opposite, of course, are laughing, as is often the case when we advocate

for the public good, and this, sadly, falls into that category.

I'd like to give my colleague a chance to just explain a bit more some of the impacts that rising fares and service cuts will have on students, single parents, their families, children trying to get to and from school.

Mr. Wiebe: Well, I thank the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer); it's almost like he read my mind because I was just looking at my notes and going, I missed students—I missed students. This was a huge—my entire—half my notes are about students and the impact on students because I, you know, as the critic for Education—but as somebody who, as a student took the bus, and now just seeing the impacts of higher tuition, less resources, a less accessible university and college and training structure, adding to this really just puts a hamper on what students are able to—how they're able to engage, and it's just part of the growing economy in this province. And so I appreciate his question on that. I'm sure he's got other excellent questions; I look forward to those.

Mr. Fielding: These are some questions, obviously, when you look to do the finance of these things, so I hope you look internally to see the efficiencies. I'm just wondering would the member—are you aware that in terms of transit costs—when you do look at this, you want to make sure it's efficient—that transit costs have gone up over 19 per cent over the last four years alone, or the fact that the funding to transit has gone up by 21 per cent for the City over the last number of years as well as things like the costs per vehicle purposes and all that sort of stuff. So does the member appreciate the fact that these costs have gone up and have you done any work to see what transit can do within itself be more efficient?

* (11:00)

Mr. Wiebe: Well—and I agree, I think some of the costs that are going up include the carbon—the impact of the carbon tax. That's going to impact the transit fleet.

However, now it's interesting that the member opposite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —stands up and says, oh, don't you think municipalities should have a fair say and then comes out and says, wait a minute, why don't you start dictating to the municipalities about their costs?

Well, wait a minute, shouldn't that be under the purview of those city councillors and the mayor?

Mr. Altemeyer: Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker. My colleague, again, I think offers a very fine rebuttal to yet another bizarre question. I'll—let me try to explore further the climate aspect which my colleague from Concordia raised earlier.

Is he aware of any other jurisdiction in Canada which, on the one hand, claims to care about reducing climate emissions but, in the same breath, freezes funding to public transit and then charges a carbon tax to transit vehicles while excluding several other sectors of the economy?

Is he aware of anyone else trying to square that circle in our fine country?

Mr. Wiebe: Well, again, I want to thank the member for Wolseley because, you know, my notes here on this—I think I only spent about two minutes on it; I could have spent the entire 10 minutes talking about this. So I appreciate the opportunity to be able to bring this up.

No, I mean, this is an unprecedented opportunity for government to actually have an impact on climate change through practical ways directly within their province. No, there is no other jurisdiction that would take such a backward approach, and it's only this government that is taking this bizarre approach where costs are going up for everybody and then, on top of that, those green initiatives that could have some impact—the costs are going up there, as well.

Mr. Fielding: I just want to say, obviously the member didn't want to answer the question about the efficiencies in the system because, quite clearly, he didn't do his homework to know that the costs have dramatically gone up with the system to be more effective.

I do want to ask the member: Is the member aware that ridership in Winnipeg Transit has gone down by over 9 per cent since 2015 alone? Does the member believe that improving the efficiency of the ride and ensuring that people actually get on the bus is probably a more important piece, and does the 9 per cent reduction in terms of ridership have any impact in terms of the finances of the city's transit system?

Mr. Wiebe: Where to begin on this one, Mr. Speaker. I honestly—I don't even know where to start. This is just bizarre.

So the member's saying that—first of all, he's saying that there's inefficiencies within transit and that a stable, across-the-board 50-50 funding arrangement which helps support Winnipeg Transit is not the way to go, and, in fact, it should be this minister that goes in and tells transit exactly how to operate, which has nothing to do with the fair-say campaign that he started with.

And, second of all, he's saying that ridership is down and we should raise fares to make sure that more people take the bus. I'm confused, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Altemeyer: One fact that our honourable opponent, the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) from across the way has left out of his questions as one of the reasons for the increase in cost for transit is the repair bill attached to the catalytic converters, which continue to cause lots of problems for the machine shop.

And, lo and behold, we have advocated for many months now that helping the City of Winnipeg switch to electric buses would resolve that problem, reduce emissions and actually save money for all involved.

This government indicated they were going to provide 100 electric buses to the City of Winnipeg. Could the member tell us how many—

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

An Honourable Member: I actually did.

Mr. Wiebe: You know, again, Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate these questions because the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) has been talking about these issues for decades, long before this was an issue that came before this House. And it's something that he's been advocating for and working towards. And so now, all of a sudden, the rest of us are catching up, and I appreciate his expertise in this matter.

You know, electric buses is an amazing—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Wiebe: —pilot project that was undertaken here in the city of Winnipeg with provincial government support. And what did the findings actually show? Is—that they are viable, they are feasible and so much so that other cities across the world are coming to Manitoba to buy our buses. And yet, this government

refuses to see the future, to embrace the future and actually implement them right here in our own city.

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

Mr. Fielding: Well, just—I want to put some correct—first of all, on the record. First of all, the City is the one that changes the fare. The Province has nothing to do in terms of the fares. That's a decision that—that's the decision that city council made.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Fielding: Second of all, the City of Winnipeg gets the sweetest deal of anywhere, any other cities within the country. I can tell you that as a fact.

Third of all, does the member know—and this my true question—No. 1, does the member know that the City of Winnipeg, at year-end, ran a \$16-million surplus? They ran a \$16-million surplus. That would have been, actually, a \$25-million surplus, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the fact that the City had to pick up \$9.5 million in the year prior.

My point to this, and will the member confirm this, there's lots of money, there's a lot of black ink at the City of Winnipeg. If you're going to take a look at other funding sources, look at—

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

Mr. Wiebe: Well, you know, it sounds like the minister is preparing for a city council race. I would encourage him to do that. He obviously feels a lot more comfortable at City Hall than he does here, and I'd encourage him, if he wants to go back to being a city politician, he can certainly do that. I'm sure he'd have a lot of success there.

I'd be very curious to know, in his time at city council, whether he went around and said, yes, you know what, actually, there's so much black ink around here, we could go for some cuts to funding. Don't worry about it. We don't need the money.

I can tell you that the money that is used by the City of Winnipeg to fund transit could be used to enhance the services, could be enhance—could use to keep the fares low and could be used in part of a real green plan, which this government has no idea about.

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

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): There are other factors for the decrease in ridership. For instance, the NDP's increase in PCs, and now the Tories' massive layoffs throughout the industry.

Wouldn't the member agree?

Mr. Wiebe: You know, I appreciate this question as well, and I think it actually speaks to the heart of this particular resolution, and that is that we want to see more ridership. We want to see an expansion of Winnipeg Transit, and we want to see fares that reflect a prioritization of this kind of green transportation, rather than taking a step backwards.

I think the member for Kewatinook probably has some great ideas. Members of our caucus have some great ideas. We'd love to hear some of the great ideas from the members opposite, and how they can support this resolution, and actually keep transit affordable and accessible in this city.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Time for question period has expired.

Debate

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The debate is open. Any speakers?

Hon. Scott Fielding (Minister of Families): I want to thank the member for leading into that, asking is there some alternatives that we can propose? And what I'm going to do in my 10-minute speech here, I'm going to talk—a number of things. Number 1, I'm going to talk about the fare safe—why it was so important to have a fair say.

I'm going to talk about our commitments to things like bus rapid transit, and I'm going to provide that alternative that the member talked about, four different alternatives where the City can take a look at funding for transit. We all know it's important, so with those four things—those are four alternatives that I think the member can chew on and think about in the future.

Number 1, I'd like to say that our government was the one that provided a fair say to the City of Winnipeg. That is something, when I was on city council and others, we were asking for for a long period of time. In fact, we were asking for that for 17 years, but we never got it with the NDP. The fact that this government introduced a fair say that gives flexibility to the City is an important aspect, and we don't want to overemphasize the fact that the City now how a fair say in terms of this.

Also, the provincial government, and I'll give some credit to the opposition, which was carried on by our government, our commitments to new projects, new and enhanced projects, whether that be the existing transit system as well as over \$200 million of commitments to rapid transit. So to somehow suggest that we aren't supportive and investing more money in this system is just completely untrue, and I'd like to put that on the record, Madam Speaker.

I can also tell you that I do understand some of the finances at the City of Winnipeg. I chaired finance for the City of Winnipeg for six budgets, so I can tell you exactly where the finances are at. And I'm going to go through some, and these are, I think, some suggestions, some things that the City could consider as alternatives, and I wish the member, before he introduces amendments like this, would take a look at alternatives. Take a look at the efficiencies of the system to go forward.

* (11:10)

So I'll briefly go through these.

Number 1: As I said, we made important investments in terms of BRT which we think is important. We also know that transit needs to be, as all organizations need to be, more efficient. We've taken a lot of time in our departments here at the provincial government doing operational reviews that's a part of this, and we think that transit is probably some—that needs to. I think that the City recognizes that. In fact, the City has suggested that they will be doing an operation review to make sure the transit is as efficient as can be had.

And I'm just using some stats. This is actually from the City of Winnipeg's own particular stats, their financial reviews, their annual reports. So these are facts. These are facts that are put forth by the City. So No. 1, transit, as all organizations, should become more efficient. Transit, in terms of the funding, we know that funding has gone up over the last four years by over 21 per cent over the four years. That is a significant amount of money, Mr. Deputy Speaker; 21 per cent increase over a four-year period is significant amounts of money.

We also know that transit needs to be little bit more efficient and effective, and I don't think that's bad for any organization to say. Costs per passenger have gone up by over 19 per cent in that same time period. So my point is the cost per passenger has dramatically gone up. The cost per vehicles have

dramatically gone up as well, over 13 per cent. So, to somehow suggest that—and for the member to suggest that there's no need to look—to be more efficient as an organization, it kind of shows the type of leadership that was on the other side in terms of how they ran the government.

What we're suggesting is that there can be more efficiencies. We join the City in terms of their call to be more efficient as a system. That's for riders, and riders is an important aspect, too, ridership. We know from the City's own data that ridership has dropped by over 9 per cent compared to 2005. Now, is that because—there's a whole bunch of reasons probably why ridership has gone down? I think probably marketing a little bit better, providing a better quality of ride is important. *[interjection]*

Where I'm going to this—*[interjection]* Where I'm going with this—*[interjection]*—and the member from Concordia doesn't want to acknowledge this, but I can see in his eyes. He's saying it with his eyes, Madam Speaker—is the fact that ridership has gone down by \$2.2 million. If you've got a 9 per cent reduction in the ridership, the revenues that they bring in from there. So, to somehow suggest this is just a province-wide issue in terms of the funding, when we've frozen the funding, is just simply not true. And we want to work with Winnipeg Transit. We want to work with the City to make sure you get ridership up, to get people on the bus, to be there. Now, whether that investment, the \$200 million that the Province has put into rapid transit is something that's there, I think is legitimate. But, to be fair, ridership at transit has dropped by 9 per cent. That is important we need to work on. That is one element in terms of some of the cost parameters that they have talked about that needs to be there.

Number 2: When you look at the City's finances—and, again, I can tell you that when I was there, when I introduced six of the budgets that were there, you got to look at the financial year-ends. I know the member probably didn't do that. He probably didn't do his homework on this. But what I can tell you is when you do look at the city financials they are doing very well. In fact, the vast majority, I would say, over the last 10 years, the City ends up in surplus year after year after year. I think last year or two years ago was the only year they didn't have a surplus. In fact, this year—and I did go—did my financial data—I'll give you where it was for the member of Concordia, if he decides to do some homework on this—the financial review status report from the City of Winnipeg that was tabled, suggests

that there's a \$16-million surplus. That does not even take into consideration that the City had to pick up \$9.5 million from the year prior because they missed them. So the City was cruising towards a \$25-million surplus. My point with this is the fact that if there's some surplus there, go towards your surplus and pick them up. Use some of the funding that's there. If there's leftover money that you charge ratepayers, taxpayers' money, use that money to address transit issues in and itself while you're making it more efficient.

Second point, the next point, Madam—Mr. Deputy Speaker, is I want to say the City does and has done a relatively good job in terms of their finances. But I can tell you they have a system where they have capital and operating reserves. And this year, in fact, if you look at the City of Winnipeg's 2018 budget, appendix 3, page 37, the City is actually putting away close to \$30 million more in their reserves than they did last year. In fact, the year prior it ended at \$242 million; now it's \$272 million. There's \$30 million more stashed away in reserves. Now, reserves are important—important element, not just municipal governments, but also governments as a whole. But my point is you can have a line of credit that's a part of it, whether you have an increase of \$30 million in your operating and capital reserves in a year where there is apparent funding shortfalls. Potentially look at that—I'm not suggesting they reduce the amount of reserves, but I'm suggesting that increasing by over \$30 million in a year where there's potential issues maybe is not the best use of your money at that point and you should take a look at it.

The final point it is in terms of cash to capital, and the City, for the most part, does a very good job in terms of their finances, but I can tell you that the City is using a lot more money in terms of debt financing. I know the member opposite from Concordia knows a lot about deficit financing spending because they jacked up the deficit so much when they were in government that it's unbelievable, and the fact of the matter is if you're paying cash for projects, that's going to be something that's not going to have a dramatic impact on future generations. We know that here in the province that we're spending over a billion dollars in debt servicing because of members like the member from Concordia and others that were there at the time that jacked up the deficit so high.

So what I'm saying is the City is spending a lot less in terms of cash for their projects. In fact, it's

gone down from over \$75 million in 2014 to about \$23 million. So what my point is that what happens is they're spending more on debt financing, less on the cash component of it. There's more money in the system. The spending has really probably gone up by about 4 per cent, so you need to be more efficient, as other governments do, and there is money on the table.

Where I'm going with this, with all these topics, is that there is substantial amounts of money within the system. We want to work with the City to be more efficient and more effective in terms of deliveries to the system, but to be fair, why not take a look at some of your reserves, why not take a look at—or some of your surpluses. Take a look at being more efficient as an organization, which I know they've already committed to, is probably your best approach in terms the line.

So, in conclusion—I wish I had more than a minute left here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I can say conclusively this government has made substantial progress with municipalities.

We're not closing down and amalgamating all the municipalities like the previous government did. We're providing a fair say. I think most of the municipal leaders agree that a fair say is important. That provides some flexibility for municipalities to deliver the services they can.

There's ample amount of room within that flexibility that we provide for the fair say to support transit types of initiatives and again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have not reduced any of it. We've frozen the levels that are there.

We also think that further investments making in bus rapid transit, over \$200 million which we continued on, is important investments that should be a part of that, and that's a commitment that our government has made. The other areas is the four alternatives that the member from Concordia asked us to brought forward. These are four solid ideas that we think can provide more funding for transit within the current funding system.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): Let me just pick up right where the Minister of Families (Mr. Fielding) left off and offer him a solution to the problem that he is desperately trying to create to excuse his

government's rather lousy decisions related to transit. If he were interested, and if his government were interested in being part of the solution, rather than part of the problem, they might approach the City of Winnipeg with an offer along these lines.

Everyone knows that the fleet at Winnipeg Transit needs to have buses replaced on a regular basis, and rather than continuing to acquire more diesel buses which are very expensive and very polluting in terms of their maintenance and their fuel costs, instead the Province could actually be useful and assist the City in acquiring electric buses.

So what would that do? Well, there would be an initial up-front cost difference. New Flyer is a local manufacturer, of course. They're not going to tell me the precise price of their new electric buses, but let's say there's a significant difference. A new diesel bus is about half a million dollars. Let's be a little generous and say an electric bus is maybe closer to 800 or 850. Let's take the higher number, 850. So that's a \$350,000 additional cost to the City of Winnipeg. If the Province were to use some of its carbon tax revenue and provide a loan to the City of Winnipeg, then the City would be able to acquire the electric buses.

* (11:20)

According to Dr. Nazim Cicek, who's the biosystems engineering prof at the University of Manitoba, each electric bus will save over \$60,000 per year that it operates on Winnipeg roads. If that savings is then used to pay back the provincial loan, the province recoups all of that money without spending anything in six years. And after that, the City of Winnipeg is clearing \$60,000 in savings per bus, which they could then use to reduce fares, improve service, and acquire more buses to provide better service on our streets.

That's called a solution. If the province wanted to be even more helpful, they could agree to extend the length of the loan to the City of Winnipeg at zero interest and say, all right, we'll split the savings of \$60,000 per year. You pay us back at \$30,000 per bus per year and you can use the other \$30,000 to reduce fares, or acquire more buses, or improve service in some way.

The solutions are staring this government right in the face, and they are desperately scrambling to keep their eyes closed and their blinders on so they don't see them. They are also refusing to listen to the voices of the thousands and thousands of

Winnipeggers and Manitobans who have been negatively impacted by this government's decisions relating to transit. And it is—I want to emphasize, it is not just Winnipeg that has had this change foisted upon them by a government, by a political party, which went door to door promising no cuts and has done nothing but cut since they came to office.

That's really the sole accomplishment of this government to date and, as my honourable colleague from Concordia has pointed out very astutely, the cuts that have happened to the City of Winnipeg and their transit services also happened to every other municipality that enjoyed the 50-50 funding agreement that was in place under our term in government.

Let's also recall that the previous Conservative government under Gary Filmon cancelled the 50-50 funding agreement for transit, just as this government has done. It is yet another example of how the Conservative party of Manitoba does not believe in transit, and actually does not believe in public services, generally speaking. And we don't have to look much farther than to the education or health-care systems, or any number of other places in their budget to see the truth of that statement.

The negative impacts that these cuts have had have already been opposed by an enormous diversity and number of people. Again, not just in Winnipeg, but in other municipalities that have public transit services, such as Brandon, such as Selkirk, Flin Flon. So people particularly affected, of course, are those who just don't happen to make as much money as some others of us do. And transit is their most affordable ticket for being able to move around, to get to work, to get their kids to school, to get their kids to daycare, to get to the grocery store. To run errands, they rely upon transit. And when they are forced to pay more and more for a service that is less and less well-funded, we can see who it is that is bearing the brunt of this government's impacts. It's not this government, it's not their MLAs, it's not their segment of the voting population, which is the only group that they seem to talk to. It is people who are already facing lots of barriers. And this government could really care less about their lot in life.

And that is where we also see really bizarre claims that this government does care—at all—about transit, in that when they bring in a so-called climate plan where none of the money raised from a carbon tax is going to be used to fight climate change, and they exclude—properly, I would say—fire and

paramedic service from the carbon tax being assigned to their fuel—they still decided to assign the carbon tax to public transit, making it even more difficult for transit to provide a good service in an economical way to our citizens. It would be funny if it weren't so tragic and so completely at odds with what any sensible approach to either transit or social justice or climate change would obviously require.

You just don't do that if you're actually serious about trying to reduce emissions in Manitoba, as this government should be serious, and they are not, but if you were, you'd try everything you can to get more people to choose public transit and active transportation more often, and you don't do that by cutting its funding, and you don't do that by making it more expensive for the municipalities to provide the service in the first place. You don't do that by ignoring obvious solutions that are staring you in the face that would help municipalities in Manitoba save money, provide better service and even reduce fares.

Wouldn't that be a great alternative vision, Mr. Acting Speaker, if this government actually came forward with a solution for once, rather than just making the problems worse and blaming everyone else for it, as the Minister for Families just did, and actually step forward and said we're going to help you bring in a better public transit system? We're going to help you transition to electric buses, which don't cost as much and which reduce emissions and which actually provide additional revenue to Manitoba Hydro so that those rates do not have to go up at the rate that has been requested at the Public Utilities Board. All of these things, taken together, would be obvious good policy to do, but because this government does not believe in the public good and does not believe in public services serving the public, they are doing everything they can to undermine them, and it goes beyond that because we have—[interjection]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Altemeyer: —we have the wonderful situation here in Manitoba where New Flyer Industries exists right here, a continental leader in the manufacture of buses, a continental leader in the design, development and creation of electric buses. It was our government who successfully brought New Flyer and Manitoba Hydro and Mitsubishi industries—heavy industries and Red River College together to form a partnership to design multiple new green bus technologies. The electric buses that are on the road in Winnipeg right now have proven that they work

even in our demanding climatic requirements, and we're talking local jobs. Imagine what would happen if we were able to actually bring electric buses purchased from New Flyer onto the streets of Winnipeg. Again, it is a solution staring this government in the face, which they are desperate to not see.

I await with some trepidation the excuses and spin from members opposite as they try to argue against the fine resolution that has been brought forward by my colleague, the honourable member for Concordia (Mr. Wiebe). Transit is the way to go. This government is determined to put up more stop signs than go signs, and it will be our task to continue to expose the barriers and to provide the reasonable alternatives this government should be providing so the public knows that it's not a lost cause; we just need a different government who cares, to be in charge. Thank you.

Mrs. Colleen Mayer (St. Vital): I rise today to speak to the member-private member's resolution called Restore Public Transit Funding for Municipalities. And I am pleased to stand here because I think it's important to put some facts on the record, and I want to begin by bringing attention to a mistruth that we hear very often in this House, the word cuts to transit funding.

We've heard it from members opposite in this resolution. We've heard it from his caucus colleagues. We've heard it from the counterparts at 510 Main St. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let's say it like it is: Operational funding for Winnipeg in Budget 2018 has been maintained at the same level as 2017, no cuts. The fact is, the City of Winnipeg benefits from operating funding levels from the Province that are among some of the very best when compared to major municipalities of a similar size. It's very good, if you look across our jurisdictions.

The transit funding level provided in 2017, which is the same amount that is provided in 2018, and I repeat, it's the same amount, through unconditional grants, is nearly \$3 million more than the NDP provided in 2015.

*(11:30)

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they can have greater flexibility with their fair say. Municipalities can have greater flexibility with their fair say with funding, which is something that the previous government did not encourage. They encouraged top-the top-down approach.

Now, the fact is, and I'm going to quote the mayor, who stated in 2016, in May of 2016: The Progressive Conservatives have had a significant announcement on fair say—a single basket for funding, an easier approach, which will help us get more value for dollar. We're expecting, as a result of that, we'll be able to reach to—sorry—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.

And that was mayor—Mayor Brian Bowman said that.

So, the NDP took an item—*[interjection]* The NDP—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mayer: —took an itemized granting approach to funding. *[interjection]*

You know, not only, Mr. Deputy Speaker, does the members opposite have such a disregard—I'm just going to quote something—disregard for our side of the House and people speaking, but they also, the member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) and the member from Concordia have such a disregard for the members and the organization of AMM, because they sat here and they have no faith in that organization. So the vice-president of AMM said not long ago, last month: We feel we've been heard, and I think it's going to benefit communities with the red tape as we will—as well as financially. So, you know, they can talk all they want, they can continue to disrespect, but we know what Manitobans want.

Our basket-funding approach means improving efficiencies and less red tape, fewer application processes and more unconditional funding so that the City can invest based on its priorities, what they want. These priorities are the priorities that they have heard or that they represent the voters in this city.

Our team campaigned on a promise that municipalities across the province would have their fair say through this funding model, and I'm happy to see that we are making good on that promise. The current government was elected to fix the finances that the mess that the—the mess that the NDP had left us in, and we're committed to making Manitoba Canada's most improved province. We will continue on the road to recovery, and along that road there are going to be tough decisions. There are always tough decisions to be made, but make no mistake, Mr. Deputy Speaker, our government understands

this. We're willing to stand up and make the choices necessary to ensure a more sustainable future for every Manitoban.

But it's more than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We want to continue to work with municipalities to ensure that they can continue to deliver the services that best fit within their roles. Over the past two years we've listened to our province's municipalities, and I think this is quite evident based on what at the—based on the comment that came from the last AMM convention. There had been over 111 meetings between participants, ministers and the departments, and I think it really speaks to our government's level of commitment to an open dialogue.

This month alone, the current government has delivered on four AMM resolutions, which shows our approach to municipalities has completely changed from the misguided ways of the NDP.

I wish to remind everyone, once again, that Winnipeg received the highest level of unconditional operating funding of any Canadian city of a comparable size.

I also want to point out that transit costs per passenger has continued to grow in recent years with a decline in ridership. The city now has an opportunity to decide what their priorities are and make their spending choices. They get to choose what to do with that money. Municipalities across the province want a fair say and now they have it.

I'd also like to reiterate that our government continues—*[interjection]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mayer: —to be a supporter of public transit through projects like rapid transit, the Waverley underpass and the purchases of 60 new transit buses. We have made historic investments that future generations will benefit from.

We're investing well over \$200 million in major transit projects across Winnipeg—bus rapid transit—and phase 1 and 2 are included in that. We also announced infrastructure investments that include over \$34 million of new water and waste-water projects.

Bill 30 passed, giving municipalities the power to decide whether they want ride-share services in their community, and I want to remind everyone that Winnipeg was the only municipality that didn't have that right.

As previously mentioned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have listened and we have engaged in meaningful dialogue, something the previous NDP government did not do and refuses to do. So let's not forget that under the NDP municipalities were forced to amalgamate with no consultation. The NDP spent \$75 million—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mayer: —less on core infrastructure that was previously committed, all this during the year that they did a PST hike. It's shameful, again, disrespectful, shameful.

And the NDP talk about the city's budget, but they forgot that when they were in power they couldn't keep their own budget balanced, and now they stand up and want to comment on how municipalities should balance their budgets? All this in spite of the fact that Manitobans pay the highest taxes in western Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I stand here before you talking about a resolution that I will not be supporting. But what I want to talk about or what I want to leave you with are some facts.

Fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker: municipalities desire an increased 'flexibility' when it comes to the allocation of funds, and we have given them that.

Fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker: the City of Winnipeg continues to receive one of the highest levels—the highest levels—of unconditional operating funding of any comparable city in Canada.

In fact—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Mayer: —Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been a 9 per cent reduction in ridership since 2015.

Fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am very confident that the mayor and city council can manage their expenditures very well and we will be able to find the need to spend those dollars in a way that meets the needs of their voters.

And fact—and maybe members opposite might want to take a listen, because unlike them our current government is continuing to listen and learn from municipalities and their partners and move forward. And we will continue to foster a positive working

relationship. Where they failed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are going to get it right.

Now, I know that these facts are something that the mayor for Fort Garry-Riverview may want to take a note of in the coming months.

Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Before we continue, I just want to remind the member—all members—that when you say untruth, it means that they're lying. So I would—I want to clarify that.

Mrs. Mayer: I apologize. I certainly did not mean to offend. I know that I am passionate, just like everyone in this House. So I give you my deepest apologies for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And the—secondly, also, indicating—like, the respect for other members in this House. When you refer to him as mayor, it should be—any members of this House should be honourable member for River Heights—river—Fort Garry-Riverview.

Mrs. Mayer: Again, I—apologies. I meant that comment with the utmost respect, but I will remember that. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Ms. Judy Klassen (Kewatinook): The member for St. Vital (Mrs. Mayer) boasts that the funding for transit is the same, but—it was for—two years ago—two fiscal periods ago.

I've stated previously that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Friesen) ought to take lessons in inflation so that his budget would accurately reflect costs of inflation. So maybe, now, the entire team needs lessons in inflation.

Also, the government has a carbon-tax statement. I won't say that it's a carbon-tax plan because it's too cloudy as it is at present to be called a plan.

So the Liberals support this resolution. Public transportation is of vital importance to many throughout our province. Ensuring our population has ready access to affordable public transportation, especially to those in large urban centres, provides many benefits to those who depend on them.

* (11:40)

Our province has a long-standing tradition of matching public transit funding with municipalities,

which was a true demonstration of support and solidarity to a greener future.

This reduction created chaos in public transportation in our province as municipalities struggled to find ways of not going over budget due to that reduction in funds. Cutting services, laying off workers and drivers, fare increases, were all options that our municipalities had to consider at the detriment of those who depend on those services. While reduction in services were able to be withheld by the City of Winnipeg, a 25 per cent increase in fare prices marked a drastic increase.

These increases heavily impact transit users, placing the burden on some of our most vulnerable who depend on public transportation. Low-income families, seniors, students and newcomers are all being forced to pay more to cover the funding shortfall covered by this government.

From what I heard, Winnipeg Transit had already faced issues of infrequency, unreliability and overcrowding to the point of denying people services. We're at a time where more—where we need to be investing more into public transportation, not taking away from it. I really like the solutions proposed by the member for Fort Garry. *[interjection]* Thank you.

Our city and province are growing and public transportation must grow with it. This Province's idea of public transit funding does not keep up with growth nor inflation.

The increased fares are heavily impacting those who depend on transit to get to work, to school, to find jobs and to hold jobs, more importantly, and especially to access health care. The increases impact students, low-income families, seniors and those physically unable to drive the most.

While the subsequent increase in fares may seem like a small amount to those in this Chamber, it means less money being put towards tuition, towards food, towards living in this city. A small family of—a young family of—with three kids and both parents needing the bus, that's equal to a loaf of bread. And I know it's a hard concept for some to realize that, but, you know, those four quarters equal a loaf of bread, and you always have to be mindful of that, that people are struggling and people are living on the streets.

We agree with the idea that this government should continue the long-standing tradition of funding public transit on an equal basis with our

municipalities. It incentivizes many to take public transit, helping our environment while aiding those with low and limited incomes. This government should listen to the leaders of our municipalities who want this government to restore the 50-50 transit funding agreement.

Thank you.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Southdale): I want to rise in the Chamber here today to put some words on the

record regarding this proposed resolution. I know it's interesting that the—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

When this matter is before the House, the honourable member for Southdale has 10 minutes remaining.

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 5, 2018

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