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JOHN YAKABUSKI, M.P.P. - RENFREW-NIPISSING-PEMBROKE

Private Member's Resolution

May 7, 2009

Highway Improvement (Gas Tax Rebate)

Mr. John Yakabuski: I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to provide that, when requested by a municipality, the Minister of Transportation shall not refuse to enter into an agreement with that municipality to provide a tax rebate under the Gasoline Tax Act to a municipality for the purpose of constructing, maintaining or-I have the wrong-

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll just take a moment, and we'll give you the proper notice. Go ahead.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pardon me, Mr. Speaker.

I move that, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to provide that, when requested by a municipality, the Minister of Transportation shall not refuse to enter into an agreement with that municipality to provide a tax rebate under the Gasoline Tax Act to that municipality for a purpose related to public highways under the jurisdiction of that municipality.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Mr. Yakabuski moves private member's notice of motion number 89. Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Yakabuski, you have up to 12 minutes for your presentation.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that opportunity, and I'm glad I caught that motion before I finished reading it.

Interjection.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yeah, whatever. Thank you to the member from Halton.

This is very interesting. This is a fundamental issue of fairness, and currently the government of Ontario rebates the provincial portion of the gasoline tax, which is 14.7 cents per litre, to municipalities that have a public transportation system in operation in their community. But they prohibit or leave off the municipalities-they freeze out the

municipalities that do not have a public transportation system operating within their borders. So, to me, it's a fundamental issue of fairness.

It's interesting that the member for Huron-Bruce, in her windup, talked about EI. She talked about what the Premier has been going on about. She didn't mention the Premier, but we know the Premier has been waxing on about what he sees as the inequity in the way Ontario is treated-"mistreated," he says-under the Employment Insurance system. He says Ontario is being discriminated against. He wants the federal government to treat Ontario the same as other provinces. He doesn't like discrimination. Those are Dalton McGuinty's paraphrased words.

Well, I don't like discrimination either, but the Premier speaks out of two sides of his mouth on the issue, because on the one hand, he says he stands against discrimination when it comes to the federal EI program, but on the other hand, he is in favour of discrimination when it comes to withholding that gasoline tax from rural municipalities. You can't square the two, I say to the Premier, and I say the same thing to the member for Huron-Bruce. You cannot square those two positions. You either are opposed to discrimination or you support it. You can't have it both ways. And what is happening in Ontario today with respect to gasoline tax for rural municipalities is discrimination, plain and simple-14.7 cents per litre.

The Minister of Natural Resources is here today, and I'm glad to see her. She has been in my riding. She knows something of the scope of it; she knows the size and the distances between communities. I remember making that drive with her from up north to Stonecliffe, back down to Pembroke and wherever you had to go after that. Minister, you know it was a busy day. Do you know how long the travel was? Well, that's what people in my riding have to travel every day. It's not just my riding but every rural member's riding. They all encounter the same issues.

I was talking to the member for Haldimand-Norfolk the other day, and not a single community in his riding gets a single cent of gas tax from the provincial government. That is wrong.

As I said to the Minister of Natural Resources, she knows the distances. In Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and in other rural communities, families sometimes have to have two vehicles, because if they're both working, the chances of them working in the same business or at the same time on the same shift are remote. They need to be able to get to work or they can't support their families.

On this issue of the tax, they pay an inherently disproportionate amount of that tax, because the more miles you drive-and if you're from rural Ontario, you've got to drive miles or kilometres, call them what you want, but you've got to drive a lot of them, and for each of those, you burn fuel. Every time you burn fuel, you've got to fill it up, and every time you fill it up, you've got to pay for it-except we're not getting any of it back, not a fair share of it, and that is fundamentally wrong.

We're not even talking about the 8% that Dalton McGuinty wants to add to the costs of those rural people. For every kilometre they have to drive, every litre of gas they have to buy, another 8% is going to be added on, effective July 1, 2010. That's wrong again. We've got two wrongs. Are they going to try to make a right out of that? It's not going to work. People in rural Ontario won't buy that.

They don't have the option of hopping on the subway, the TTC buses or whatever. They don't have the option. I've got two communities in my riding that receive some gas tax from the province: the city of Pembroke and the town of Renfrew. The city of Pembroke receives from the provincial government the grand sum of \$115,120 and the town of Renfrew receives \$185,237.

They want to talk about the federal government, so let's see what the federal government gives communities in my riding of Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke as their share of the gas tax. Let's see. We'll start with Admaston Bromley. The federal government, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you, doubled their contribution this year to those rural communities. They doubled their contribution because they recognize what a challenge it is trying to get municipal infrastructure built and maintained in rural communities.

This government is so citified, it is so city-centric, that it won't help out those rural communities in a fair way. I know that the member for Manitoulin, who has spoken before on this in the past, is going to say that there are other government programs. There can still be other government programs. Don't tell me that you're restricted to this. Here we've got Michael Bryant the other day all of a sudden finding the secret drawer in Dwight Duncan's desk and finding \$2 billion in the secret drawer. If they want money, they can come up with it. For whatever political purpose that suits their gain, they will find the money, but when it's about rural fairness they can't seem to come up with it.

Just the other day, I had to chastise the Minister of Education for coming up with \$15 million for Toronto school boards to support swimming pools. We can't even get our kids to school. They're cutting back \$1 million on bus transportation in my riding. You can't even get kids to school. They're cutting the funding there. Until this minister comes up with a fair funding formula for rural schools, this problem is only going to get worse.

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This is a fundamental issue of fairness. How this government can stand there and continue to do nothing about it while the federal government has at least recognized-and let me get back to that: Admaston/Bromley, \$91,761; Arnprior, \$233,691, Bonnechere Valley, \$116,683; Brudenell, Lyndoch and Raglan, \$50,000-I'll just round them up; Deep River, \$135,000; Greater Madawaska, \$75,000; Head, Clara and Maria, \$8,000; Horton township, \$83,000; Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards, \$81,000; Laurentian Hills, \$90,000; Laurentian Valley, \$284,000; Madawaska Valley, \$143,000; McNab/Braeside, \$222,000; and North Algona Wilberforce, \$89,000. Pembroke, from the province, \$115,120-they have a small bus system-but from the feds, \$877,000. Petawawa, \$468,000. Renfrew county, from the province, zero; from the federal government, \$2,638,605. The town of

Renfrew, \$185,000 from the province; \$258,000 from the feds. One more to come here, and that is Whitewater Region: nothing from the province; \$211,855 from the federal government.

That is how the federal government has addressed the problem of rural funding, and they're not even responsible for transportation. But they take care of rural communities. This government discriminates, without exception. Except where there's a small transportation system, they discriminate against rural communities. As I said earlier this year, they can come up with the money for Toronto swimming pools, but no money for transportation for school boards in Renfrew county.

I know they're going to talk about the MIII. I know they're going to talk about infrastructure programs. There is nothing to stop them from continuing with those, but those are nothing but a crap shoot. Those are a lottery.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not everybody gets them, I say to the member from Manitoulin, and you know it. They are not sustainable, and you cannot account for them; you cannot plan for them. But in the case of gas tax funding, which the federal government doubled this year, you can count on it, and rural communities across this province need to be able to have a form of sustainable funding that they know is going to be there. Under this program with the provincial government, they don't know what's going to be there. You've got to put your name in; you've got to do the application. You've got to spend thousands of dollars to do an application, and at the end of the day you might get the letter from the ministry saying, "Too bad, so sad; not this time." That's not good enough. We need sustainable funding in rural communities. I've got rural communities from all across the province supporting this, which was a bill.

I'm going to shift gears for just one second and catch my breath. I'm going to say thank you to the government House leader and I'm going to say thank you to the House leader of the NDP, because I tried to reintroduce this as a bill, like it was introduced in the past, and I was ruled out of order. But I will say thank you to the government House Leader for allowing unanimous consent to allow us even to debate this today. So to some degree I say it was magnanimous of her, and I do appreciate it. We're having the opportunity to debate, and I appreciate that. But the question is, will they support it? Will they support fairness in gas tax funding for rural communities here in the province of Ontario? Mr. Speaker, that is the question, and I know you'll be putting it to them shortly.

Interjections.

Mr. John Yakabuski: We're trying to put it to them, but you'll be putting the question to them.

I know that I have other members who are here today to support this. I hope the members on the other side-and I'm not trying to lecture you. You know that. I'm not that type. I'm

just trying-I'm frustrated. I'm trying to appeal to your compassion and your sense of fairness today: Do not forget the rural people in this province. They are struggling greatly. When the province struggles, our rural people struggle even more, because they have to spend so much more of their income on essentials. In Renfrew county, take out Atomic Energy of Canada and Base Petawawa and people live on very low incomes. Please give them a hand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Wow. Speaker, how do you follow that, eh? Really, it is very difficult. Even when I disagree with the honourable member, I have to say he has the best set of leather lungs in this Legislature, and you can even, at times-those on television can't see this, but you can see faint vibration of metal and wood around the chamber as he gets into it in full flight.

This motion needs a little bit of decoding for those who think it might be about swimming pools, because swimming pools are an issue. That's another part of what life is dealing with today. My understanding-and I'm sure that, sotto voce or full bellow, I will be informed whether I'm right or wrong-is that this would require the Ministry of Transportation to provide a gas tax rebate to municipalities not only for public transit, but also for roads, bridges and highways.

A nodding of the head was seen in the direction of the member who put forward the motion, and I'm going to assume, then, that my interpretation of the motion is correct. I appreciate that.

People need to know that Mr. Yakabuski has been fighting this battle for years and clearly has built up a good head of steam in the course of those battles. Indeed, he introduced a bill to this effect in 2005 and has not stopped since. The point has been put strongly each time it has been raised.

There's an equity dimension-and people heard about the fairness and equity dimension for the last few minutes-to the argument that's made, and not all municipalities have public transit systems; that's true. There's a certain size and density that you need before a transit system will make sense. So the question that's been put on the floor before us is whether it's fair that residents of municipalities without transit systems see their gas tax money going to other municipalities that do have transit systems. I would say, frankly and emphatically, yes, it is fair, just as all other revenue that goes into provincial coffers is distributed according to the needs of the province now-sorry, I should correct that. "According to the needs of the province" assumes a detached air of accounting that doesn't exist. It's allocated politically, roughly following the political powers of the different communities and interests in the province. I think, however, that it makes sense for this province to continue putting money into municipal transit.

I'll note this again, but I want to note it right up front. Previously, under Conservative, Liberal and NDP administrations, public transit in this province was funded at 50% of

operating costs coming from the provincial government. That ended in the late 1990s with one Conservative regime, and what has happened since 2003 is a small return of some of the cash necessary to make those transit systems work. So about a third of transit costs are now covered by the province, not the half that used to be there. You actually need the half to make sure that cities function properly. That's what we need. A suggestion that we would further reduce the amount of money that goes to transit systems in terms of the economy of this province is not a good idea.

One of the purposes of taxation systems is to fund programs that serve the common public good, and that's whether or not every individual or every region in a province utilizes the services that are produced. For instance, air ambulance is something that is needed throughout the north, throughout large areas of the province where you have low density. I have no argument with that at all. You don't need air ambulance in the GTA or in Ottawa; they are served by a large number of hospitals and the distances are much smaller. I think it would be wrong for us not to have that level of service in the north. I don't mind the fact that my taxes go to pay for it. In fact, the travel allowance that is given to northern residents has been outlined to me by people in the north, and it's clearly not adequate for their purposes. There should be more there, and I think people here who are from the north can speak to that far more eloquently than I can.

Different parts of the province have different needs. One of the investments that makes a huge difference to our society as a whole is an investment in public transit. Even if a person never steps on a bus or steps on a subway system, they benefit from the fact that having transit systems in place reduces the volume of car traffic and the level of air pollution that people are subjected to.

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I have been in Kingston-I have been north of Kingston in midsummer, when people have had to breathe the smog that blankets all of southern Ontario. Some of that is from coal-fired plants; some of that is from natural gas. A big chunk of it is from cars. The more people we get out of cars and onto transit, the less smog. If you're in rural Ontario, you're breathing that junk just as sure as if you are down here in this Legislature. Investment in transit in Ottawa, Hamilton, Windsor, London, Toronto, Kingston-in all those cities-means cleaner air and better health for rural Ontario and urban Ontario.

Air pollution in Ontario causes at least 2,000 premature deaths each year and costs \$10 billion in economic costs each year-\$10 billion. That's a cost that is borne by the whole province. So investments to reduce that air pollution, to reduce the mortality and to reduce health costs are of great consequence to every person in this province.

Public transit reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The north is going to be hit much harder by climate change than the south-more forest fires. Farmers-rural areas dependent on regular, predictable rainfall for crops-are going to be hit hard. Rural Ontario has a huge stake in the outcome of real action on climate change, and if you're going to take real action on climate change, you have to have investment in public transit, and that

investment has to be at a level that makes it viable and attractive. So we have a question here of making investments in different parts of the province that benefit the whole province.

Getting people out of private vehicles and onto public transit reduces motor vehicle crashes, which kill about 3,000 Canadians a year and cost the Canadian economy about \$1.7 billion a year. Very straightforwardly, we're about 40% of Canada's population. So we're somewhere in the \$800-million or \$900-million-a-year range for health care costs arising from motor vehicle crashes. Again, since we don't say we'll spend less in rural areas for health care than we spend in urban areas-although I know that very often that is the way it's been working out in reality-the principle is not applied the way it needs to be, and it needs to be corrected. And if that motion were on the table, I would be giving a very different speech. The reality, though, is that health care costs are shared across the province, and to the extent that we reduce the number of people who are injured in car crashes, we'll reduce the overall burden of health care costs in this province.

Investing in places where we can get people out of their cars and into transit makes sense for the province as a whole. In smaller communities, transit can play an important role helping local businesses, helping commuters get to work and bringing shoppers to stores.

It was interesting: About a year ago, I was talking to a friend of mine who drives a bus in London. Now, London is a city that doesn't have a very big transit system-it isn't a very frequent service, in my experience, honourable member. Having grown up in Hamilton, I really enjoyed the transit system when I got to Toronto. It was just a lot more frequent. My friend, however, was driving a bus in London, and talked about how they changed his route so he had to stop in a shopping mall. Initially, the business owners in the shopping mall weren't enthused about it, but he found that he was carrying a lot more passengers into that mall and out of that mall. He was increasing the overall traffic, the overall trade, to their advantage, and the people who weren't having to spend money on gasoline and insurance for their cars, and paid much less for transit, were able to spend that money in those stores. There's an advantage to us to have more people with money in their pockets because they can rely on transit rather than having to spend a lot on owning and operating a car.

There are 89 municipal transit systems serving 111 municipalities in Ontario: towns like Elliott Lake, Leamington and Lindsay. For us as a province, there is a tremendous advantage to investment in public transit. It's good for our health, our environment, our quality of life and our communities.

This government, frankly, could do a lot more to support public transit. As I said at the beginning of my speech, the government of Ontario once paid half of transit operating costs and now pays less than a third. In its most recent budget, the McGuinty government once again allocated more money to new highways than it did to public transit. There is an awful lot more to be done to actually re-jig that balance of investment in transportation dollars so that the investments we do make improve our health status, reduce air pollution, reduce greenhouse gas impacts and, in fact, make our cities more livable.

I've listened to the member from Renfrew, who makes a very strong argument. I disagree with him. I think taking money away from transit and putting it into roads, bridges and highways is not the right direction to go. I have to say this, though: Rural Ontario is in deep trouble. I think the speech that's been made by the member shows the extent to which rural Ontario has been dealt a bad hand. That needs to be corrected, because I heard it when we did the Clean Water Act hearings. I disagreed with the arguments people were making but I understood emotionally where they were coming from. They're seeing their way of life being drawn away from them with depopulation and reduction in incomes. Those things have to be addressed in this province because there is a rural anger out there that, if not addressed, will shred the fabric of this province. It needs to be addressed. I disagree with this particular approach, but not with the fundamental argument about the need for a fair deal for rural Ontario. Thank you, member, for bringing this forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Linda Jeffrey: I appreciated the rant that the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke brought to the table, and his passion, but I think a little context always helps, and I thought I'd bring context from my own community.

By the year 2031, the city of Brampton is expected to reach a population of 680,000 people; a home to more than 290,000 jobs. I think the resolution that we've heard put forward today would jeopardize my community's plans to successfully manage the growth and the transportation needs of such a large city.

In Brampton, to respond to those needs and the growth that we've all heard about, we've prepared a transportation and transit master plan. The plan reinforces the urgent need to implement an accessible, attractive and viable alternative to the private automobile. To this end, the city of Brampton proposed a Brampton Rapid Transit initiative, which we fondly call AcceleRide, to improve transit service in the high-demand corridors, to encourage and increase commuter traffic and use of transit and more effective use of Brampton Transit to other transit networks across the GTA. The key to all successful implementations of any transit network-and certainly in Brampton-is a meaningful relationship and a partnership with a senior level of government.

In March 2006, our government announced a \$95-million commitment to the city's AcceleRide program as part of our budget. I was thrilled by the announcement. I think on Wednesday we announced it in our budget, and by Friday Mayor Fennell already had the money and it was in the bank. We had already put our third forward in order to successfully implement this AcceleRide program in Brampton. The city committed to putting its one third forward; we're still waiting for the feds to put forward their amount. They've made many announcements but the money hasn't actually been there. The city of Brampton has put \$2.4 million in the bank, including hiring additional staff. The first phase of the AcceleRide program involves some branded and enhanced service on Queen Street and Main Street connecting us to Vaughan.

The reason government provides gas tax to mass transit systems is to get the vehicles off the road, to reduce our emissions and to make sure the infrastructure of mass transit service systems serve all of Ontario. We've made it a priority to invest in public transit. We're back in the business of public transit systems, and that's important. Municipalities have indicated that an ongoing, predictable funding source is a top priority for moving public transit. Providing two cents of gas transit revenues is a key example of our commitment to improving public transit in the GTA and across Ontario.

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I find this resolution to be problematic because it takes money away from mass transportation systems. The two cents of gas tax applies to all of Ontario, so if you take some of that money away to do other things across Ontario, you're going to reduce the funding to mass transit in the larger cities and larger communities that provide that mass transit.

When I am here in Toronto I hear the need-and certainly in Peel, there are appeals for more money for mass transit so we can reduce emissions, reduce the wear and tear on our roads and get our people moving. So although I appreciate the passion of the member, in my community you need to fund the mass transit. We have almost a million people there and you need to fund those transit priorities.

I think there are unintended consequences of this resolution. Although I appreciate its passion, I am unable to support this resolution.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Arnott: I'm glad to have this chance this afternoon to speak in support of my colleague the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke and his resolution which he's brought forward today: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to provide that, when requested by a municipality, the Minister of Transportation shall not refuse to enter into an agreement with that municipality to provide a tax rebate under the Gasoline Tax Act to a municipality for the purpose of constructing, maintaining or operating a rapid transit or public transportation system." Translating that-

Mr. John Yakabuski: That's the wrong resolution.

Mr. Ted Arnott: That's the wrong one?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Read it on orders of the day.

Mr. Ted Arnott: Well, that's what I've got in front of me.

But essentially what the member is advocating, as I understand it, is to allow the rural municipalities of the province of Ontario to access some of the provincial gasoline tax.

Right now, as we know, the provincial government shares a small portion of the 14.7-cents-a-litre gasoline tax that people pay when they buy gasoline with municipalities that operate transit systems. Of course, those tend to be the cities, or perhaps the larger towns in some cases. But as we know, rural Ontario is excluded from this predictable stream of funding, by and large. A vast majority of rural municipalities are excluded from this particular stream of funding, which makes it very difficult for them to plan their infrastructure projects.

I support what the member is saying. I want to suggest that he deserves credit for his persistence on this issue. He has brought it forward on a number of occasions in the House. I've certainly expressed support. In fact, I have presented petitions in this Legislature on this very issue, and I think that people in my riding are very concerned about it and see it as a matter of fundamental unfairness.

Listening to the government members opposite with their explanation of the situation, unfortunately they seem to be willing to pit the cities against the small towns with respect to this debate; to suggest that if the small towns and the rural areas of the province get anything in terms of the gas tax, it's going to be taken away from the big cities such that they won't be able to maintain and operate their transit systems. I don't believe that to be the case. I certainly recognize and understand that our urban communities in Ontario need public transit, and I support that. I support expanded GO Transit service and GO train service to my constituents in Wellington-Halton Hills and have spoken out on that on many occasions. But at the same time, I'm well aware of the infrastructure needs that exist in the communities in Wellington-Halton Hills. I know that each member of this House who represents a rural riding should be aware of the huge infrastructure deficit that exists in their communities.

Just last week, the municipalities in Wellington-Halton Hills and, I believe, across the province had a deadline to submit their applications for the Building Canada fund and the stimulus fund, which is a joint federal and provincial program, those two programs together, in an effort to build infrastructure to kick-start our economy. All of the communities in my riding identified their needs. I could go into it as great length. I know that the county of Wellington wants to build a new Centre Wellington police operation centre and a new county archives. I've written the Premier to express my strong support for those projects. Certainly, the region of Halton has a significant list of projects as well: the Skyway waste water treatment plant and the southwest treatment plant; key transportation projects, Tremaine Road and Upper Middle Road-I guess that's most likely in Oakville; development of employment lands, the 401-Halton Hills corridor that includes our riding of Wellington-Halton Hills, the Milton business park and Winston Park as well as a number of other projects.

Our local communities have a huge list of projects that they have put forward. Again, this underlines the need for infrastructure funding from the senior levels of government, but I take this opportunity to express my strong support for all of our applications that are coming from Wellington-Halton Hills. I know they've been carefully reviewed. The ideas have been thoroughly vetted by the municipal councils and the staffs, and I have absolute

confidence in the local municipal councils and the staffs in my riding. I'm privileged to work with them. I'm privileged to call them colleagues. They do an extraordinarily good job on behalf of their constituents.

Very briefly, I know that the township of Guelph-Eramosa is seeking assistance to reconstruct 7.8 kilometres of Jones Baseline between County Road 124 and 22.

Puslinch township is seeking assistance for a new municipal storage building at the municipal complex. They're also looking for assistance under the Building Canada Intake 2 for the reconstruction and paving of Concession Road 7 in the township.

I know that Centre Wellington is looking at the need for assistance for replacement of the Forfar Street water tower, the reconstruction of Church Street in Elora, and the reconstruction of Sideroad 19, Burnett Court and Victoria Crescent. As well, under the Building Canada program, they have identified the need for a big, expensive project but certainly a well-needed project: the Elora waste water treatment plant upgrades. It's a \$15.6-million project, hopefully split three ways.

Interjection: Where is that located?

Mr. Ted Arnott: That's in Elora, in Centre Wellington township. We certainly need the support of the provincial government with that one.

I'm pleased to outline the needs in Halton Hills. We have the need for assistance to twin the Acton arena under the communities component of the Building Canada fund. As well, under the stimulus program, there is a need for assistance for the Acton branch library replacement; the Georgetown arterial road reconstruction-Delrex Boulevard and Sinclair Avenue; and the rehabilitation of rural surface treated roads to asphalt.

Those are a number of the projects that I believe need to be funded by the provincial government. I also know that if the government were to listen to the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke in this regard and bring forward a program in response to his resolution so as to allow our rural communities to access some of this gas tax money, they would be able-in my community, certainly-to take a very good stab at this significant list of infrastructure projects that are needed. I know that they could move forward on them more quickly and build more of them. I think it's important to point that out today.

Again, I would suggest to all members of this House, particularly the rural ones-there are a number of rural MPPs who are here on a Thursday afternoon to listen to this debate. I hope that they will support the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke. His speech today was excellent. He's a vocal, outspoken and articulate spokesman for rural Ontario, and he deserves enormous credit for bringing forward this resolution. I salute him, and I urge all members of this House to support his resolution this afternoon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I'm very pleased to enter the debate today. I do want to be up front that I will not be supporting this motion.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Oh.

Mrs. Carol Mitchell: I know that the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke will want to know why. I entered the debate the last time, when you brought it forward as a private member's bill, and today, when it is a motion.

I want to talk specifically about one of the smallest municipalities that I have in my riding. It's called the municipality of South Bruce. They received \$78,000 in gas tax in 2007; in 2008 they received \$98,000; and in 2009, \$197,000. I want to give a sense of where the municipality is at today. They need a new bridge. How many years would it take them to save for that bridge? Ten years? Nine years? They would be saving so long for a bridge, if that was the funding they received for infrastructure, that they would never, ever catch up. They would think that the previous government was back in government again. The municipality of South Bruce just received \$19.5 million for sewage. If they received only gas tax for funding, they would have to save for 100 years to pay for the same work that they're getting.

The members from across the way will tell you that rural Ontario is not getting its fair share of infrastructure dollars. They're simply wrong. My riding, the most beautiful riding in the province of Ontario, Huron-Bruce, received \$56 million in the last fiscal year alone. Do you want me to tell you what happened when the previous government was in? They downloaded \$40 million to the county of Huron alone, and we also had the county of Bruce.

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I know that we're on a "spend" day today from the members across the way. We're on a "spend" day today; I understand that. Tomorrow we'll be on a "cut" day, but today we're on a "spend" day-and for the member from Wellington-Halton Hills to stand up and give his list of what he wants to see happen, when he sat in the previous government and cut, cut, cut, because those were "cut" days, but today we're having a "spend" day from the members across the way.

They'll also vote against the budget; I know they will-\$32 billion invested in infrastructure over two years, and then you'll say, "Well, that's the federal government. They're putting all their money in," and they are putting some money in. Of the \$32 billion, they're putting in \$5 billion. That's their contribution. Then in the same breath they'll argue, "You should do what the federal government does now for the rural municipalities." Well, we're doing far more than that. Look at my little municipality of South Bruce-\$19 million. You would subject my community to living with inadequate sewage capacity for another 100 years if your program came forward. I say to the member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke that that's not good enough for me. That's not good enough for my people. I know that you will vote against \$32 billion and I say

that's inappropriate. Roads and bridges funding, MIII, RIII: You guys have never seen the investments and you're all out there for the photo ops, you're all out there to cut your ribbon and you're all out there to bring your list forward, but by the same token you'll vote against that \$32 billion.

I say, come clean, tell us where you're going to cut if you form government again, and then my people will know the story. Thank you for allowing me to enter the debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mr. Ted Chudleigh: I think this motion is all about fairness. What he talks about here is that, "in the opinion of this House, the government of Ontario should amend the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act to provide that, when requested by a municipality, the Minister of Transportation shall not refuse to enter into an agreement with that municipality to provide a tax rebate under the Gasoline Tax Act to that municipality for a purpose related to public highways under the jurisdiction of that municipality." It's a reasonable resolution, a reasonable request.

The member also has a bill before the House that talks to the same issue. But here we have in Ontario two classes of citizens, two classes of municipalities: one that qualifies for a very specific grant dealing with, albeit public transportation, but it deals with the basis of transportation. On the other hand we have a number of municipalities in Ontario that don't have a system of public transportation within their municipalities, and they are excluded from this rebate. People in the excluded municipalities still require transportation. They provide it themselves, and that transportation should have the right to the same access to funds that the municipality with public transportation has in their grasp. So I think this whole resolution, this whole program, is one that looks at the fairness of treating Ontarians on a level playing field.

It isn't just in transportation that this exists. This exists in other parts of our society as well, and I find it particularly interesting and upsetting, perhaps, that it occurs in the town of Milton. Milton, of course, is the fastest-growing town in Ontario. It's growing at a rate that puts it as-this is interesting-the fastest-growing town of its size in the world. It grew about 15,000 people in the last two years. My riding, which includes Milton, has in excess of 200,000 people in it. Most ridings are in about 100,000; 107,000; 110,000. My riding has well in excess of that. I think it is about 220,000, but it's difficult to keep up because it's growing so quickly.

The province of Ontario funds certain things, certain administrative things, in hospitals, in municipalities, on the basis of census figures. The last census figure for Milton-Milton had census figures, I think, of 29,000 or close to 30,000, and here we are servicing currently 75,000, 80,000 people in Milton. Miltonians are being short-serviced by that amount from the population census, and that makes it very unfair.

The system of funding certain programs and health care in Ontario municipalities based on census population figures works well for perhaps 90% of Ontario, perhaps 85% of

Ontario. That program works well; that system works well. But when you get areas of high growth, it is distorted and it doesn't work well, and the gasoline tax and the rebate system add to the distortion of what is fair for all Ontarians.

It's very important that when we're dealing with Ontarians, whether it be in Moosonee, Kenora, Cornwall, downtown Toronto or any of the small towns-whether we're talking about the Teeswaters of Ontario or the medium-sized Guelphs or Chatham-sized towns-I think all of those towns have to be treated in an equal way with respect to their own needs and their own desires, as opposed to being dictated to from a central source at Queen's Park. People in the country, of course, refer to it as Toronto, but it's Queen's Park that is dictating the fact that Ontarians are treated differently in different communities, and I think that's inherently wrong.

I'll be pleased to support this member's motion and-

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Michael A. Brown: Just briefly to the member for Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke-and a good friend: He would be wanting to go back to all of those municipalities that he represents in his very fine riding and explaining to them that they can access this money. What they need to do is provide disability transportation within their communities, and they can access the money to do that. He would know that I have a number of communities in my constituency that do not operate mass transit systems and that feel that they have some reason to look after their folks with disabilities and make sure that they can go where they need to go, such as appointments. You can do that through this program if those municipalities choose to do it. So I know he would want to go back to his municipalities and say to them, "If you care about your people with disabilities, you can get the money, and this is how you do it."

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Further debate?

Mrs. Liz Sandals: I will be opposing this motion, so I will be up front about that, just as I opposed Bill 38, which the member previously put forward.

I support the gas tax and I support it going to public transit, because I share our government's commitment to public transit. In fact, we've invested \$17.4 billion in public transit since we came into office in 2003, and what we're seeing as a result of that is increased ridership and improved service, and I'm very proud of that.

We delivered on our commitment to provide two cents per litre of provincial gas tax revenues to municipalities. I am fortunate that Guelph, in fact, is one of the municipalities that receives that money. To date, Guelph has received \$11.3 million from this fund, and it's gone to very good use.

People who have ever used public transit in Guelph will know that, traditionally, it was like a daisy: Everything met in the middle. What we've done with the gas tax money is

introduced ring routes around the outside of the petals, and that's meant a huge improvement for people who are trying to get around by bus in Guelph. We've also been able to increase the frequency of the service, and again, that's made a huge difference in Guelph-very much appreciated.

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But the member from Renfrew has been talking about the fundamental issue of fairness. I think I disagree about what's fair, because the member from Renfrew left a piece of the story out. What the member from Renfrew didn't mention is that this government has a lot of programs for which only rural municipalities qualify.

Guelph is now over 100,000 people. That means we are not rural, and I don't complain about that; we're clearly not rural. But because we're not rural, we can't qualify for COMRIF; the member's municipalities can. We can't qualify for RED, rural economic development; the rural members can. My municipality doesn't get what's called OMPF any more, the Ontario municipal partnership fund. His municipalities can. In fact, if you look at his municipalities, when you look at just the roads and bridges portion of stuff they can qualify for that my municipality can't, they have received \$21 million from this government. That's double what my municipality got from the gas tax.

So I agree that there's a fundamental issue of fairness. It means that urban and rural both have their needs met, but it-

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): Thank you.

The honourable member from Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke has up to two minutes for his response.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I thank the members from Toronto-Danforth, Huron-Bruce, Wellington-Halton Hills, Brampton-Springdale, Halton, Algoma-Manitoulin and Guelph for their comments. I just want to touch on a couple of the points because I want to clarify something.

To the member from Toronto-Danforth, I want to make one thing perfectly clear: Never once have we ever talked about reducing the funding for public transportation as a result of this. This is about a fair share of gas tax. This is a \$109-billion budget this government is putting out. Michael Bryant can find \$2 billion extra in Dwight Duncan's extra pair of pants, for God's sake; we can find the money to fund public transportation. And for the members to impute that this is the only funding, then, that rural municipalities would be getting is absolutely preposterous. What the member for Huron-Bruce said-for goodness sake, the federal government gives gas tax. It also participates in infrastructure funding-billions of dollars. For them to make that kind of connection is ridiculous. There is more than one way to do it, as the member for Guelph has said.

What we're saying is, you fairly share the gas tax and we still deal with those issues. But we do not have, then, the totally inequitable situation of giving gas tax that is collected from rural people, taken out of rural people's pockets, and given to people who don't even drive cars. This is something that is absolutely wrong. So for them to try to equate those two things is preposterous at its outset and I'm trying to clarify that. Toronto is not limited to gas tax funding for transportation infrastructure. Toronto gets billions of dollars of funding over and above gas tax from the provincial share.

Their arguments are wrong. This is an issue of fairness. This is an issue of sharing the gas tax equally among those people who pay it, and it's time for them to do something fair in this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Jim Wilson): We'll vote on Mr. Yakabuski's ballot item in about 50 minutes.