

REMEMBER WHEN... ONE REP'S PERSPECTIVE

With the oncoming spring election in Manitoba, the news is dominated with campaign promises and platforms. "Politics as usual" the cynics would say. And perhaps this is true.

I personally have not been overly focused on campaign rhetoric. For this election, I have been looking for the deeper meaning. The deeper meaning to me is reading between the lines. It is easy to promise to cut the PST – but how do you protect front line services while taking in \$300 million less in revenue? This is what I refer to as reading between the lines.

Brian Pallister makes a series of announcements where he talks about creating a better government for Manitobans ... and a more transparent government for Manitobans. But these are just words. Read between the lines – What does creating a better government for Manitobans really mean? Does it mean out with the old and in with the new? If that is the case, then that is hardly a reason to vote for change.

A better government is one that has a platform that can be quantified with logic and reasoning. If you cut the PST, either something has to replace the lost revenue or services have to be cut. But Mr. Pallister just talks about improving services with less dollars. That is not transparent. That is merely a flashback to the 1990s.

And this is going to be the key point to the election in my opinion. Many public sector workers today were too young to remember the Gary Filmon Era; an era that Brian Pallister was a part of. If you were born after 1972, you mostly likely have not experienced the hacking and slashing of jobs in all sectors.

Times were tough – the Filmon government brought in "experts" like Connie Curran from the U.S. in an attempt to Americanize Health Care. Funding to the municipalities and School Division were cut. In the case of School Divisions, School Boards had to make cuts or freezes in wages, benefits and classroom sizes. This has a spiralling effect on all workers in school divisions – not just teachers.

For those who survived the cuts, wage freezes and rollbacks were the protocols of the era. And with Pallister's announcement that his government will not cut jobs, especially teachers, is not so reassuring if you read between the lines. Pallister personally will not cut any jobs or wages. But if he cuts funding to the Divisions, they will end up doing his hatchet work. Does it really matter who does the hatchet work when you are on the receiving end of the cuts and freezes? Is this transparency? I would say it is a gutless agenda. If your intention is to hack and slash the public sector, then just say so. If it is what you believe, why be secretive?

My fear is simple. Too often, voters are swayed by politicians who say what people want to hear, without a thorough explanation of how they can really do it. Does this sound familiar? Does this remind us of that guy seeking the Republican nomination down south? Perhaps you have heard about him – Donald Trump. All rhetoric and no substance. Platforms without substance; without explanations on how they can be implemented are akin to a Trump campaign (without the overt hatred and venom spewed).

Getting back to the point of how a Pallister government can cut taxes and yet live up to all of his promises. The answer from the Conservatives is, “we will trim the fat”. However, for those of you who work in the public service, you very well know that there is no fat to trim. Core services would have to be cut, or wages and benefits scaled down.

I do not think it is a coincidence that another Tory, Steven Harper, during his reign of terror, attacked the public service by trying to eliminate sick time, defined benefit pensions and wage reductions. If his government could not achieve it through free collective bargaining (which it could not), they just legislated them back to work the moment job action was taken.

And there is another way that they will propose savings. That will be through contracting out work, privatization and possibly use Private Public Partnerships (P3s) to achieve their real agenda – gutting the public service and giving away public sector work to their business sector friends.

We have been fortunate in Manitoba, as the use of P3s has been limited in this province. This is due to the current government enacting legislation to make P3s transparent under the law. When a P3 has to be transparent, the costs must be open to the public. When these real costs are exposed, a reasonable person can see that there is not only no savings – but it is equivalent to paying your mortgage with a credit card.

In the school sector, P3s would be the means that the Pallister government would build new schools and facilities. Over the long run, it would drive up costs to the Divisions resulting in higher taxes and/or budgetary issues which would impact the employees.

Contracting out would also see a loss in jobs, and in many cases, the higher end jobs for many CUPE members. The trades staff would be immediately vulnerable, and so would I.T. and on a grander scale, bussing services could be tendered out.

As for the issue of privatization, that too could happen in the school sector. Again, turning back the time machine to the Filmon Era, there was a mandate to support private school funding. Such a mandate comes at the expense of public schools. This would create job loss to employees, while quality of education becomes an issue of income level rather than a level playing field.

So maybe I am a cynic too. But I need platforms at election time that make sense. Promises without substance, or not commenting on how one plans to make their campaign promises until they are elected to see what they are inheriting, is avoidance - pure and simple. Essentially, the Conservatives are asking Manitobans to enter into a deal on the principle of trust. Based on their previous record, that is a deal that I cannot enter into.

I would rather see honest policies, even though I do not agree with them, than a blank cheque and promise that cannot be honoured. I do not think I can take a Filmon 2.0 government. Can you?

This is one Rep's perspective...

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