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Political divide threatens 'big heart' solution on NDIS

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Social affairs reporter

Scott Morrison's plan to utilise Australia's "big hearts" to fund the NDIS is under threat, with both Labor and the Greens raising concerns over the funding plan.

The Treasurer said it was time to put politics aside and ensure the National Disability Insurance Scheme was fully funded.

It was a shift to the middle for the government, which had previously linked funding the \$22 billion scheme to its doomed omnibus bill, ditching the threats and moving to an increase of the Medicare levy to raise \$8 billion over four years, spreading the cost across all working Australians.

On Wednesday Mr Morrison made it personal, telling the story of his brother-in-law Gary Warren, a fireman diagnosed with progressive multiple sclerosis in 1999.

"People, he's told me, are enormously generous, not just happy to help, but keen to help," Mr Morrison told the National Press Club, where Mr Warren was in the audi-

ence. "He said, it's not flash being disabled, it's not flash. But if there's anything good about it, he said, it's that you're disabled in Australia.

"That's an incredibly generous statement about the big heart of Australians. He and I both know they have big hearts. I don't know a finer man than Gary Warren.

"So last night I was very proud to declare that as a Treasurer in the Turnbull government, we would fully fund the National Dis-

ability Insurance Scheme. That's what this is about. That story."

Five-time paralympian Kurt Fearnley, who earlier this year sparked debate when he accused the government of using the NDIS as a "political football", described the budget measure as "bloody fantastic". "I am shocked and amazed and also excited that for the first time in a few years this won't be brought up as a political thing," he said.

"My thoughts are we have solved a problem - it needed to be funded and if Australians can look at this levy increase and see the benefits to our community - honestly it is a

relief. Now we can get on to bigger problems we still have to address, like engaging people with disabilities into the workforce, engaging in

education, engaging them in the tourism industry. But this, it's done. And that is amazing."

But Labor has not committed to supporting the increase in the Medicare levy from 2 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

The opposition maintains the 2013-14 budget it handed down following the Gillard government's creation of the scheme fully funded the NDIS by increasing the Medicare levy itself and "a number of savings measures". But a change in government, and a blowout in the scheme's cost, had left a hole.

Professor Hal Kendig at the ANU Centre for Research on Ageing, Health and Wellbeing said no previous government had fully funded the scheme, despite their ambitions.