

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 28 NOVEMBER**HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: My apologies for keeping you waiting, every one. I was just waiting on Minister Hipkins to arrive. Good afternoon. Cabinet met today and discussed the horrific homicide that occurred last week in Sandringham. [*Missing audio*] Given the matter is before the courts, I can't say much more at this time, other than to acknowledge how important it is that justice is done. But we also need to continue to do all we can to prevent crimes being committed against workers and shop owners.

In 2018, we stepped up our investment in aggravated robbery prevention initiatives, which resulted in the roll-out of over 1,000 fog cannons. Previously, the initiative set up by the last Government, following an increase in aggravated robberies in 2016, had a much more narrow scope. We know these installations have made a difference, but, in that time, we've now seen ram raids increase. In May, we established a \$6 million crime prevention fund, managed by Police, to install bollards or other protection structures in front of businesses being targeted by ram raids. More than a hundred shops have had installations approved, with 431 security measures under way, including 93 fog cannons, 78 security sirens, 57 alarms, 63 CCTV systems, 43 sets of bollards, and 36 roller doors.

At the same time, we also see a concerted effort by police to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice, and that is having an impact. This year, there have been 517 ram raids. In response, there have been 360 prosecutions and 145 youth referrals. This will be, in part, one of the reasons why, so far this month, we've seen a decrease in ram raids from the high point in August to 13 this month thus far. But, over the last few weeks, Cabinet has been looking at how we can better support businesses, and has signed off today an additional package to continue to tackle retail crime. This includes: (1) a new \$4 million fund to support local council crime prevention programmes, to be matched dollar for dollar with councils themselves; (2) expanding the \$6 million retail crime prevention fund to include aggravated robberies committed during the past 12 months; and (3) a \$4,000 subsidy for all small shops and dairies to install a fog cannon if they choose—not just those who have been the victim of a crime.

We have been working with councils over the past month, including meeting with mayors, to find out from them what will help prevent the kinds of crimes we've been seeing in their communities. As I've mentioned, today we're announcing we will match local councils dollar for dollar to fund these initiatives, which are likely to be focused on crime prevention through environmental design measures like street lighting and CCTV cameras. I've heard from local businesses about their desire to see an increase in these kinds of resources to reduce crime; unfortunately, it's often taken huge time and expense. That's why we have been talking with councils about what more we can do to support these initiatives. We've been working alongside, in particular, Mayor Paula Southgate, who put this idea to us—and \$1 million of the fund will go towards these kinds of measures in Hamilton; \$2 million of the fund will match Auckland Council dollar for dollar; and \$1 million will do the same across councils in the Bay of Plenty region. We have targeted those areas that have experienced a particular spike in retail crime. I expect councils will already be investing in these areas, and this fund will supplement those efforts.

We will also expand the criteria for the retail crime prevention fund. This fund was designed to support ram-raided businesses, given the increases we saw in this area, but we also want to ensure we prioritise support for those businesses who have experienced an aggravated robbery in the past year. But we also don't want to wait for small businesses who feel vulnerable to have a crime committed before they can install what is one of the best preventative measures we have. That's why

a subsidy of \$4,000 will be available to small retailers who wish to install a fog cannon. They'll be able to go through an authorised supplier list, meaning they'll not have to pay for the full cost upfront. Further details around the parameters of this programme will be provided over the coming week. This will be the first time the fog cannon and ram-raid funds have operated at the same time. We are aware of supply chain issues but, despite that, I'm advised that Police have been successful in ordering an extra 455 fog cannons, which are expected to arrive before Christmas. This adds to the 270 that are currently in the country and have been allocated to affected shops. I'm advised that these constraints are in part due to the global demand for fog cannons. It appears that New Zealand is not alone in the current experience we are having.

Finally, we will also continue with the work we are doing with young offenders and their families. Evidence shows that what we are doing is working, with around half of the most serious and repeat young offenders that were identified and targeted through the Better Pathways package now back in education or training. Reoffending amongst this cohort has also reduced. As Ministers, we've also gone over all the tools available to deal with young offenders in these areas. There are many, including the use of the courts. We're concerned by reports that not all of these tools are being accessed where the public might expect, and continue to actively look at ways to resolve this issue.

To conclude, the extra initiatives we're announcing today make up the most significant crime prevention financial package in recent memory, but one of the most important things we can also do is to continue to support the police. We've grown our police force to its largest level in our country's history, with over 1,600 police over and above attrition added since 2017, a turn-around from the declining numbers we inherited. Every year since taking office, we've also increased the policing budget, including by a record 16 percent in the 2019-20 year. This compares to two years of frozen budgets under National, and other years that saw increases of between just 1 and 2 percent. We must continue to ensure that any debate on crime is based on fact, evidence, investment, and change. I am committed to that. Minister Hipkins and I are now happy to take your questions.

Media: You've spoken about the reasons for delays and that, but how quickly are retailers going to be able to practically access some of these things? Because you see the outcry of anger on the streets at the weekend and today. They want that now.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Let's be clear: we won't be able to do this overnight. There is a supply constraint. By putting this initiative out there, though, we do expect that the business community who provide these services will be able to ramp up their delivery. That won't happen immediately, but the businesses will be able to access the subsidy as soon as the businesses are able to install the fog cannons for them.

Media: Has the Government been too slow to act, then, on recognising the extent of this problem?

PM: No. As I've said, since we've come into office, we've rolled out a thousand of these already in store. We've also put in place a specific programme to not just put in place fog cannons but other preventative measures for businesses. What we're doing today is now vastly expanding who can access that. Any small business, basically, who feels vulnerable and fits that definition of a small business will be able to access a fog cannon through an authorised supplier list. That removes a lot of the barriers to access. One point, as we've continued to make, though: there is a global issue with access to these pieces of kit, because this appears to be an issue that not just New Zealand is facing.

Media: With the death of—

Media: Because—

PM: We've enough got time to keep scanning around.

Media: [*Inaudible*] around this issue. Do the stats bear out this problem, to be as big as what it seems, or is it just that [*Inaudible*]

PM: Look, the first thing I'd say: it is understandable that right now there is a huge amount of emotion, and it is true that we have seen a spike of particular activity around retail crime. What is not true is to say that we've seen this escalation across all types of criminal activity or that we've seen a general across-the-board increase in youth crime. Ninety-two percent of retail offending is committed by adults. Aggravated robberies across some of these different types is actually less than it was five years ago. So we have a particular problem that we are going in and targeting hard.

Media: It took a death for the Government to act today, though—

PM: I disagree.

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: Absolutely—

Media: [*Inaudible*]

PM: The council funding that we have announced today was put before Cabinet prior to this death. We're announcing it today. The youth initiatives were announced and put in place prior to today. In fact, one of the very meetings that we had around what more we could do on youth offending was held last Wednesday. We've continued to look at this issue as we have seen what is happening in our communities. We continue to announce as we work up additional proposals, because we do see the issues, and we know we need to respond.

Media: There were hundreds of people outside your electorate office today. Why did you choose not to make an appearance?

PM: I was, obviously, chairing Cabinet and working through additional initiatives that we can put in place to respond to the requests we've had from the community to make sure that we do everything we can to keep them safe. What we announced today is all about that.

Media: The resounding message that was being heard from those protestors was "Enough is enough." Is it enough?

PM: Again, our job as Government is to make sure that we do all we can to keep our small-business owners and operators and workers safe. What we're announcing today is focused squarely on that.

Media: What is your message today for people who were outside your office—in terms of what's your message?

PM: I've spoken directly to some of those business owners and operators. I hear what they're telling us about the spike they've seen. We can see it in particular parts of retail crime. That's what these initiatives are focused on. For the first time in New Zealand's history, we have now a regime that means that, if you're a small-business owner that feels vulnerable to these kinds of issues, even if you haven't experienced them, you'll be able to get a significant amount of support from the Government to put in preventative measures.

Media: And, in terms of today's package, what does success look like?

PM: Ultimately, our goal is to make sure people feel safe at work. No one should go to their place of work feeling that they are vulnerable to senseless violence and crime. This is one part of what we can continue to do to make sure that people can go to work safely.

Media: People were actually looking for answers around why this Sandringham dairy didn't have these protections. Is the expansion to include aggravated robberies a direct outcome of those discussions?

PM: Actually, that was in place, as well, in the last expansion that we had. So I talked a little bit about this this morning: as far as we're able to ascertain, the dairy in question had an aggravated robbery, or a robbery, in 2016. At that time, the last Government put in place a fog-cannon initiative that was very narrow—you had to have experienced repeat offences in order to qualify. When we came into Government, we expanded it significantly. In fact, by the 2019 year, if you'd experienced one aggravated robbery in the last, I believe, 12 months, you were eligible for a fog cannon. Three years have passed, though, since that particular dairy had experienced that kind of event. So, as far as I can ascertain, they had fallen between two programmes. That's as far as I can ascertain. What we are doing today removes that, because now we have available a subsidy that says, regardless of whether you have experienced crime or violence, you will be able to access this preventative measure and this subsidy from Government.

Media: Have any Labour MPs met with the protestors today?

PM: I couldn't tell you that with any certainty, forgive me—after Cabinet, we've come straight in to preparing for this and then speaking with you.

Media: [*Inaudible*] impact by the depth of feeling, though? I mean, there were huge numbers today. Was that surprising to you?

PM: Not necessarily. This is about the safety of community; this is about the ability of people to go to work and feel safe. I absolutely understand the strength of feeling around that, but this package today is about responding to that. I also do want to make sure that people have access to the facts and evidence that exist around criminal activity currently in New Zealand. Yes, we have had a spike—in particular, retail crime. But it is not, as claimed, across the board—as some may have claimed. Regardless, one is one too many, and that is why we will continue to do all we can.

Media: Was retail crime a blind spot for this Government, though?

PM: No. And, again, as I say, when we came into office, we did not reduce any sentences around this area. We did not reduce our activity in this area. We increased it. We've the largest number of police on record—1,600 more on the front line. We have half a billion dollars in the last Budget alone that have gone to Police and resourcing, and we've widened the eligibility to fog cannons in particular significantly. We have increased—not decreased—what we've done in all of these areas.

Media: How worried are you, though, politically about how damaging this is?

PM: In my mind, this is not about politics. It's about making sure we do what works, we support our community, and we ensure people feel safe. I think we'd be better off if we're all able to make sure we focus on fixing the problem, rather than the politics of the problem.

Media: Have you spoken directly to Retail NZ and directly to retailers about what they would like? And what have [*Inaudible*]

PM: I've spoken to business associations particularly. I know Ministers have broader conversations.

Hon Chris Hipkins: I haven't spoken to Retail NZ in the last week or so, but I have spoken to them previously, and the sorts of things that we're talking about are along the lines of the feedback that they have given us. And, in terms of the meeting even here—with some of the small-business representatives who I've met with here in

Auckland—much of what we've announced today is along the lines of what they've been asking us to do.

Media: How would something like fog cannons have helped in the Sandringham case, though? Because that was obviously outside the dairy. You know, that's not, I guess, stopping the [*Inaudible*]

PM: Look, I think here, at this point in time, what we are expressing is our deep, deep sorrow at what has happened in that case. No one, I think, wants to make any assumptions about what could or couldn't have happened in that case, based on different actions. I think, ultimately, what we need to do as Government is make sure that, as we move forward, we support our retailers as much as we can based on the feedback we're hearing from them. But I'm very concerned about anything that could be perceived as judgment against that particular scenario.

Media: You're still preparing for a slow start in fog cannon installations. Why can't you get it done more urgently?

PM: Yeah, look, it's not that we are planning for that; it, unfortunately, is the reality of access to supply globally. And some of the issue is that, where we already have, for instance, a ram raid that's occurred, you need the store front to be reinstated before you're able to put in place other initiatives. That means, often, insurers coming to the party so that glass can be up, so that roller doors can be installed, and bollards put in place. Those are some of the barriers that police have been facing; it's one of the reasons I've asked Ministers to reach out to the Insurance Council and make sure they're also coming to the party to help speed things up.

Media: You say you want workers to feel safe going to work, but there have been stories in the media for months now about workers feeling fearful getting up in the morning and going to their shop. How can you say that you weren't too slow?

PM: Again, here I just reflect on what we've already done. Our increase in police has been for the very fact that we want to make sure that anyone who commits these crimes is brought to justice. That's how you prevent reoffending and further victimisation. Half a billion dollars went in the last Budget to support Police to be able to do just that. Secondly, the retail crime prevention fund was obviously set up to directly support businesses with this particular type of offending. Police have also established the retail crime prevention unit, because they saw the spike and they've been working hard to increase prosecutions and resolve what is, in some cases, a network of individuals working across different areas. What we are doing today is continuing to expand based on what we are learning and from what we're hearing from businesses.

Media: Given that owners are desperate to defend themselves, would you ever consider something like allowing access to pepper spray?

PM: I think the focus here—and I'll have the Minister speak to this—our focus has to be keeping people safe. The concern we have is that, when you get into the question of arming shop owners, the advice from Police is that does not make people safer.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, there's very clear evidence—from New Zealand and from around the world—that where shop owners are put in a position where they have to defend themselves more, where they are more actively engaged with potential offenders, they're actually putting themselves and potentially other customers at greater risk. One of the reasons fog cannons are very effective is that they're very safe for the person who is deploying them. They do de-escalate the risk almost immediately, and the evidence of reoffending after a fog cannon has been deployed is very low. So, very few businesses where a fog cannon has been deployed have been the subject of re-victimisation. So they work. That's one of the reasons why we want to see their expansion.

- Media:** Are you considering changing the law around youth offenders to [*Inaudible*] young, 12- and 13-year-olds. What work is being done there to fix the problem?
- PM:** Well, actually, as I say, 92 percent of retail crime—or prospective retail crime—is committed by adults. So that is still where the vast proportion of that criminal offending is taking place across the board. We have seen particular issue, though, with some young people engaging in ram raids. And that's why we've looked at the way that the law applies from 12 all the way up to 17. Now, the point I've made today: there are tools available to the Police and to Oranga Tamariki. You can take either a care and protection route if the child is particularly young, or you're also able to access the courts, because these crimes do attract significant penalties—it's 10 years for a burglary, 14 for an aggravated robbery. So those tools are there. Our concern is they are not being used as the public—nor indeed we—would expect. So we are looking at what may need to be done to ensure that they are.
- Media:** Why aren't they being used?
- PM:** It seems to be a number of issues. In some cases, the time it takes, for instance, to go through the Family Court if it's a young child. In other cases, it's whether or not the repeat offence provisions are being used. We are working through those as we speak, because, in our view, the tools that we have aren't always being taken up. The final point, though: 12- and 13-year-olds, I think we can all agree, if you see offending at that age, it is not just an issue with the young person; clearly there are issues at play with the family. It's one of the reasons we've had a programme that has targeted, roughly, 70 young people that we believe have been engaged in this type of activity. Almost half of them are now reengaged back in education and training as a result of that work.
- Media:** The fact that this is simply not being fully used as it should be—isn't that a sign that the system's failing?
- PM:** Not necessarily. Again, it is an area where we're continuing to work with Police and Justice to identify—again, it's not the case that nothing happens. In some cases, some of the interventions may not be as swift as we like. So that's why we continue to work through. But it is not fair to say that there are no tools to deal with young people or that they cannot go through our justice system; they can.
- Media:** The main complaint, though, of some of the protest today has been that police are not responding to those minor crimes, like shoplifting, reported through 105. Would you like to see police investigating those—you know, every complaint—before it escalates to something more serious?
- Hon Chris Hipkins:** As Minister, of course, I can't direct the police in terms of where they direct their resource, but I refute the allegation that police aren't following up on crimes that are reported to them. The introduction of 105 as a hotline has made the reporting of crime much easier and, therefore, the proportion of crimes that are being reported to the police has gone up. On one level, I think that's encouraging, because it means that police now have greater visibility of crimes which previously didn't get reported at all. But I can say that police do take these crimes very seriously. If you think about retail crime, as the statistics that the Prime Minister has just mentioned show, police have been very active in pursuing those young offenders.
- PM:** Also, I think worth noting: the police themselves have a focus on retail crime, because of when, in some cases, they may see escalation—that's why they established the national retail crime unit. It has been focused on, for instance, if they see particular syndicates of activity, being able to gather the intelligence around that and make sure they properly prosecute it. They've had considerable success around those interventions, and they're taking the lead on some of the work we're doing with retailers now. That national retail crime unit has not always

existed. That is a more recent initiative based on the fact that they have also seen, alongside Government, the particular spike we've experienced.

Media: This scheme of the councils, can you explain a little bit of why you decided to—

PM: Yeah, so two reasons. In conversations with the Mayor of Hamilton, one of the issues that's been raised is, of course, with the National Crime Prevention Fund, it's focused on a particular shop. It doesn't necessarily then give you the ability, if you have a business district, to then support what may be other crime prevention initiatives that can make a difference. That may be lighting. It may be the installation of CCTV cameras. It may even be the use of particular placement of concrete planter boxes that may prevent, for instance, ram raids in a wider area. Our response to that has been a partnership with council, to say, in order to increase the scale of what they're able to do, we'll come to the party with a million dollars for Hamilton, two million for Auckland, and one million for the Bay of Plenty, to expand and scale up what they're doing in that space. I know that that is important to our businesses. I heard recently that, in Auckland, there have been cases where simple requests for lighting and CCTV have taken an inordinate amount of time. I hope this will speed up the pace.

Media: And how have you come up with those caps for the—are there caps for the various regions? So Auckland's is going to be double Hamilton's?

PM: Yeah, so it's based on, obviously, where we've seen the most activity around these issues. Keep in mind as well—so, yes, Hamilton has, I believe, 14 percent of some of the ram raid activity nationally. Auckland obviously has a large proportion, but they also, within them, will also have in some cases larger business districts that will also have different funding streams. So, look, that initial funding we've put in. We know that Hamilton has welcomed it. Mayor Brown, who I just spoke to, has also welcomed it. We believe it will be a catalyst for some important initiatives.

Media: How many small businesses do you estimate will be seeking help from these initiatives?

PM: Yeah, so we know that the number who have experienced an aggravated robbery in the last year is smaller than those who have experienced a ram raid. So that category, that extension, is relatively small, from those who have had that aggravated robbery experience. For, generally, the access—we would be speculating on the number that may seek to install a fog cannon. At the moment, we're putting in \$10 million to support that initiative, but, again, it will be demand driven.

Media: Is that thought to be enough at this stage, or is there the potential for it to go higher?

PM: Again, it will be demand driven, and this is our initial, upfront investment.

Media: Why did it take so long to realise that the scheme was broken?

PM: Again, you know, I just come back to the fact that we've been making implementations and changes to these programmes for a number of weeks and months based on what we're seeing. A thousand fog cannons had already been installed across those who had experienced, previously, aggravated burglaries. The number of those who were having that experience was much, much smaller compared to ram raids, which is why that was where that funding was focused. Today, we're saying: if you feel vulnerable, we want you to be able to access support.

Media: Is there any update on your three-waters entrenchment?

PM: Yes, there is. We had a discussion as a Cabinet, today, around the three-waters debate last week and entrenchment provisions. Two important points to make. The provisions themselves apply to the privatisation of water assets. Labour is very,

very clear: we do not want to see—ever—the privatisation of water assets. There's a number of initiatives in the bill itself that prevent that from occurring. The Green Party put forward a proposal around entrenchment. Now, entrenchment tends to have a 75 percent threshold, but, on this occasion, a novel 60 percent was put before Parliament and passed. Understandably, there have been those with a constitutional law background who have raised principle concerns around where entrenchment is used—slightly different to the subject matter and whether it was justified; just to the principle of its use. We agree: we do need to be cautious about where the principle of entrenchment. Our plan is to go back to the Business Committee, discuss where entrenchment is used more broadly, and look to resolve the issue. I haven't got a final outcome for you today, but we will consider it and discuss it with other political parties.

Media: Had the Greens discussed that SOP with you before coming to the House—

PM: Oh—

Media: —and did you know [*Inaudible*]

PM: I know there was discussion around 75 percent. The level of awareness—I could not tell you around the lower threshold. But that was one of the issues that was a more novel approach to entrenchment. Again, though, coming back to the two principles, we still stand firm against the privatisation of water assets, and I'd ask that other political parties be clear on their view on that issue; let's deal separately with the principle of entrenchment.

Media: Why not say [*Inaudible*] privatisation? Why are you now [*Inaudible*]

PM: Simply because, again, we stand firm on the issue of privatisation. We haven't resiled from that at all. There are a number of initiatives in the bill to prevent that ever from occurring. Having a political pledge from other parties would, I think, give extra confidence to the public. Here, though, we saw a more novel use of entrenchment. I do think it's right that we go back and discuss with the Parliament its use in this case.

Media: Are you surprised that National and ACT, then, are actually opposing this, given one of the key criticisms of three waters has been concern about privatisation?

PM: I think probably I was a bit more surprised when we originally sought political consensus to never privatise the assets, and we weren't able to receive that commitment. I'll seek it again. I think it's one way we can give the public confidence. But, on the principle of entrenchment, look, as a Parliament, I think it is worth us discussing how we make sure we preserve that.

Media: Aren't you in this mess because Parliament was doing too much in urgency?

PM: No.

Media: Some of our legal department [*Inaudible*]

PM: I've probably covered an answer to that, but—

Media: Would you categorise this as just careless lawmaking, then?

PM: No—no, I wouldn't.

Media: Minister Hipkins, you were in the House. Were you aware that this was [*Inaudible*]

Hon Chris Hipkins: In answer to the second question, no. In terms of the entrenchment provision, the last I had heard, the proposal was for a 75 percent entrenchment, which would have failed with only Labour and the Greens supporting it. So I wasn't aware, until after the fact, that that had been lowered to 60 percent. I wasn't in the House at the time that it happened.

PM: Just to be clear, though: there was nothing procedurally different around the fact that political parties, during a committee stage, will put up their SOPs in real time. That is absolutely how, within urgency and outside of urgency, amendments can occur. That is not any different to any other debate in Parliament—so just to be clear on that. What was novel was some of the thresholds that were used for entrenchment; that is not something Parliament usually has before it.

Media: So did Labour realise what it was voting for at the time, then, [*Inaudible*]

PM: Again, I think, to be fair, the principle of entrenchment has generally attracted a 75 percent threshold. Everyone in Labour was very aware of that. What would have been happening in real time is you had both an entrenchment provision but a different threshold. I think, again, just to be clear, that the important point here is that, as a party, we remain committed we will never oversee the privatisation of these assets. I think it would be useful if other political parties who believed that pledged that publicly. Then, separately, we can resolve the entrenchment issue.

Media: Do you have a preference for what you'd like to see once it goes back to committee—

PM: I think the points that are being made by those who are observers and who have a background in constitutional law is a fair one, and I think we would want to make sure that we preserve the special cases for entrenchment. That actually is a wider issue I think Parliament should give some discussion to.

Media: So you're saying you wouldn't like to see this particular—

PM: I do think that we have to seek a resolution on this issue. We remain very firm, though, on the principle that it applied to.

Media: Do you know where you think that line should be—

PM: Again, I think this is actually, given it's an issue that affects all parties in Parliament and regardless of who's in Government, something that would be worth us making sure that we do have guardrails in place for its use. Again, it doesn't change our position on the issue of privatisation.

Media: [*Inaudible*] aware that this was an issue [*Inaudible*]

PM: As I've just explained, often SOPs will happen in real time. I can't tell you how much notice was given on the floor, on this particular SOP, but that's not something I would necessarily be aware of.

Media: Just for Minister Hipkins, back on crime: standing today, how do you describe the state of crime in New Zealand? Are we in a crisis?

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, as I've always been clear, I don't want to put a label on things that can be misleading. Ultimately, if you're the victim of crime, it's a crisis for you, regardless of what that crime is, and we should always acknowledge that. And that's why as a Government we have been really working with the police, providing police with extra resources, so that they can get out there and they can tackle crime. It's not just through the police that we're dealing with that, though. As Minister of Education, as Minister for the Public Service, I can tell you that right the way across Government we've got a whole programme of work that's designed to prevent crime from happening in the first place. I would far rather that police were responding to fewer criminal events rather than having to respond to the number that they do. And so, you know, this is a fairly comprehensive programme of work that we've got, but I'm not going to put a slogan around it. I think it's far more important that we actually get underneath the causes, we make sure we're dealing with those, and that we provide effective support to those who have been the victims.

Media: Was banning three-strikes [*Inaudible*] the penalties for aggravated robbery?

PM: No, because they apply to individual criminal activity, and that doesn't change.

Media: But [*Inaudible*]

PM: Again, we have not reduced the penalty for aggravated robbery. We have not reduced the penalty for burglary. In fact, if you compare toe to toe National and Labour's record, we've invested more in police consistently, we've increased police numbers consistently, we've put in place more initiatives around reducing gun crime, we've put in place a gun register, we've increased the penalties that exist for possessing illegal weapons, we've also increased the tools available to police around gangs—a number of those initiatives the National Party didn't support. I'm happy to debate this issue based on evidence and fact, but I will not—I will not—stand by and have anyone call this Government soft on crime; we have been the opposite: firm and fact-based.

Media: Why does the [*Inaudible*] funding announcement for nurses not include nurses working in general practice?

PM: Yeah, a good question. So here we've been really concerned to make sure that we don't see a loss of our nursing workforce across those areas where it continues to be critical that we maintain service. Aged care in particular—you had a gap in pay between what they call the "funded sector" aged care and those working in our public health system, like hospitals. We're trying to bridge that gap, and that's what we're doing today. The issue we have with nurses in GP practices: the evidence isn't there to tell us that there is a gap that exists. We'll continue to work alongside primary care to establish if this is in fact an issue.

Media: Meanwhile [*Inaudible*] rejected the recent Government [*Inaudible*]

PM: We have the education Minister available for that question.

Hon Chris Hipkins: Look, we'll continue to negotiate with teachers in good faith. I don't think any Government has ever reached an immediate settlement with the teacher unions on the first offer. So we'll continue to talk to them—can't really add to that.

Media: What is the future for Ruapehu ski field? I know that MBIE has received John Fisk's report.

PM: Yeah, and, look, I haven't got anything additionally that I can share today. Our focus, of course, is an outcome where, as best as we're able, we see, regardless of what happens, that people continue to be employed and we continue to see economic development in the region. So that's our focus, but there are a number of different ways that that outcome can be reached.

Media: On public media, did Simon Bridges approach the ministry of culture seeking a directorship of Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media, or was it a recommendation from the broadcasting Minister that he be appointed?

PM: Look, I can't speak to any approaches or discussions on such issues, and I have nothing to add or to announce on any particular future membership.

Media: Did Cabinet discuss that today?

PM: No.

Media: Would it be appropriate for a former MP to be the chair of the board?

PM: Again, this is highly speculative, and I have nothing further to say on this area nor any impending announcements on this area—but what you're sharing is highly speculative.

Media: Prime Minister, today is the anniversary of the Mount Erebus crash. On that point, do you go by your promise last year that you'll—

PM: I do—absolutely. I am firm and resolute that the families who lost their family members in that enormous national disaster deserve a memorial. It is one of New Zealand's largest disasters, and, to me, it is just wrong that we don't have a memorial for them, a place of quiet reflection, and a recognition of what hurt was caused over a number of years in the aftermath. I remain incredibly disappointed that we haven't been able to do that to date, but remain committed to it, and we'll continue to work with families as we finally fulfil that commitment. I do want to thank Ngāti Whātua for caring so well for families today.

Media: On the Christchurch Call, are the Twitter lay-offs and what's going on there affecting that, and how worried are you about that?

PM: Look, a good question. Obviously, some of the lay-offs we've seen have obviously been in the content management space. And so, in recent times, we have seen reports of additional postings of the terrorist video from March 15. Officials have acted quickly to raise with Twitter where we have seen that, and the advice that we've received from Twitter is that they have not changed their view on membership of the Christchurch Call to Action, and we will continue to maintain our expectation that they do everything they can on a day-to-day basis to remove that content but also to reduce terrorist content and violent extremist content online, as they've committed to.

Media: Are you worried, then, that Twitter—what's going on at Twitter is going to have an impact on that?

PM: Look, time will tell, but we have seen nothing specific from them to say that they resile from their commitments to the Christchurch call to action, and we will continue to act as though they maintain the commitments they have made to us.

Media: And, just on that entrenchment issue again, when you go back and discuss—

PM: You mean with the Business Committee?

Media: Yeah. Will you also look at when entrenchment is appropriate and provide clearer guidelines around that?

PM: Yeah, I think what this issue has raised—as I've said, this was, what was put before Parliament was, a more novel approach to entrenchment than what it is currently commonly understood as a threshold to be used currently. So that's one of the issues that's arisen. Our plan is to go back and just discuss more broadly the issue of where and how entrenchment is used. I think it's important that, regardless of the Government of the day, we can have confidence that these provisions are used appropriately, and that's in everyone's interest.

Media: In China, there have been some pretty major protests and also reports of people being arrested at large and assaulted in police custody. Are you concerned about their freedom to protest—does New Zealand support that—and what do you think about these protests?

PM: Again, I'll make a very broad comment, and it's the same comment I would give regardless of whether or not you were raising with me protests in China or protests in Iran: New Zealand believes very strongly in the importance of the freedom to protest safely and non-violently, and we hold that position regardless of the country in which protest will be occurring. OK, thank you, everyone.

conclusion of press conference