

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2023
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Good afternoon, everybody. Before I get into the post-Cabinet update, I do just want to take a moment to acknowledge the passing of the Hon Chester Borrows. Chester and I served on a number of select committees together. He served as Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives at a time when I held a variety of different roles connected to the House and Opposition. I always found him to be a really honest straight-shooter, someone who I really enjoyed working with, someone who was passionate about his local community, and an all-round thoroughly decent bloke. So I want to send my sympathies and my condolences to his family and just acknowledge his passing.

Cabinet met this morning to discuss the ongoing response to Cyclone Gabrielle and our plan to build back from it better, safer, and smarter. The new extreme weather response committee, chaired by Grant Robertson, also met this afternoon for the first time.

Our response efforts over the last week continue to track positively. The number of households without power now sits at around 2,900—most of those being in and around Napier. That's down from a peak of over 200,000. Just after the cyclone hit, there were 296 schools and 477 early childhood centres that were closed; today, those numbers are down to 25 schools and 62 early childhood education centres—almost all of those, again, in the Hawke's Bay and Tai Rāwhiti area. The mobile network is largely back to normal. And eight sections of the State highway are currently closed, which is down from 21 a week ago. The number of people sheltering in a civil defence centre is down to about 80. So a really big thankyou to the many crews, volunteers, and the other organisations that have helped to make these things happen in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

The national state of emergency will continue, particularly for Tai Rāwhiti and the Hawke's Bay. For the other regions, we will be looking to move them to a national transition phase, and that could be as early as a few days' time from now.

The death toll still stands at 11, and the number of people not accounted for is down to four—police are continuing their search efforts. At its height, that number was around 7,000, so it's been a pretty incredible amount of progress made by the New Zealand Police.

Cyclone Gabrielle has been our most devastating and deadly weather event in a generation. While we're through the worst of the emergency response phase, it's clear that the road to recovery is going to be a long one. The cyclone's estimated to have caused more weather-related damage and disruption to businesses and the primary sector than any other event since Cyclone Bola in 1988. Four hundred kilometres of State highway were closed at its peak, and, once tallied, the number of affected sections of local roads is expected to far surpass that. We've got a huge job ahead to assess our transport and our electricity networks, and to work out where we can repair them and where we'll need to find different solutions. Whichever options are taken, we do know that the cost is likely to be in the billions of dollars.

Homes and community assets, like sports clubs, have been hit hard too, and, when you add the damage from the January flooding, up to 9,000 homes have had to be assessed to see whether they're safe to live in. As of two weeks ago, more than 40,000 insurance claims were registered, and that number is expected to continue to rise. As many as 1,800 households in Auckland alone may need temporary accommodation, and that's also expected to grow significantly when assessments in other affected regions have been completed. I'm committed, and the Government is committed, to standing shoulder to shoulder with the affected regions on that journey. We'll back them and we will partner with them to lead their local responses.

So far, we've provided an initial \$25 million to help businesses meet their immediate costs, and more than \$25 million to support farmers and growers. That money's being paid out locally by groups that know those communities well. We freed up a quarter of a billion

dollars in immediate short-term support to help fix the roading network—that's national and local roads—and we've paid out more than \$51 million so far in civil defence payments to 94,000 people. We're fast-tracking visa applications for skilled workers that we need to bring into the country to help drive our recovery efforts. But we know that there is more to come, and there is more to do.

Recovery is not a job we can do alone, so today we are looking for support from our friends and partners. I'm pleased to announce the launch of an international fund-raising appeal and a special Lotto draw on 18 March to help support our recovery efforts. The appeal is modelled on the Christchurch Earthquake Appeal that raised over \$94 million to assist the rebuild and revitalisation of Christchurch, following the earthquake in 2011.

In terms of the damage caused, Gabrielle, and before that the Auckland floods, has affected millions of people and many thousands of businesses and farmers. These areas account for around 30 percent of New Zealand's land area and are special to so many people both here and abroad, so I know that there'll be a real appetite to support them to get back on to their feet as soon as possible. We'll be looking to attract international donations to supplement the generosity of New Zealanders. The appeal will be overseen by a charitable trust. The Department of Internal Affairs chief executive, Paul James; the former Mayor of Napier Barbara Arnott; and Ngati Porou's Selwyn Parata will be the trustees. The appeal will focus on medium- to longer-term recovery projects that ensure that the regions build back better and with greater resilience, better prepared to withstand the next extreme weather event.

I want to thank Westpac, Colenso, and Colenso BBDO, who have been working tirelessly over the recent days to make this appeal a reality, and thanks also for Facebook, who have offered to promote the appeal. I feel a real sense of national unity in the aftermath of the cyclone, and it's heart-warming to see so many donations and other offers of assistance already. Every little bit does make a difference. Just to give you a few details, if I've got them here, in terms of the way people can access further details around the appeal: www.cycloneappeal.govt.nz—that website should be now live. For those who want to make a small donation immediately, they can text "give" to 2454, and all trading banks will be accepting over-the-counter donations as well.

To other news, I'm confirming today that Stats New Zealand's 2023 census day will continue as planned on 7 March; 97 percent of the country is ready to participate in that, but we have, however, taken advice from the Government Statistician, and follow-up activities for the regions that have been most affected by the cyclone will be delayed until it's safe to do that. So we've extended the period for those follow-up activities by a further eight weeks, so that will now extend from 6 April to 1 June, allowing for about 2,500 census staff to remain out in the field longer, with a particular focus on those most affected regions. The areas most affected by the cyclone—including the Hawke's Bay, Northland, and Tai Rāwhiti—are among the communities that were underserved by the 2018 census, so that makes the data collection in 2023 all the more important and that's why we decided to extend the time period for those regions.

Briefly looking at the week ahead, this afternoon I'll be meeting with the Premier of Niue, Dalton Tagelagi. I was, unfortunately, unable to attend the Pacific Islands Forum last week—Carmel Sepuloni attended that in my place—so this will be the first face-to-face meeting that I've been able to have with a Pacific leader since I became the Prime Minister, and I'm very much looking forward to meeting with the Premier, where I'll be reiterating that the security, stability, and economic welfare of the Pacific region remains a key priority for New Zealand and it remains at the top of our foreign policy agenda. Tomorrow, I'll be in Auckland attending the opening of the Ngākōroa School and visiting business in the area. On Wednesday, I'll be in the Hawke's Bay to check in on response and recovery efforts, and I intend to make another attempt to visit Wairoa—I'm hoping that will be more successful than my last one. On Friday, I'll be in Christchurch for a business breakfast with the Chamber of Commerce. I'll be visiting schools that have been part of the rebuild, and I will be undertaking visits to local businesses. With Parliament not sitting, Ministers will be

continuing to visit cyclone-affected regions to ensure they're up to date with the issues facing those local communities, so you'll see them out and about.

Now happy to open up for questions.

Media: Is the appeal the right thing to do in the middle of a cost of living crisis? A lot of Kiwis are already struggling to make ends meet and then—so how are they going to be able to contribute to this appeal?

PM: One of the things we know from past events is that there are people abroad with very strong connections to New Zealand who want to be able to make a contribution. And they, therefore, want to be able to have a channel—a vehicle—through which they can direct those. And that was certainly the case after Christchurch. So that includes expatriates who are doing well abroad and who want to give something back. This will be a vehicle through which they can do that, and it is an opportunity for people to make those kind of small micro-donations to support their fellow Kiwis. If you look at the appeal post the Christchurch earthquake and the sorts of things it was funding, it's often been used to fund some of those things that are of strong benefit to the whole community but maybe fall outside of a particular area of focus for Government or the private sector—so things like sporting facilities, community facilities, where, previously, fund-raising may have built them in the first place. This is an opportunity for us to be able to give back.

Media: And do you have any idea of the size of the bill for this yet? Now that you've been able to go and survey the regions yourself, have you been able to—you know, the finance Minister said his estimate was \$13 billion, but do we have any sort of better—even a guesstimate of what this is going to cost?

PM: It's going to take some time to work through that, and some of that is actually going to be informed by science. So if you look at the issues around silt, for example, what we're working through at the moment is just the science of how best to deal with that and that'll include an analysis of what's in the silt; it'll also include an analysis of where it needs to be removed or where it might not be possible to remove it. It's still too early to put figures on any of that yet.

Media: Prime Minister, is it a natural marriage with Lotto and with Facebook over this appeal?

PM: Sorry, what do you mean by that?

Media: Are you comfortable working with Lotto and with Facebook on this?

PM: I guess they're different things. So Lotto will be helping to support us, particularly with the international appeal and soliciting donations and so on. The Lotto draw—which has been done after the Canterbury earthquakes and after the Kaikōura earthquakes—is a separate matter.

Media: What about with Facebook, then?

PM: Look, I'm quite comfortable—and I'd welcome other social media platforms and other media platforms helping us to promote the appeal as well.

Media: What are you weighing up with the national disaster—are you looking to extend that for the next week? What are the options that are still on the table?

PM: At the moment, we're not just simply going to drop the national state of emergency for those regions that can start to move towards the transition phase; we will give them a bit of notice that the national state of emergency will be removed from them, effectively, because they will move into the transition phase. So we'll work through that with them in the coming days. We have a sense now that there's quite a few of those regions are ready to get into that transition phase, so we'll work through that. For the Tai Rāwhiti and Hawke's Bay area, though, there's clearly still some immediate emergency needs there so we'll be extending the national state of emergency to apply to them.

Media: Have you seen the statements that Rob Campbell made about National's three waters policy, and do you think that he has breached the Public Service Code of Conduct?

PM: I do think that his comments were inappropriate for someone holding a role such as the ones that he holds in terms of Crown entity chair. There is a code of conduct around political comment by people who hold those roles, and his comments fall well outside that. That is ultimately now a matter that the Ministers responsible will be raising with him, and, of course, there's a process that they need to work through in doing that.

Media: Grant Robertson said over the weekend that there will be some areas where houses can't be rebuilt. I know there's been talk about managed retreat, but can you put some context around that in terms of that in terms of: do you have areas now that you know that won't happen, and what kind of time frame those decisions might be made over?

PM: We know that we've got to make some decisions in the next sort of month or so when it comes to things like insurance payouts and those sorts of things. So we're working through those with as much urgency as we can. No, I can't put a ring-fence around which areas we're talking about at this point. We've got to gather a bit more evidence before we're in the position of making those decisions, but I'm also mindful that people want to see decisions made as quickly as possible.

Media: Also, do you have a response to Federated Farmers calling for the military to be sent in to the Hawke's Bay for concerns about crime, but also just having extra resources there? You know, we're still hearing from people who haven't seen authorities, who are still really struggling with the physical response. Is that still an active consideration, or is it under consideration at all?

PM: So the military, of course, are working right the way up the East Coast at the moment in terms of keeping the supply lines open and adding their expertise. The issue around whether we should have military working alongside the police or replacing the police in their day-to-day duties is one that, of course, we always look at in a natural disaster. The advice that I have had from the Commissioner of Police is that he is comfortable that he can draw resource from other regions, as he has done over the last couple of weeks, to put extra police on the ground in the Hawke's Bay. So there's 145 extra police on the ground now, and they've been rotating through, so that's not the same 145; they've been moving people through to provide that extra on-the-ground presence there in the Hawke's Bay. Obviously, any reports of opportunistic crime are very concerning, and I can say from the conversations that I've had with the police that the police are taking a zero-tolerance approach to that, so they will investigate those. My message is: really make sure—to anyone who's in that position where they have been a victim of that—make sure they're reporting that to the police as soon as they're able to do that.

Media: Under the Defence Act, the police are the ones that, you know, have to make that call. Should that be on the police, because shouldn't there be some independent view or some testing of that?

PM: Well, I mean, ultimately, it's designed so that if the police don't feel that they are able to do their job, that they can ask for additional support. They haven't asked for that additional support.

Media: But what if other people don't feel the police are able to do their job? I mean, if the police are saying, "Yeah, it's all fine; we don't need anything.", that's fine, but is there not any independent testing of whether actually things are being dealt with or that there are enough resources, because it's that disconnect, isn't it, between what Ministers and officials say and then what we're still hearing from on the ground? And the concerns of people—well, just, yeah—

PM: The point here is that police make those judgments independently, so they make them independently of politicians. That's built into the law around the way the police operate, and I'd be very reluctant to change that. I think it is important that we have an independent police force who make these judgments. Now, as Ministers, we'll continue to

ask questions of them about what's happening on the ground and, you know, to test that they are on top of the situation. I've not received evidence that they're not; I have received reports of criminal activity that I know the police are following up on, though.

Media: But what's your message to people in Hawke's Bay who've said there is, you know, kind of a disconnect? There's still frustration; there's still fear in the community. What's your message to people about the support that is being provided to people that don't feel there's enough?

PM: We've got 145 extra police on the ground, and if the local police commander indicates to the commissioner that more support is required, then more support will be given. So the region is getting everything that they are asking for in terms of that extra support for policing.

Media: Are you at all concerned with the fact that Lotto tickets tend to be disproportionately sold to people from low-income households? Are you concerned that you might be leaning on them for this disaster recovery effort?

PM: Look, people will be buying Lotto tickets regardless of whether we do this particular draw. This is ensuring that the proceeds from one of the Lotto draws is directed towards supporting the recovery effort.

Media: There was a call today by a group of NGOs for the Government to wipe the debt owed to the Government by beneficiaries of about \$2.3 billion. Would that be something the Government would consider?

PM: That's a question that the Minister for Social Development and Employment has been looking at, and continues to look at, as part of the wider welfare reform picture—you know, how we handle debt to Government and so on—so that's probably a question best directed to her at the moment. It's not something that I have looked at in the last week.

Media: Right, the Minister has actually ruled out wiping the debt of beneficiaries, but, I mean, what is the point of trying to claw back this money—\$2 billion—from people who have almost nothing?

PM: Yeah, look, I wouldn't rule out us doing more in the overall debt-to-Government space—in the welfare space—in the future, but I certainly don't have any announcements to make on that today.

Media: On the appeal, who are the sorts of people you are targeting overseas? Is it wealthy Kiwis, is it businesses that do work in New Zealand, or is it foreign Governments?

PM: Wealthy New Zealanders who have gone abroad and done well and want to give something back to the country—my message to them is: we would love your support. Where businesses have a relationship with New Zealand and want to chip in and help out with the rebuild, again, we would love to hear from them as well. This is a charitable appeal, so we're really targeting anyone who's in a position to feel that they can contribute and do something that's for that wider community good—we will of course welcome that.

Media: Do they have an ability to target where it goes, to what projects or—?

PM: That will ultimately be a matter for the trustees, so we'll work through that. I don't know whether they did that after the Christchurch earthquakes, so let me come back to you on that one.

Media: Prime Minister, will the Government have to reduce spending elsewhere or bring in a tax to offset any extra Gabrielle spending?

PM: As the Minister of Finance and I both said last week, we are going to take a little bit of time to make sure that we consider all the options around how we pay for this. We're not going to rush those decisions, although we are going to endeavour to provide answers as quickly as we can, but I'm not going to sort of play the ruling this in or ruling this out

game until we've actually worked through the options and we have something more concrete to say.

Media: The Reserve Bank said last week that it would prefer than any extra spending was, effectively, offset—i.e., no new net fiscal impost. Is there a concern for you that spending on Gabrielle would be wiped out, in a way, by the Reserve Bank putting up interest rates because of the inflationary concern?

PM: Well, of course, the fiscal impulse now is negative—you know, we're heading into a period where the Government's overall level of spending as a proportion of the economy is actually trending downwards post the big COVID peak—so we're already in that territory now where, you know, the—and, of course, the conversation around the fiscal impulse with the Reserve Bank, you know, is an ongoing one, best directed to the Minister of Finance to talk about that. But we are in an environment where the overall level of Crown spending is going down, and that will have a negative inflationary impact.

Media: Prime Minister, you went to Te Matatini over the weekend. What did you think of that experience, and will you consider matching the funding for that with, say, the ballet or the symphony orchestra?

PM: They're quite different organisations, you know, with a different model for the way they operate. The ballet, the symphony orchestra—they pay their performers, for example; Te Matatini don't. But the broader question of: do I think that this is an important cultural event for the whole of the country? Yes, I do. Do I think we need to provide them a sustainable funding platform? Yes, I do. And so we can work our way through that with them.

Media: What does that mean, “sustainable”?

PM: Well, so that we can continue to ensure that the event takes place.

Media: No, no—sorry—that's not what I meant. I meant what will you provide? Are you looking to provide more funding for them—is that what you're saying?

PM: Well, until we've sat down and understood a bit more—I need to sit down with them and understand a bit more about what their costs are and, ultimately, what their ultimate ambitions are, bearing in mind that Te Matatini as we see it on TV is actually only one piece of that puzzle. There's a whole lot of other local events and a whole lot of other things that go into making Te Matatini possible, so I just need to sit down with them and we need to work out how we can do that sustainably. I think it's a fantastic event for New Zealand, so I want to see it continue, I want to see it thrive, and I think it should be a point of pride for all New Zealanders. We should be as proud of Te Matatini as we are when we see the All Blacks performing the haka at the beginning of a test match, and, in fact, more so, probably. So let's work with them to make sure that we can do that in an enduring and sustainable way.

Media: Just back on Rob Campbell for a second. He's told *Newshub* that he doesn't regret the comments, he has nothing to apologise for, and there is a—quote—“big difference between being politically impartial and being”—quote—“politically neutered”. What do you make of those comments?

PM: Look, there's a natural justice issue here; there is a process. I think that some of the public commentary that he has made steps well outside of the politically neutral stance that we would expect of someone holding a Crown entity chair's position, so we need to work through a process with him.

Media: So you don't think he's fit for that role?

PM: Like I said, there's a process to work through.

Media: Also Te Whatu Ora - related: on winter preparedness, has Cabinet received a winter preparedness report from Te Whatu Ora, or are you expecting one in the coming weeks?

PM: Winter preparedness has certainly been a topic of conversation. Cabinet hasn't received a full report as yet, but we've certainly received some guidance, particularly around our COVID-19 response and preparedness for winter in respect to the COVID-19 response. Vaccination will play a role there, so you will have seen the announcement by the Minister last week around making the new vaccine available to a much greater range of people. That will certainly help with the winter preparedness. We'll also be looking to deliver that in conjunction with the flu vaccine because, again, the flu vaccine and the broader uptake of that has the potential to take some of the pressure off our health system as well. So it's still very much front of mind. Whilst COVID-19 might not be the same day-to-day topic of conversations for Kiwis that it has been over the last three years, it is still with us, and as we head into winter, we do have to be prepared for the fact that we'll see more cases and the health system will come under further pressure again over the winter period.

Media: And are you confident that the health system will cope?

PM: We have ways of managing that through the health system, but of course it's something that we'll be monitoring closely. We do expect the health system is going to come under pressure again this winter, as it did last winter, as well.

Media: Prime Minister, on the cost of living, the inflation surge is at least partly due to companies increasing their profits, and the Reserve Bank is now investigating more into which companies and how much. Government-owned companies—including Air New Zealand, the three big “gen-tailers”—have all increased their prices and their profits. Are you concerned that companies and Government-owned companies are responsible for a significant chunk of the cost of living crisis you've dedicated yourself to [*Inaudible*]?

PM: Obviously, I saw the result from Air New Zealand last week, as everybody else did. That comes off the back of a period where Air New Zealand's been clocking up relatively significant deficits, and so we have to consider it in light of that as well. It's an impressive turn-around for Air New Zealand and I think we should acknowledge that, and they have a significant amount of debt that they've accumulated during the time that they've been running deficits that they're aiming to repay as well.

Media: They're also going to start repaying dividends three years early.

PM: Yeah, so, look, those are conversations that we will work through with the relevant companies, and the Minister of Finance will lead that work, but, yes, they're live conversations that we'll have with them.

Media: The Reserve Bank is also critical of the banks for not passing on rate increases to term deposits, making the inflation fight harder. What's your view been on the banks not playing their part?

PM: It's an ongoing and live conversation with the banks. I'll share it with them before I share it with the rest of the country.

Media: How much is the Lotto jackpot going to be?

PM: I don't know, actually. I suppose it depends how many people buy tickets. I'm not entirely sure.

Media: You'll come back to us on that?

PM: Yeah, I'll come back to you on that.

Media: On a separate issue, a second US department, the Department of Energy, has joined with the FBI in saying that it has, I think, a low level of confidence that COVID-19 came out of some lab mishap in China. A bunch of other US agencies think it's, you know, as a result of natural spread. Have you ever had any advice on that issue?

PM: Not in my current role, but in my previous role, of course, it was the subject of a lot of speculation, and we'll continue to participate in the World Health Organization process there. We think that that would be the best way to get an answer to that question. At the

moment, it's still a live question and there are variety of different theories around exactly what happened. I'm not going to put my finger on any one of them and say I agree with that one more than that one, at this point. There's still a process to go through, and the World Health Organization, in my view, are the best people to lead that.

Media: In your talks with businesses, and subsequent to them, have you given any more thought to the wage subsidy, and also, on a not related topic, in terms of the rebuild are you looking at doing specific empowering legislation to allow it to go through a fast track?

PM: We will almost certainly need some form of legislative response to the recent disasters, in terms of making sure that we can do what we need to do when we need to do it. That's not uncommon; that's happened after other natural disasters, and I'm sure it will be required here as well. The exact scope of that will depend on just how things shake down in the next few weeks, but I expect that we'll be bringing something before Parliament fairly soon. In terms of my conversations with businesses, and the conversations that other Ministers have been having, our question really has been around, "How can we best support you through this emergency response, and how can we best support you to get back on your feet as quickly as possible?" A one-size-fits-all approach isn't necessarily going to be the best outcome here. Some of those businesses are back trading now, and the disruption has been, you know, relatively modest compared to some of the other businesses where the disruption has been at the catastrophic end. So we need to work through to make sure that we're supporting businesses based on their actual needs rather than just trying to apply some kind of blanket approach that won't necessarily satisfy everybody.

Media: Do you have any concern that a lot of workers will up-sticks and leave the region, basically, if there isn't work for them to do and they can't be certain that they're going to get paid?

PM: Well, one of the challenges around a wage subsidy is that there will be examples where some businesses are back in full swing while others aren't, and the businesses that are back in full swing will need workers. And so we don't necessarily want to stop worker mobility. We don't want to stop them moving to the areas where the work is, or the businesses where the work is, so that's one of the complexities around the wage subsidy that we have to work through as well.

Media: What about a recovery authority?

PM: The approach that we've taken is to work region by region rather than establish one central recovery authority. At a central government level, of course we will have a unit based within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, who will help to coordinate the central government response to all of the regional responses. But, again, the needs in each region are slightly different. So the needs in Auckland are quite different to the needs in Hawke's Bay, and so making sure that we've got good on-the-ground local teams—and we'll play our part in that but it will also have local government, local business, and so on, engaged in it as well. Making sure that those local responses are speaking to the needs in those areas is, really, I think, one of the key elements of the way we're trying to pursue the recovery effort.

Media: [*Inaudible*]—like, no authority will be created?

PM: Not at this point. But, like I said, there will be a coordinating unit within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet that will be staffed by some quite senior people, from within the Public Service, to make sure that central government's doing its bit. But we're not going to take over the recovery and take that away from the regions, particularly where they've already got mechanisms that can help to coordinate the recovery, that are likely to work better and quicker than a central government response would.

Media: Prime Minister, do you have a specific story or reflection to make about Chester Borrows?

PM: Actually, you know, one of the very first select committee meetings that I ever attended—it was just after Labour had become the Opposition back in 2008; I think it was one of my first ever select committee meetings—and some of my more seasoned colleagues still had a bit of gripe over the previous National Opposition's tactics when they were in select committee. And so I was told by my more senior colleagues that we all had to stand outside the select committee room to wait until the National members had all assembled and formed the quorum before we went into the room. And that was my first ever meeting in person with Chester Borrows, because he was the chair of that committee and came out to implore with us that we should come into the meeting so that the meeting could get under way, and pointed out that there were a whole lot of people, who'd come to make submissions, who were going to be inconvenienced by the meeting not going ahead because one of his own colleagues hadn't shown up to the meeting. And he put it in such a reasonable way that I think everybody just felt like we should get on with it. And so whatever political point was that was trying to be raised kind of got lost in all of that, and we all went in and we got on with the meeting. And from that point onwards, he was someone who I just got on really well with because he was just so sensible and normal. You know, he loved his politics—the same as the rest of us do—but he also just wanted to get on and get the job done. So those were my first ever impressions of him, and that kind of stuck with me right the way through.

When he was the Deputy Speaker, he introduced a new, somewhat novel approach to parliamentary urgency, because parliamentary urgency—when you're in Opposition, you tend to make a lot of noise, as we've seen in recent times. He would deliver a scorecard at the end of urgency, from the Speaker's Chair, on who he thought had done the best filibuster speeches that made the most novel and entertaining contributions, and so on. And no Speaker had done that before, and I don't think any Speaker has done that since—it was a uniquely Chester innovation. But I don't think anyone else would necessarily be able to get away with it, to be frank.

Media: Marae up and down the coast are saying that they've had a number of empty containers dropped off at their marae without being told, and they don't know why they've got them. Why is it that emergency response are dumping empty containers on marae?

PM: That's absolute news to me. So I'm happy to find out what's happening there, but first time anyone's raised it with me.

Media: Kahungunu have said that Te Tai Rāwhiti have also identified drop-offs of containers, but that is news to you?

PM: Yeah—don't know anything about that.

Media: Emergency response is not—

PM: Yeah. Not sure what that is, but I'm happy to find out, and we'll get you an answer to that.

Media: Is it appropriate that marae are being dropped-off with empty containers or with resources that they cannot use? That's the point.

PM: Like I said, I don't know what's in the containers or what the purpose of them is, so, without knowing that, I wouldn't want to venture a comment on it.

Media: Just on the appeal: how long is it going to run and do you have an idea of how much you want to raise from it?

PM: I don't want to set a monetary target. What we do know—I mean, the appeal, we will know from past history that, you know, you get the most money up front, normally in the immediate period after a disaster like this. The Christchurch appeal—funds from that are still being dispersed even now. So, again, when you're looking at those medium- to longer-term recovery projects, the trust will be in place for quite some time. And I don't think they'll ever stop receiving donations.

Media: And do you already have any pledges or things in the pipeline for it that you know of?

PM: Yeah. I'm aware of some generous people who've already indicated that they'll be making some contributions. And in due course, we'll share the details of that, but I'm not in a position to share that yet.

Media: On rebuilding the State highway network: is it your plan to, I guess, work out what needs to be fixed and then work out the new vision to rebuild the [*Inaudible*] that'll all be connected, or is it the message of one bit at a time, higgledy-piggledy, or are you going to present an overall view of this is what we think is a sustainable State highway network?

PM: That's not a technical term that I would use! But in terms of how we look at the rebuild, I guess we have to look at that in phases. One is, how do we get the roads reopened to make sure that all of those areas that have been cut off at least have some form of access? And so that might mean just patching up the roads that are there, or it might mean some temporary workarounds to make sure that we've got a transport link connected. The next bit, then, is to look at, OK, well how do we make those more resilient? Does that mean strengthening those workarounds or those temporary measures to make them permanent, or does it mean things like building roads in a slightly different area? I guess the bit that will join all of that work together is that we don't necessarily have the capacity to be able to build new roads everywhere we want it all at the same time, so we will have to think about that in terms of how we sequence that work.

Media: Prime Minister, just on family harm in the wake of Gabrielle, which we know is at elevated levels, do you think the Government did enough after the cyclone to safeguard against family violence?

PM: It's always a really difficult area. Obviously, a tragedy is never an excuse for violence, and it's never an excuse for violence in the home—there's never excuses for that within the home. Our social sector partners, the people who we work with, do everything that they can to support those families most at risk, and particularly when a tragedy like this happens and those stress levels are heightened. But we've all got a responsibility and a job to look out for each other and to support those most vulnerable families. Government can't do all of that; we look to work with the organisations that can. But even friends and neighbours and relatives can play a role here in helping to destress some of those situations, because violence in the home has more than one victim. And so the more that we can do to support those vulnerable families, where that may be an unfortunate feature of their life, the better.

Media: Service providers say that their biggest concern moving forward now is housing and places for people to go. What can we do there?

PM: We've got the temporary accommodation service, which is about getting a roof over people's head in the short term. But what we also know from our past experience with the temporary accommodation service is the most immediate need, so the number of people who sign up for temporary accommodation right at the start, doesn't reflect the true scale of need, because in many cases people will move into other arrangements; they'll go and stay with friends and relatives and so on. And there is a finite time when those arrangements will continue to be able to operate. At various points—and that can lead to different stresses and strains in families as well, if they're staying with others for a prolonged period of time. So we know that the growth in temporary accommodation demand is going to increase. We use commercial providers—you know, hotels, motels, and so on—to meet immediate needs in the short term, but we will be needing to look at other solutions to continue to contribute to that, whether it's temporary buildings, whether it's seeing if we can access some of those Airbnbs. All of those options are on the table and we'll be working our way through that.

Media: Could you tell us more about the four people that are unaccounted for?

PM: I haven't got more details about that from the police at this point. That number sort of halved in the last little while. I think they're getting down to the numbers now that we should be able to get a bit more public information about the nature of those four missing people. So as soon as I can get that from the Police, we'll share that.

Media: This group today, who are calling for MSD debt to be wiped—they said that the Government's talked big on being "transformation" but hasn't delivered on that. What's your response to that?

PM: I think if you look at the scale of the change that we have overseen in the overall welfare area, it's been very significant. There's been a lot of extra support put into a lot of our most vulnerable families—significant increases in the overall level of benefit levels, for example. A lot of extra support has gone into some of our lowest-income families. I'm really proud of the work we've done in that area. It's not a job done, though; there's always going to be more to do.

Media: Do you think that MSD has got a toxicity problem?

PM: No, not at all. I think there have been periods in the past where people have gone into an MSD office and perhaps not found it as welcoming as it should be and have found that they've had to battle for the support that they are entitled to. I don't think that that would be a common complaint associated with an MSD office now. It has been in the past, but I don't think it is now.

Media: Prime Minister, how much was raised with the Christchurch appeal, and also, why is a separate appeal like this better than, say, like Red Cross or one of the big international organisations?

PM: About \$95 million from the Christchurch appeal. One of the reasons that we're focusing this appeal on the medium- to longer-term recovery effort is that we know that a lot of those appeals—the Red Cross and others—are focused on there and now; so it's focused on getting people through the next few weeks and months. We're thinking about how do you rebuild communities and how do you make sure that where significant community assets, for example, have been damaged and the community groups that have built up those assets over time might not be in a position to be able to rebuild them without support—how can we make sure that we're building up a bit of a stock of support for them during this immediate response period. So I would imagine that, you know, in the first part, we'll be building up some money so that when we get to that stage of looking at, OK, what needs to be rebuilt that might not be covered by others, we've got some support available to them.

Media: Just to go back to Thomas' question about Lotto and the impact on poorer communities—I mean, only 23c on the dollar actually goes towards community grants from a Lotto ticket, so, given that and the fact that, you know, it does contribute to problem gambling, should the Government really be encouraging going to something like this for a fund-raiser? Wouldn't it be better to put more effort just into the pure fund-raiser side?

PM: So, in this particular case, 50c in the dollar will be going to the cause. If you're looking at a wider conversation about Lotto and the distribution of funds from Lotto, that's not something that I have really looked at up until now. You know, I think Lotto is—no gambling is great, but compared to some of the other forms of gambling, where there are, you know, clearly bigger issues, I'm comfortable with a Lotto draw.

Media: So is Lotto waiving some of its overheads? Is that how you get to 50c? What's—do you why that—

PM: They're just following the—I haven't actually asked them about exactly how they get to that; they're following the same formula that they've used in the last two special Lotto draws.

Media: Did you consider a wee telethon or something of that ilk?

PM: Haven't thought about that yet so far.

Media: So not ruling it out?

PM: Oh, everyone loves a good telethon, but it's certainly not on the cards right at the moment.

Media: What about Facebook—isn't that a bit of a strange bedfellow after, you know, the Christchurch Call and the role Facebook and social media plays in disinformation and misinformation?

PM: Oh, look, a lot of eyeballs—a lot of people still have Facebook and they have a lot of eyeballs there, and if that can help us to reach the audience, the intended audience, then I'd welcome their support, as I would welcome the support of other media outlets and other social media platforms as well. We might—you can have the lucky last question, Jenna.

Media: Prime Minister, will you express confidence in Rob Campbell?

PM: As I've said, there's a process. Thanks, everybody.

conclusion of press conference