

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 21 AUGUST 2023  
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** All righty, good afternoon, everybody. I've had formal notification from King Charles that he has approved the cancellation of James Wallace's knighthood. I've written to James Wallace to advise him accordingly. The Government formally requested that the King cancel Mr Wallace's appointment as a Knight Companion of the Order of Merit back in June. James Wallace was found guilty and imprisoned for serious crimes, and it is totally inappropriate for him to hold any honour. He can no longer use the title of Sir or KNZM and has been asked to return his warrant of appointment and his honours insignia.

Moving on to other news, we've hit two significant milestones that I think the health sector can be incredibly proud of. First, just a month and a half since we abolished the \$5 prescription fee, 3 million free prescriptions have already been filled, supporting the health of about 900,000 New Zealanders. Abolishing prescription charges is one of the practical steps that we've been taking as a Government to reduce the pressure on family budgets, and Kiwis are already benefiting from that.

Another Government commitment that's making a big difference is in mental health. Primary health and addiction programme Access and Choice has hit the 1 millionth mental wellbeing support sessions milestone since it started delivering services back in 2020. Primary and early intervention services like Access and Choice just didn't exist in a major way before 2019. Between 40,000 and 60,000 a month are now being delivered, and that number will continue to grow as the phased nationwide roll-out of services continues. We've also put mental health support into schools in large parts of the country through Mana Ake and other programmes. We've funded additional mental wellbeing supports in every university and tertiary education institution. That's the type of progress the Government can make if it sees mental health as a priority, and this Government does.

Another priority that the Government can highlight is the work that we've been doing to lift wages across the board and to reduce pay inequality. Last week, official data showed average weekly and hourly wages and salaries have increased by 7.1 and 6.6 percent respectively in the year to June, outstripping inflation over that period. Both are the second-largest annual increases on record, surpassed only by last year's. Our work to keep Kiwis in work and to increase their pay is delivering for Kiwi workers. Over the past 5½ years, more than 150,000 New Zealanders have also seen their pay increased through pay equity settlements: 156,557 workers across 11 separate settlements have seen pay increases, including 115,000 people working in health. They include 40,000 nurses, who received a 26 percent pay adjustment; and 65,000 care and support workers, who received an extra 27 percent; 22,000 teacher-aides received an extra 25 percent, and 1,300 Oranga Tamariki social workers received a recent pay increase of 30 percent. Others included librarians, clerical staff, community and social workers, and other support workers. All these people are on the front line of our public services, delivering support to New Zealanders. All of them were historically undervalued, and all of them are better off because of this Government's commitment to investing in public services and in the people who deliver them. There is more work to be done, but recognising these amazing groups of people in this way is an achievement that our Government is incredibly proud of. Valuing people fairly is what Governments can do if it views that as a priority. Now happy to open up for questions.

**Media:** What did you make of National's announcement today: "Hey, we'll scrap those free prescriptions, but on the other hand we'll fund those 13 cancer drugs"?

**PM:** It's another smoke and mirrors policy from the National Party. They want to take medicine off one group of New Zealanders in order to give it to another group of New Zealanders. In fact, we need to be increasing the Pharmac budget, but that shouldn't come at the expense of free prescriptions. We've increased the Pharmac budget every year that we have been in Government, and we'll continue to do that. National, on the other hand, have prioritised tax cuts for millionaires.

**Media:** How many New Zealanders will miss out on free prescriptions if National goes ahead with its plans?

**PM:** Well, as I've indicated, there is about 900,000 New Zealanders who have benefited from it so far. Prescriptions are something—it's a small thing that we can do that helps to keep people healthy, that means that they don't end up requiring more expensive healthcare. So it's an incredibly short-sighted decision by the National Party. We've increased Pharmac funding every year that we have been in Government. Of course we want to see cancer patients getting access to more treatments.

**PM:** There are 10 new cancer drugs already that have been funded under our Government because we've increased the Pharmac budget to allow them to do that. And it's our intention to continue to do that, but we think that's actually a better use of money than tax cuts for millionaires which is what the National Party are prioritising.

**Media:** Are you saying that you can match those extra drugs that they're saying that they can fund without needing to take money from somewhere else?

**PM:** I'm not announcing our election health policy today, but I am indicating that increasing funding for Pharmac has been a priority for our Government and if we are re-elected it will continue to be.

**Media:** And would you put any perimeters around I guess it being specifically for cancer treatment, for example?

**PM:** Pharmac is a very good model that ensures that we get the best value for money from the money that we spend on medications. We've set up the cancer control agency to be an advocate. I note the National Party opposed setting up the cancer control agency and are now using its advice to launch their policy from. I think we need to be careful as politicians about picking and choosing which drugs get funded.

**Media:** Has the National Party gazumped maybe your election policy?

**PM:** Sorry, in what regard?

**Media:** Funding these drugs.

**PM:** I've been very clear that increasing funding for Pharmac will continue to be a priority for our Government, but I'm not announcing our health policy today.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you listed off a bunch of pay agreements there, but one group that's clearly not happy about where they're at are the senior doctors who have voted to go strike today, helpfully during an election campaign. What do you know about their grievances and what do you think of that?

**PM:** Our track record speaks for itself. We've invested significantly in our doctors and our nurses. They've seen significant pay increases during the time that we've been in Government. I've encouraged the senior doctors to get back around the bargaining table to find a way forward. We do value the work that our senior doctors do. The best way to resolve the issues that they're raising is to get back around the bargaining table.

**Media:** And could something like that be resolved before the election?

**PM:** Look, I live in hope. Ultimately, you know, I hope that the doctors will be able to get around the bargaining table and resolve the issues.

**Media:** Just quickly, earlier today Jan Tinetti made an announcement that Labour's kind of going to standardise the teaching of—the Government can standardise the teaching of reading, writing, and maths. When the National Party sort of suggested something kind of similar earlier in the year, you guys panned them a bit. Is this a bit of—from memory when you were Minister of Education, you weren't too keen on the Government getting too prescriptive down into classrooms. Is this a bit of another kind of road to Damascus conversion here?

**PM:** This was work that started during the time that I was Minister of Education. We've been working on reshaping the curriculum to make sure that the basics, the core basics that every young New Zealand needs, aren't left to chance, but we've been focused on doing that based on evidence of what's actually going to work. So we've had teachers and educational experts developing this work; not politicians in the Beehive. I think what they've come up is actually really sound. It's based on evidence and it will work.

**Media:** Why is it that the teachers don't like it?

**PM:** Sorry?

**Media:** If you worked on this with teachers, why, then, do teachers not like it?

**PM:** I don't accept that.

**Media:** They don't like it. They've issued a statement saying that they don't like it.

**PM:** We've worked very closely with educational researchers and with the teaching community around the curriculum review to make sure that what we've come up with will actually work and it will increase the reading, writing, and maths of our young New Zealanders. If we contrast that with national standards, which were developed in the Beehive without consulting with the education professions, the result was that actually reading, writing, and maths for that age cohort got worse.

**Media:** It looks like the strike notices have just gone out for senior doctors. What implications would rolling strikes by senior doctors have for the health system?

**PM:** Of course, I don't want to see any of our medical workforce on strike and I think the best way to resolve those issues is around the bargaining table. I know that Te Whatu Ora will have contingency plans in place should any strike action go ahead, as they always do.

**Media:** Is this the first time senior doctors have been on strike?

**PM:** I wouldn't know, sorry.

**Media:** But how concerning is that? I mean, these are senior doctors, an integral part of the health system that's already under pressure.

**PM:** And, like I said, I'm not going to bargain publicly with them. The best thing is to get back around the bargaining table.

**Media:** Does the election give you extra impetus to get it sorted? Because, obviously, having senior doctors striking at a time when you're trying to campaign is not a good look.

**PM:** I don't want to have senior doctors or any members of the health workforce on strike at any time. I want to have them focused on delivering health care for New Zealanders. That's why we'll get around the bargaining table with them in good faith in order to try and resolve any issues that they might be raising.

**Media:** Prime Minister, it's just been revealed that the Government's being taken to the High Court over maximum nicotine levels in vaping products by Alt New Zealand. Is this a concern for you?

**PM:** They're entitled to their day in court and I'm not going to comment on the court case that's currently before the courts. But what I would say is that I make no apologies for the fact that our Government is taking steps to crack down on vaping. I don't want to see a whole generation of young New Zealanders taking up vaping when that can be avoided.

**Media:** Will this put the kybosh on any of the Government's or Labour's plans around vaping?

**PM:** No.

**Media:** Has your Government failed in this area? I mean, you say you don't want to see a generation—but has the horse already bolted on that, and is it because your policies have been too lax in not looking ahead at the trends that have now come to pass?

**PM:** I think we have to look at the reality: that vaping is a good way out of smoking for a lot of people who have previously been smokers. But we have seen an alarming uptick in young New Zealanders who are seeing vaping as an entry, something that—they haven't been smokers before and they're taking up vaping. I am concerned about that, and I do think there is more that we can do in that area, and I'll have more to say on that shortly.

**Media:** Has your Government been too wedded to that principle of a transition from smoking and actually the collateral damage is the young people now who are vaping and in a big way?

**PM:** I think this is an area that's evolved pretty rapidly in the last few years, and so I do think there is more that we need to do.

**Media:** Are you surprised at all that you've seen these companies push back at the Government like this, in taking you to the High Court on this issue, or were you expecting this to happen?

**PM:** Well, there's big money in vaping, so no, I'm not.

**Media:** Were your officials too—should they have foreseen this? It was happening overseas. There was a bit of a lead-in. Could more have been done sooner?

**PM:** I think—well, I'm kind of in a difficult position around commenting on something that we haven't yet announced, but we are intending—the Labour Party is intending—to take further steps around vaping. I've already indicated we're setting those out tomorrow; so, happy to talk more about that tomorrow.

**Media:** Just on reading and writing and maths, should New Zealanders be despairing a little bit that, in 2023, both National and Labour are campaigning on getting reading, writing, and maths right in the classroom and making it a core subject that is taught here?

**PM:** I absolutely think that reading, writing, and maths are basic foundation skills, but I have made it very clear right the way through the time that I have been Minister, whether Minister of Education or Prime Minister, that we have to make decisions here that are based on evidence of what's actually going to work. Political tinkering has a real risk associated with it. We saw that with national standards. That was an ideologically driven policy that resulted in reading, writing, and maths getting worse for that generation of young New Zealanders. So we have been focused on making sure that we're developing something that's actually going to work.

**Media:** You've been in Government for nearly six years and you were the education Minister, so why is it now, 50-odd days out from an election, that you're talking about how to get it right in the classroom?

**PM:** We made the decision not to roll out significant Curriculum changes during the COVID-19 period. That was for about three years. I stand by that statement and that decision, because, ultimately, I don't think that our school system was in the right space to be rolling out those sorts of changes during that time.

**Media:** How much work had you done in Opposition, though? I mean, you must have had an idea of what was working and what wasn't. You were talking regularly with principals and teachers. You knew what the situation was. Why couldn't you act on that as soon as you got in?

**PM:** We made the decision when we were in Opposition that we could develop something in conjunction with the education profession. That's what we've been working on doing. I made the call as Minister of Education, at a time when we were asking schools to deal with lockdowns to deal with significant student and teacher absence because of COVID-

19 circulating in the community, that that wasn't the time to press ahead more aggressively with that work.

**Media:** State Highway 35 suffered a closure again on the weekend because of slashing. Are we a bit behind the eight ball, Government, in fixing what is happening down in that area? It's out of control, out of your control, the Government's control. What are we doing to ramp up the roading there—the fix up of the roads?

**PM:** We received the inquiry report into slash that was authored by the Hon Hekia Parata. I think it does provide a good blueprint for a way forward on a lot of the issues that we're now experiencing. We've divided that up. We've set out a work plan to deal with those issues, to consider all of the recommendations in the report. We are fast-tracking that work. We want to be able to get some of those things under way as quickly as possible. And so, yes, I think it is something that needs to be urgently dealt with. This problem has built up over many years, and we're now seeing the outcome of that with more extreme weather that we're seeing on the coast. And so I think we do need to make sure that we're fast-tracking the work to get the solutions in place as quickly as possible, bearing in mind that some of that slash has been sitting on those hillsides for some time now.

**Media:** National have been quite critical of the idea of Labour, Te Paati Māori, and the Greens in some sort of post-Government arrangement; however, Christopher Luxon is yet to rule out New Zealand First. How do you think that the New Zealand public would react to a National, New Zealand First, and ACT Party potential coalition or some sort of arrangement there?

**PM:** A National - ACT - New Zealand First Government would be a coalition of chaos, cuts, and confusion. I think New Zealand deserves better?

**Media:** Do you think it's time for Christopher Luxon to make a call on whether or not he's going to rule out New Zealand First?

**PM:** That's really a question for him.

**Media:** What makes it chaotic? Is it ACT or New Zealand First, and if it's New Zealand First, don't you have the same potential problem?

**PM:** Well, clearly, they don't agree with each other.

**Media:** But you haven't ruled out New Zealand First yet. I know that he's ruled you out, but you haven't actually explicitly gone that far yet. Can you do that categorically today?

**PM:** Look, I think any governing arrangement with Labour and New Zealand First after the election is a very, very, very, very, very long shot. I've said that I'll set out closer to the campaign our preferred governing arrangements and I will do that.

**Media:** Have you had any conversations with Winston Peters about any potential future governing arrangements?

**PM:** No, I've only seen Winston Peters once since I become Prime Minister, which was at field day. As I think there were a few cameras around at the time. It was an interaction that lasted all of about 90 seconds, where we exchanged pleasantries about the weather.

**Media:** What about with the Greens or Te Paati Māori? Have you had any conversations with them about future governing arrangements?

**PM:** I have conversations with the Greens all of the time because we actually have a governing arrangement with them at the moment. I haven't had any specific conversations with Te Paati Māori.

**Media:** During koroneihana, Māori leaders were asking not to politicise, not to use Māori as a political football. Are you concerned about the passion in which Māori are seeing the politicking or the racism around this particular campaign? Are you concerned about what they're saying?

**PM:** I've made a commitment as Prime Minister and also as leader of the Labour Party that I won't use ethnicity or race as a wedge to divide New Zealanders, and I challenge all other political parties to make that same commitment.

**Media:** In the campaign, do you think candidates are more at risk of foreign interference than in previous elections?

**PM:** I think international experience shows that we all need to be very eyes wide open when it comes to the potential for foreign interference in our elections. Good guidance has been issued by a variety of different Government agencies to candidates and to parties about what to look out for. And I think there's a lot of publicly available information for New Zealanders around how they can keep themselves safe in terms of foreign interference or the impact of myth or disinformation.

**Media:** Is there more risk, though, this election?

**PM:** I think there clearly is more risk and we've seen it in other elections around the world, and we need to make sure we keep our eyes wide open to that here in New Zealand.

**Media:** So have you been advised, or have you received any advice, on what foreign States might be interested in interfering in our election, and, if so, who are they and to what extent?

**PM:** There's a range of publicly available information that's been disclosed and I'm not going to add to that. I actually think that the most appropriate agencies to talk to that are the apolitical agencies. So the intelligence agencies have released some information around foreign interference and what to look out for. I'll let them speak to that, because, obviously, I am a political actor in this election as well and I have an interest in it. They're best to speak about what to look out for.

**Media:** But have you received advice in your role in terms of national security?

**PM:** All political parties have, and members of the Intelligence and Security Committee have also received some information.

**Media:** Just following up on Claudette's question before about racism and whatnot around the election campaign, what do you make of David Seymour seemingly making jokes about sending in Guy Fawkes—well, the joke was, you know, the inference, what do you make of that?

**PM:** I don't think jokes about blowing up a minority are very funny at all.

**Media:** Do you think he should apologise?

**PM:** That's really a question for him.

**Media:** Prime Minister, Westpac has forecast today that the operating deficit will be \$9 billion and \$12 billion in the next two fiscal years, instead of about \$7 billion. Is the Government aware of those types of forecasts and are there any policy changes needed to offset those losses?

**PM:** New Zealand Treasury is working through the pre-election fiscal update—the PREFU—at the moment. They do that independently of the Government. It's probably part of the Budget process that we have the least influence over. They do that very independently and they very jealously guard that independence. That will set out the official Government machinery's view of what the Government's financial position is going to do over the forecast period and beyond. It sets out a broader horizon as well. Of course, as an incumbent Government, we are very aware of the financial pressure that the Crown accounts are under at the moment.

**Media:** What are you doing in policy changes? If the PREFU shows much deeper deficits than expected, are you prepared to make policy changes to offset them, or will you just absorb it as debt?

**PM:** As part of the regular Budget cycle, we're always looking for savings. We're always looking for how we can ensure that we're delivering taxpayers' value for money for the taxes that they provide. We'll continue to do that.

**Media:** Prime Minister, will you be going into coalition with the Māori Party?

**PM:** As I've said, I'm going to set out a bit closer to the election our preferred governing arrangements, and that'll set out whether there are any parties that we wouldn't deal with, for example. But I'm not doing that today.

**Media:** Have you already made up your mind about which parties you will or won't work with, or are you waiting—

**PM:** I'm not setting that out today, Tova.

**Media:** Was there anything in a poll tonight that made you perhaps think one way or another, whether you'd work with New Zealand First?

**PM:** Well, I'm not going to comment on another media outlet's polls.

**Media:** Have you given any more thought to a cross-party meeting? Willie Jackson joined calls by James Shaw and others to meet ahead of the campaign and discuss some of the potential safety issues—you had a seemingly quite different experience in South Auckland on Saturday to what you might have normally. Have you given any more thought to what meetings may need to be had?

**PM:** Look, I assume the observation that I did after the event on Saturday—I think that was a handful of people; maybe no more than two dozen who were using loud hailers in order to drown out the voices of the vast majority of people who were at the markets. I think that was really unfortunate for the people who were at the markets who otherwise would have had the opportunity to interact with politicians on the campaign trail, but it is democracy in action, and people are free to, you know, make noise, free to protest, free to share their views. This was Brian Tamaki's group of people trying to disrupt the election campaign—that's not exactly new; they've been doing that the whole time I've been in politics.

**Media:** Yeah, but, I mean, did you take on board Willie Jackson's comments last week? He did say that he was going to speak to you about it, that he's concerned about what MPs and candidates—particularly, though, Māori MPs and candidates on the campaign trail and their safety and how they feel. I mean, a) has he talked to you, b) do you think that there's merit in having a conversation?

**PM:** The Parliamentary Service have been working with political parties and MPs to ensure that there is extra safety available; you know, there's extra support available for safety on the campaign trail if it's required. I think that's good work; it's been done cross-party, so there is a mechanism where it's being done cross-party at the moment, and I think that's the right way to approach it. It shouldn't be a political thing. All candidates—regardless of which parties that they're standing for, whether they're a current MP or an aspiring MP, should be free to be safe on the campaign trail. They should be free to express their views without the fear that there might be any physical harm to their safety: that's fundamental in a democracy. So I think that we should continue to not treat this as a partisan issue, we should continue to work across the Parliament to ensure that we can give effect to that.

**Media:** Did you feel safe on Saturday?

**PM:** I didn't feel unsafe. Obviously, it was disappointing, because there were people who wanted to be able to talk with me and engage with me, and they didn't get the opportunity to do that because they were drowned out by others.

**Media:** And I guess that was probably one of the first times you've campaigned out in public like that. Were you surprised by that reception?

**PM:** I've done plenty of campaigning out like that in public. I guess it's the first for this campaign period—

**Media:** Oh, sorry, I mean recently as Prime Minister in this campaign—we haven't seen you in sort of a marked experience campaigning as Labour leader before, so I guess were you surprised by what you experienced?

**PM:** I got a heads-up on the way there that there were some people who had got wind of the fact that we were going to be there and they were going to make some noise. I didn't feel particularly intimidated by that, but I did feel a bit frustrated for the people who wanted to talk to me.

**Media:** Are you expecting more of that?

**PM:** It's possible.

**Media:** Have you and Willie Jackson spoken about the security issue?

**PM:** I've spoken to a number of people about security around the MPs and Ministers on the campaign trail. As I've said, those conversations have been happening cross-party, and I think that's the best way to approach it.

**Media:** Does it include Willie Jackson?

**PM:** Yes, of course.

**Media:** What about some of that messaging that's being promulgated by people like Destiny Church and people that are probably fearing more of the brunt of the stigma; this really strong anti-trans messaging this election campaign? Are you concerned about that?

**PM:** I'm concerned about any messaging in the campaign that targets a group of people and really discriminates against a group of New Zealanders. I made a commitment in our campaign that we don't want to drive a wedge between different groups of New Zealanders; we want to try and bring people together. That's the sort of campaign that I will be focused on.

**Media:** At Ngā Whare Waatea, several of the MPs said that Māori were in a fight for their lives. Do you agree with that, and what do you think they actually meant? What do you take from that?

**PM:** I took from that that Māori are concerned about what the outcome of an election might be for Māori. I think they should speak on their own behalf, but I certainly took away a number of messages from Tūrangawaewae in the weekend about how concerned people are about what it might mean for a number of areas of progress we've been making; the progress we've been making on Māori health, for example. We're in the early stages of some quite significant progress there to turn around some very important health outcomes for our Māori communities. I think it would be a terrible tragedy if we were to see that go backwards.

**Media:** You said you don't want to drive a wedge, but you've also said that we no longer see the party of Key, English, and Chris Finlayson—so aren't you, yourself, scaremongering?

**PM:** No, because I think that that Key-led Government, particularly with the work of people like Christopher Finlayson, was very focused on finding the way forward that unified the country, and I think it's disappointing that National and ACT have walked away from that.

**Media:** What was the reason why financial literacy didn't work to implement it in schools the first time?

**PM:** Sorry, what was that?

**Media:** What was the reason why financial literacy in schools, which was proposed in 2017—why couldn't that get into schools the first time?

**PM:** We established the school leavers' tool kit, which is a range of resources for teaching financial literacy in schools. The research that's been done since we released the school leavers' tool kit is that some schools are doing this very well and other schools haven't picked it up, and that's the reason that we're going to make it compulsory.

**Media:** But why not just do it the first time?



**PM:** We didn't make it compulsory the first time, because we didn't think we would necessarily need to do that. Clearly, the fact that some schools are doing it well and some schools aren't doing it means that we need to make sure that everybody's getting access to it.

**Media:** What about the rest of the promises, like the politics in schools or the driving lessons—would you like that as well?

**PM:** In terms of the work around driver licensing, that was a commitment we made back in 2017. We've done a lot of work on drivers' licensing that's been more targeted. I think that's actually probably the better approach. We didn't promise that in 2020. That was a 2017 commitment.

**Media:** The Labour Party sent out an email earlier today saying Helen Clark pledged to match dollar for dollar any pledges—I think it was up to \$100,000 or \$200,000 dollars. Is Labour struggling in terms of how much money it's making in this campaign? We've seen the Nats absolutely blitz it with millions of dollars. Are you worried about a shortfall between the two major parties?

**PM:** We're not designing our policies to appease millionaires. The National Party are proposing millions of dollars—billions of dollars—of tax cuts that will go to millionaires. The millionaires are therefore funding the National Party. We rely on grassroots contributions. That's always been the way.

**Media:** Yeah, but sure, you want to get your message out there, and you want to encourage people who have a Labour affiliation or some sort of connection to the party to get out there and vote. You can't do that unless you're visible, so are you worried that you can't match them dollar for dollar?

**PM:** But we're fund-raising. We always do every election. We're going to run a very vigorous campaign, and the more people contribute to our campaign, the more vigorous it will be.

**Media:** And have you asked Jacinda Ardern to be a part of that at all? She said she doesn't want to be a part of politics, but you've got Helen Clark stepping up. Would you be a bit disappointed if she just didn't do anything at all?

**PM:** I don't get involved in the fund-raising campaigns.

**Media:** Just to follow on from Luke's earlier question, I mean, you've made comments in the past about how you didn't want to interfere with how teachers teach, but the education announcement this morning is a bit of a separation from that, so has there been some kind of acceptance—have you perhaps gone down the wrong route in the past?

**PM:** The conversation we've been having with teachers about the New Zealand school curriculum is that we've moved from a very prescriptive syllabus previously to a very broad, enabling curriculum. And actually a lot of the feedback we've had from teachers is that they want a bit more direction within that curriculum. That's what we've been focused on delivering as a Government.

**Media:** Would you say or would you agree that the Government's perhaps gone a little bit too far in terms of loosening the reins on what is taught and how it's taught?

**PM:** The current curriculum has been in place since the early 2000s. So it was in place the entire time the National Party were in Government as well. The only major change that we made there was the abolition of national standards, which, as I've indicated, weren't working and, in fact, were making matters worse. We've been focused on making sure that we tighten the curriculum. I think that's the right approach.

**Media:** Is there anything in the policy you're proposing that is about time spent on reading, writing, and maths, or is it all just related to the direction of principals?

**PM:** Time spent is a very old-fashioned measure for learning, because some kids, if they've already gained a skill, don't need to spend more time on that. You actually want to focus on making sure that you're adding value for every child in the class. The time-spent measure is that standardised view of thinking about education. It doesn't work. It is actually going to mean that some kids who are doing well now are robbed of the opportunity to do even better,

**Media:** On the Nats' cancer plan—your comments there—can you guarantee that any boost that Labour would give to Pharmac funding wouldn't come from or wouldn't take away from any other kind of health provision?

**PM:** As I've indicated, we've increased Pharmac's budget every year. We're not proposing to cut funding for other things in order to fund an increase in funding for Pharmac.

**Media:** But could you also extend that to other, you know, health policies that Labour would look to?

**PM:** I'm not going to set out our health policy today, but, you know, we will do that in the coming weeks.

**Media:** But as far as cutting from other things to fund other things, will you guarantee that that won't happen under Labour?

**PM:** We're certainly not going to be cutting health budgets.

**Media:** Just on Tania Page's LynnMall story last night, are you able to give any updates at all since you've spoken with the survivors about any changes, any new information for them around that?

**PM:** I met with the survivors about a week and a half ago, and, you know, it was a pretty challenging conversation that we had with them, and I really want to thank them for their bravery. I know it's a really difficult topic even for them to talk about. I don't think the system has properly supported them through the traumatic ordeal that they have had, so I gave them two commitments: one was to go away and look at the issues that are specific to them where we can provide more support to them; the second was to go away and look at the broader issues around how we support victims in these circumstances. That will take a bit longer, because actually that's about identifying quite big gaps in the system and how we can best fill them. In terms of the work to support the victims of the LynnMall attack, I've indicated that I'll get back to them with more detail on that within the next two to three weeks. I sent them a letter late last week, just reporting back on progress that I've made so far. I want to give them a chance to consider that before I go into the detail of that, but I will make sure that we continue to keep them updated with progress. I do think they've waited too long. I do think that they haven't been as well supported as they should have been, and I'm committed to doing something about that.

**Media:** Why do you think that's the case—do you think because this happened in the middle of COVID when Auckland was in level 4 lockdown—I mean, do you agree that these survivors genuinely got forgotten because of the other circumstances happening?

**PM:** I certainly don't think they received the level of support that they deserved. There could be a whole variety of reasons for why that's happened, but I want to make sure that we fix that.

**Media:** Do you know whether any Ministers have had ongoing conversations or even met with them, or had anything to do with the survivors of what took place?

**PM:** I don't think they've met with Ministers previously; I met with them, as I said, about a week and a half ago. That was relatively quickly after they sent a letter to my office asking to meet with me, and that was, I guess, the first opportunity that I had to become aware of the concerns that they had. Many of the concerns that they've raised with me are ones that I share. I do think the system hasn't supported them to the extent that they deserved to have been supported, and I do want to make sure that we put that right.

**Media:** Do you also think that for New Zealanders listening to this that that's quite terrifying to think that you're going away to set up sort of a system so that, not if but when this likely happens again, there is actually a mechanism in place for how you deal with people who are victim to that sort of thing?

[Inaudible sound]

**Media:** Do you think you've taken such a strong stance against wedge politics that you've ruled out working with parties like the Destiny Church party? Would you in good conscience be able to work with a party like New Zealand First, which is currently campaigning on keeping penises out of women's toilets?

**PM:** I don't think that who uses which bathroom is really an issue that New Zealand is focused on right at the moment. New Zealand First can choose to talk about that if they want to, but I don't think that it's the sort of politics that New Zealanders are really engaged in at the moment. I've indicated that I will set out—closer to the election, and we're getting quite close to the election so it won't be far off—our preferred governing arrangements after the election.

**Media:** But have bifurcated so much from New Zealand First, I suppose is what I'm asking, that you wouldn't actually be able to work with them? If you are taking a stand over here, and they're taking a stand over here, is there no way of—?

**PM:** I'll set a bit more thinking out about that in due course. Thanks everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**