

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2016

PM: OK, so good afternoon. Just a few days ago I marked the anniversary of my eighth year as Prime Minister and my 10th year as leader of the National Party. Such an occasion seems a fitting time to not only take stock of the past 10 years but to look forward. Being leader of both the party and the country has been an incredible experience. Along with my Cabinet and caucus colleagues we have steered the country through the global financial crisis, which was arguably the worst recession since the great depression. We have stood with Christchurch in the wake of earthquakes, the greatest natural disaster to hit our country since 1931, and we have mourned the victims of the Pike River mine disaster, one of the saddest days our small nation has endured in recent times.

During my time as Prime Minister, the Government has positioned New Zealand so that our economy could harness the opportunities offered by a burgeoning Asia and a more connected world. Reforms have been far-reaching, including substantial changes to our tax, welfare, planning, and labour laws, not to mention the successful partial sell-down of State companies; the considerable overhaul of our justice, security and corrections agencies; and, of course, trade liberalisation. Ten years since I first became the leader of the National Party, I believe we can look back on advanced race relations and real momentum in the Treaty settlement programme. We also have a more confident, outward-looking, and multicultural New Zealand that competes and succeeds on the world stage.

Throughout these years I have given everything I could to this job, the job that I cherish, and the country that I love. All of this has come at quite some sacrifice to the people who are dearest to me, my family. For my wife, Bronagh, there have been many nights and weekends spent alone, many occasions that were important to her that I simply could not attend. My daughter Stephie and my son Max have transitioned from teenagers to young adults while coping with an extraordinary level of intrusion and pressure because of their father's job. I thank them for their tolerance; Bronagh and I are immensely proud of them.

My family has also had remarkable opportunities and experiences, as we have met people and visited places from one end of the country to the other. We have celebrated alongside fellow Kiwis in their happiest times and wept with them in their saddest. Simply put, it has been, for me, the most remarkable, satisfying, and exciting time of my life.

But despite the amazing career I've had in politics, I've never seen myself as a career politician. I certainly never wanted my success in politics to be measured by how long I spent in Parliament. The National Party is in great shape. Bill English has told me that, in all his years here, ours is the most cohesive Cabinet he has seen. And I am personally humbled and gratified that after 8 years as Prime Minister my personal support from the public remains high. I absolutely believe we can win the next election, but I do not believe that if you asked me if I was committed to serving out a fourth term that I could look the public in the eye and say yes. More than anything else, in my time here I have tried to be straight and true with New Zealanders. I also believe that leadership change for the right reasons, and handled well, is good for a political party.

For all of these reasons, I told my Cabinet and caucus colleagues of my decision to step down as leader of the National Party and as Prime Minister. It is my expectation that on Monday, 12 December National MPs will hold a special caucus meeting to select a new leader, and later that day I will tender my resignation to the Governor-General.

This has been the hardest decision I have ever made, and I don't know what I'll do next. But for me this feels the right time to go. It gives the Cabinet and caucus plenty of time to settle in with a new leader, before heading into the next election with a proud record of strong economic management, a commitment to the most vulnerable in our society, and lots of ideas to keep lifting New Zealanders up in the world. It would be easy for me to say that I've made this decision solely to rediscover the personal and family life I once had, and that is a factor, but it is one amongst many. Over the years I have observed many leaders who in a

similar position failed to take this step. I can understand why—it is an incredibly hard job to leave.

But for me and the National Party this is a good time to go. Party membership is high, and the party is well funded. The caucus is talented and eager to serve, and one of the achievements of which I am proud is having built with my colleagues a Cabinet team that is capable, committed, and cohesive. That is a great legacy for National's next leader. Just as I grasped the challenge of leadership, so will a new leader. Inevitably they will bring their own personality, emphasis, and priorities to the role. This is part of the process that allows a long-serving Government to continue delivering.

For my part, I am confident that the caucus has a number of individuals who would make a fine future Prime Minister. It is inevitable I will be asked who I will vote for at the caucus meeting on 12 December. Whoever the caucus selects will have my unwavering support, but if Bill English puts his name forward then I will vote for him. For 10 years now, Bill and I have worked as a team. I have witnessed firsthand his leadership style, his capacity for work, his grasp of the economy, his commitment to change, and, most of all, his decency as a husband, a father, a friend, a colleague, and as a politician. Bill has, I believe, grown a great deal since he was last a party leader. Fifteen years on he is more experienced in the party, and political cycles are quite different. I believe that National under Bill's leadership would win the election in 2017.

This is not the time to thank all of those who made the past 10 years possible for me. Nor can I stand here without acknowledging Bronagh, Stephanie, and Max, who have sacrificed a lot for me to be able to do what this job demands.

No person in this role can succeed without the support of an enormous number of talented and dedicated individuals. I thank my deputy, Bill English, the Cabinet, and the caucus for their loyalty and energy, and, of course, my wonderful staff so well led by Wayne Eagleson, who has done more than I could ever hope or expect of him.

I also wish to thank and acknowledge our support partners ACT, United Future, and the Māori Party, without whom this strong and stable Government we have delivered would not have been possible. I have no doubt my successor will look to build upon these relations.

Last but not least, I wish to put on record my everlasting gratitude to the people of Helensville for electing me and to the New Zealand public for the support, faith, and encouragement. It's been a privilege to serve you all. I've always believed that the test of a good Prime Minister is that he or she leaves the country in better shape than they found it. Over time, others will judge whether I have done that. All I can say is that I gave it everything I had; I left nothing in the tank.

Finally, while I intend to stay in Parliament long enough to avoid the cost and inconvenience a by-election would cause the people of Helensville, I will at some appropriate time prior to the next election step down as an MP. On that day, I shall walk from these buildings for the last time a richer person for the experience and privilege of being here, and hoping and believing that New Zealand has been well-served by the Government I led.

Media: Prime Minister, this is obviously quite a shock for the country. How quickly did you make this decision? When did you know?

PM: Yeah, so I've been mulling over the decision for all of this year. When I came back from New York after the Security Council meeting there, I made the decision formally, I guess, in my own mind, and as a family, that I would leave before the end of the year. At that time, I told the Deputy Prime Minister, Bill English, that it was my likely intention that I would go. Obviously I didn't tell anyone else because it's a very difficult thing to burden people with. And then I formally advised everyone, starting with the Deputy Prime Minister, at 8 o'clock this morning.

Media: Why didn't you want to go to the fourth term?

PM: Look, there are many reasons. The first is, there's no way I could've served out a full fourth term, and I think in reality if I'd got there and served 6 months or 12 months, I would have inevitably in the entire campaign had to look down the barrel of the camera and say "I'm going to stay for a full 3 years."—and then I would have misled the public, and deliberately misled them, and that's just not the way I've operated.

I think, secondly, for our family, you know, 10 years at the top—it's a long time. You know, it's a lot of lonely nights for Bronagh, and I really feel I owe it to the family to come home a little bit. But probably more—well, as importantly as all of that—I really feel that leaders tend to stay too long, and I look at some of the other leaders around the world that have had the opportunity, have been on the top of their game, and we're polling 50 percent. I think, as a party, we're doing amazingly well; as a Government we're doing really well. But I think that they sometimes stay too long, and I just felt this was the opportunity for me on top to do what very few leaders and Prime Ministers get the chance to do, and that is to transition to a new leader.

And, of course, you know, the new leader will have a different style from me. They'll have a different—you know, maybe slightly different emphasis or focus, but that's a healthy thing. It's how we potentially get a fourth term and maybe even a fifth term, I don't know. But it's just the right time for me. You know, I really felt I wasn't a career politician and now is right.

Media: Has Bill English said he will stand?

PM: Well, that's for the Deputy Prime Minister to decide, and I'll leave him to make any announcements that he might make.

Media: What does life after politics hold for you?

PM: Quieter, I think, obviously. Look, I don't have any plans. I think I'll—I'm a commercial guy. I'm not looking for, you know, any sort of postings overseas or things, you'll appreciate. I think I'll—if I get those opportunities offered to me—go on a couple of boards, probably a few overseas and maybe one or two, or something, in New Zealand. I'll probably do a little bit of speaking internationally, but it'll just be a slightly quieter life and a chance for us to spend time together travelling.

Media: It's been said often enough that a lot of the success of your Government relies on your personal popularity. Do you accept that, and do you accept that you're now putting National in a difficult position to win the next election?

PM: I think—obviously, there's been a brand around me that's been built up by the people around me, and they've allowed that brand to develop and that's been a factor which has been helpful. I don't think there's any doubt about that.

But, equally, I think, people have seen what the Government has delivered, and, I think, in the end, people vote on the issues that really matter. It is, ultimately, the economy and law and order and health and education. And whoever becomes the leader—I've put on the table the cards that, you know, I hold—I think they'll be a fine Prime Minister and I think they'll demonstrate to the country that they're worthy of a fourth term. And so often in politics, you know, leaders leave because there's a coup and they stay a bit too long and then they white-ant the next leader, and there's no clear air for the person to take over and demonstrate what they're capable of doing. And what the country wants is strong and stable leadership, and I think—if we can transition to a new leadership team and do that efficiently and with unity and dignity, then I think we can provide that.

Media: But after the earthquakes, isn't this really a tumultuous time for New Zealand for you to be abandoning the leadership?

PM: Yeah, so, look, obviously, I've given a lot of consideration to the current timing, and I believe that we're, as best as I know it, through the worst of the situations. The core Cabinet—you know, 19 other members, subject to the new leader—will be there. I'll be in Parliament for a period of time, and I'd, obviously, offer any support that was required. But, you know, ultimately—let's argue for moment that Bill English becomes the new Prime

Minister. He's been Minister of Finance. He's been at my side through all of these things we've dealt with.

We've been a very decentralised Cabinet, you know. While I've had the overall authority, of course, as Prime Minister, you know, Ministers have been able to cut their own cloth. And I think the country can take great confidence from the fact that they've got very strong people there.

Media: You didn't have any agreement with Bill English, you didn't have any, sort of, Gordon Brown/Tony Blair – type agreement?

PM: Am I going—no, I'm not going for those reasons, no. I mean, he, I think, genuinely believed he would never get the chance to do this, and he's been the most utterly loyal deputy that, I think, the country's probably ever seen. And he was probably more shocked when I spoke to him in September than a lot of people, but I personally believe he'll be a fine Prime Minister—and if not him then it'll be someone else, and they'll be a fine Prime Minister. But—

Media: Isn't it fair to say that you wouldn't be talking him up if he was reluctant to do it?

PM: No, what I'm saying is that, look, in the end, if I don't come out and say who I'm voting for, we'll go round the houses on who I'm voting for, and I think it's better for me to be clear and upfront. And we've been a great team for 10 years. So no, there's no deal and there was no pressure from him and there was no expectation I would do something. It's just the right time for me.

Media: Prime Minister, what do you view as your greatest success, really, in those years?

PM: Well, I think, firstly, the economic leadership that we've shown the country. I mean, very few countries are in the financial position we're in. We're strong, we're in surplus, we're growing, we're creating jobs—we're doing well. I think, secondly, we've shown good leadership in those difficult times that New Zealand's faced, whether it's been the Christchurch earthquakes, most recently in Kaikōura; I think, with Pike River; the *Rena*; the global financial crisis—there's been a lot of things there.

And I do think as a Government, I'm very proud of what we've achieved in terms of trying to help, you know, vulnerable New Zealanders. You know, there was a lot of advice to me to pull the rug out from underneath them in 2008 and 2009, when I first came in, and I stood by those people. And I know there'll always be people that say I didn't do enough, but I think that we did everything we could, practical to the circumstances that we had.

Media: What do you think the competition for top job will do for unity within Cabinet and caucus?

PM: Look, there's bound to be some competition, whether it's either at the No. 1 job or the No. 2 job. Caucus is first amongst equals, and so, in the end, it's for the 59 members to determine who becomes the leader and the deputy leader. And competition can be a healthy thing, you know. As I said, we've got a caucus that's full of talent, and one of the things that I've always believed in is making room for new talent. And, you know, let's be blunt, I've taken the knife to some other people, and now I'm taking the knife to myself, to allow others to come through and have those opportunities. And it's a healthy thing; it's a good thing. We've got a caucus that's full of talent, so we shouldn't be afraid of that. I mean, in the end, there'll be a competition, potentially, and at the end of it, I think, they'll come together. They'll coalesce around the new leader and the new deputy leader and we'll go from there.

Media: You were the last leader to see David Cameron packing out of Downing Street. Were you thinking about it then, and what sort of impression did that leave on you, watching him do that?

PM: Well, I've certainly seen lots of leaders leave probably not on their own terms, and by any definition I'm leaving on my own terms. It's nicer when you leave on your own terms. It doesn't make the conversations I've had this morning any easier. There's always going to be some tears and there's always going to be some difficulty, because the people that work for me and the people that have supported me in terms of my Cabinet and caucus colleagues, I feel a real bond with them. They've been amazingly loyal to me.

But I really feel as though sometimes you've got to make the hard decisions to make the right decisions, and this is the right decision for, I think, the National caucus and, actually, the National-led Government in we might be able to do something that no other political party has done—had a decade where I've had essentially the same poll ratings for 10 years, where we transitioned to a new leadership team, where I, as the former leader, don't find myself in the position so many other former leaders in the world find themselves in, which is disgruntled and unhappy.

I suppose the only other last thing I'd say is that, you know, I've had amazing support from the New Zealand public. Through it all, I've had that. I really wanted to leave immensely grateful to them. These are the people that made it possible for me to be Prime Minister and for me to have this job over the last 10 years. I'm going to leave forever grateful to the New Zealand public that they gave me a chance.

Media: You're talking up the next Government as a strong and stable, flexible Government, if it's National, but how do think the public will see this now that you're throwing the caucus into a leadership challenge?

PM: Well, they'll see it as change. But I think, over time—as I said, change can be a very healthy thing, and they know those individuals, and, yes, look, whoever the leader is, inevitably he's probably going to have a different style from me, but that's one of the good things. Every leader brings their own different way of doing things and their own new answers and their own perception of different priorities. That's what gives the Government a chance to win a fourth term and a fifth term—that when we go into the election, that people see them as, you know, a little fresh, a little different, a little more interesting, and I think one of the reasons why Governments fail at that fourth-term hurdle so often is that the leader never wants to leave, everyone says "I've seen all this before. I've seen the video", and, you know, it's not new, and this is the chance for us to demonstrate a newness about us. Now, yeah, of course people say: "Well, if Bill becomes the leader, he's been there a long period of time." But not as Prime Minister; that's what makes it new.

Media: Prime Minister, what happened in New York to, sort of, spur this? Was it the fact that you'd obviously reached a high in terms of the Security Council and also the fact that the TPP was really looking like it wasn't going to happen?

PM: Well, there's always going to be some regrets, and one of them was that we didn't get TPP over the line. You know, hopefully we will at some point in a future administration. We'd gone away to Hawaii before that, and, to be frank, Bronagh and I had a pretty long discussion about it. I said to her: "Look, you know, maybe we'll just take one last look at it when I'm in New York." You guys did all ask me in Q+A and in *The Nation* whether I'd absolutely stand for a full fourth term, and one of the things I said to Bronagh on the way home is, I said: "Look, I just don't feel comfortable looking down the barrel of the camera and not being honest." And if I'm going to stay 6 months or 12 months I run the risk of doing what happened to National in 1996-99—that there was a change of leadership quite shortly afterwards. It destabilised things and it left the party in much worse shape. I honestly don't think on a family basis and a lot of other reasons I could commit for much beyond the next election. So I've got no option but to do it now. Now's the right time to do it rather than—I'm just, I've come too far to mislead the public. I'm not going to do that.

Media: Did Bronagh give you an ultimatum?

PM: No, she's been amazingly supportive, and if she wanted—look, if I really wanted to stay for a fourth term, you know, she would back me. But I just feel—look, it's been a

decade of a lot of nights home alone for her, and the time's the right time for me to come home.

Media: Prime Minister, you know I asked you directly there, you know, whether you would see out an entire fourth term. Did you find it difficult to answer that question in the way you did at the time?

PM: Yeah, I just thought, look, inevitably, I'm going to be dogged with that question the whole way through, and I spent a little bit of time thinking "OK, if I say I'm not going to stay for the full 3 years, then I'm a lame duck leader and the entire campaign will be spent talking about who the Prime Minister's going to be after that. If I'm not honest, then I mislead the very people who are making me Prime Minister.", and I didn't feel comfortable about that. So, in the end, now is the right time.

Media: Isn't there a danger that you've now levelled the playing field for Labour and the Greens going into this election?

PM: You know, I'm not so convinced. I think that, you know, in the end the public will vote for the leadership of the country that they believe will deliver what is important to them. And I do think that it's a National-led Government, and I think—I believe in everything I've said. I think Andrew Little believes in being more left wing, and I don't knock him for that—I appreciate and understand that's his perspective, but he is going more left. The centre ground is very open, and, you know, there's a scenario here—and I may be proved to be right, and I may be proved to be wrong—but there's a scenario here where, with fresh leadership and, you know, with the policies that they'll inevitably bring into the election, that National could get four terms, it could get five terms. It can do that, but, look, it needs a refresh and we're starting that refresh today.

Media: What's your advice for your successor?

PM: Oh, I think, back your instincts. You know, you operate as Prime Minister not with perfect information all the time. It would be great if you did, but, unfortunately, hindsight has taught me that things evolve and as stories evolve there's always information you didn't find out straight away and you didn't know. But I think, most of all, the public are amazingly forgiving of all of that, as long as you just—they look in your eyes and they believe you. And I think particularly television shows your heart, and I think, in the end, if you're trying to do the right thing, they'll cut you a lot of leeway.

Media: Prime Minister, just looking at the political landscape ahead for a fourth term, as you would have done, you know, did the prospect of having to share power with Winston Peters in a different kind of arrangement, kind of, was that—you know, and I'm asking you honestly—was that part of the mix, that it might not have been John Key with a pretty easy majority, it might have been John Key with a tricky one? Did that play a part?

PM: I genuinely think, no. Look, I think in the end Parliament's a place that's combative and, you know, look what's happening in the US. On the one hand, you know, you've had Mitt Romney and Donald Trump calling each other all sorts of names, and all of a sudden they're dining together and talking about what may happen. So is it possible I could've done a deal with Winston Peters and Winston Peters could do a deal with me if I was the leader? Yes, I think it's possible.

And, in the end, political parties, in my experience of being around here, are pretty much grown-ups. They know that every 3 years we have an election and people don't want to go back every 5 minutes because they can't put their differences to one side. So I think it would've been possible. But, frankly, I've had great majorities over the last 3 years. They've been, obviously, minority Governments, but they've been pretty close to there, and it's been easy. But, you know.

Media: Yeah, I mean my question wasn't whether it was possible or not, it was whether you would've enjoyed it—you know, whether you would've enjoyed it after those great majorities.

PM: I might've, but, you know, it's not something I'm going to be testing.

Media: What would you wish you could've done that you didn't achieve?

PM: There's a few things. I mean, you know, I wish, as I said, I wish we could've got TPP there. I, frankly, actually wish we could've got the Kermadecs into an ocean sanctuary, but we're going to get there eventually. I, obviously, wish we could've changed the flag. I know a lot of people had, you know, thought I had ulterior motives, but I just think one of the things I feel—and I may be proved to be right or wrong—but one of the things I feel about New Zealand over the last, you know, 8 years I've been Prime Minister is it's become a lot more confident as a nation and a lot more outward-looking, and we've backed ourselves to succeed on the world stage. And, to me, the change of flag sort of embodied that—that there was a New Zealandness about it.

And look, you know, maybe if I had my time again I would have pushed it much harder at the end. There was—you know, referendums can be a referendum sometimes that is used for political reasons, and we got a little bit of that. And that's, again, it's all part of what went on, but, you know, I would've liked to have done that, but I didn't, and I'll leave it for another Prime Minister one day to consider the matter.

Media: Haven't you, effectively, pre-empted caucus's decision by nominating Mr English?

PM: No, because in the end caucus will make a call, and it may well be contested as the leadership or deputy leadership. But what I didn't want is (a) ambiguity on my part, that you guys asked me and the country asked me; secondly, I've worked with Bill for 10 years. We've been an amazing leadership team. We've had a great working relationship, and to me it would feel a bit odd if I wasn't backing the guy that I've stood alongside for a decade—if I didn't think he was right to be the Prime Minister, then I shouldn't have thought he's right to be the deputy. And I do, I feel really strongly that—you know, things are a lot different back than they were probably in 2002 when Bill was last leader.

Media: How do you think your political career would have played out, had Don Brash won the 2005 election? Because your success came off his troubles in 2006.

PM: I don't know. But, you know, politics is a funny place, isn't it? And you pay your money and you take your chances type of thing. You've got to give it a go. And I've just, sort of, backed my instincts when I've been here. I gave up a big investment banking career to come in to Parliament. I was pretty green as grass, and I didn't know too much about it when I came. But I came and I gave it the best. And, yeah, you've got to look back and say by any definition, you know, I've been around for 14 years, I've had 8 years as Prime Minister, 2 years as Leader of the Opposition, pretty much 2 years as National finance spokesman. It's been a remarkable journey. It's been an incredible experience, and it's been a real privilege. And, you know, I'm going die happy—and I hope that's a long time into the future—but I'm going to feel really proud of what we've done, and I'm going to be really happy I was here. I'm really pleased I made a contribution. But a good leader knows when it's time to go and this is the time to go.

Media: Are you optimistic about the political environment at the moment going into the future? You've got the Trump, Brexit factors, but also this post-truth environment where people seem to be able to say whatever they want. I mean, compared to where you were when you started, are you optimistic and confident that there is going to be a healthy democracy?

PM: Yeah, I am. Look New Zealanders have an amazing capacity to look through, kind of, nonsense and work out what's truth and what's not. And I back them. I mean, look in the 2014 campaign there was a lot of stuff that I didn't either believe or knew wasn't true. And we endured a lot of days of it. But, in the end, the public came out and said "We're picking the side.", and the side was backing us. And I think they'll see through all that. I personally think—and I know it's been the, sort of, the view of many, that there's a global wave going on and it's a bit different and it's going to wash over New Zealand. And I know

that there'll be many people who come up with all sorts of reasons. There is no grand conspiracy here of why I'm doing what I'm doing. It just is the right time.

But, I don't think that's quite so true in New Zealand. I think, having lived in the UK for a long time, there was always an uneasiness about the full integration into Europe, and about uncontrolled migration, and about paying in a lot of money, and having another place like Brussels set the rules. And I think in the US the voting system's very different, it's very low in turnout and people are quite disengaged. And I think we're lucky in New Zealand; for the most part our democracy means that 75 to 80 percent of people vote. So, yeah: will it be robust and rugged and everything like that in the next election campaign? Bet your bottom dollar it will be. But, it was in 2014, it was in 2011, from memory it was in 2008. It's just—elections are messy affairs.

Media: So what will you say to those people who will be questioning whether there is some conspiracy. I mean, there are comments on—

PM: I'm sure there are.

Media: —the blogsphere are coming up, but they're not necessarily—they're in shock, for sure, but they're saying: "Oh, there's something else going on." What do you say to those people?

PM: OK. But, for a start-off, I think most people that know me, and I think even the media who have had to hang around me for 14 years, I think most of you guys know that I'm not a career politician; that I came to do a job. And I think a lot of the public elected me in 2008 because they wanted economic reform and the sorts the things we've done. And I think we've done a lot of stuff there. I think they also know I'm probably not the kind of guy that has to hang on to power for power's sake. I'm quite happy to have a life where I'm not in front of the camera. In fact, my aim is to have a life where I'm quite subterranean, actually, going forward a long time. I've got some things I want to do. But I don't need to be in front of the camera.

So there'll always be people that come up with a million conspiracy theories, but, you know, I just encourage people to see it for what it is. It's the right time from a family perspective, it's the right time to hand over, I feel like I'm going out on top. And I feel like I've left the party well-funded, polling 50 percent, and ready to transition to the new leadership to give them the best shot of winning a fourth term.

Media: How did you tell your Cabinet, and what was their response?

PM: So I started at 8 o'clock in the morning. I spoke to all of the Cabinet members individually, because I, you know, obviously felt I wanted to do that. There was quite a bit of, you know, surprise and shock, but a lot of support. They can understand it. There's obviously going to be disappointment from some of them, but, you know, this is a process where pretty quickly they'll move to the new leader and the new deputy leader and there'll be opportunities. And that's a good thing. So, yeah, they were hard conversations. But for my staff, I mean, I can't control what happens next, although they're immensely talented and I'm immensely confident for them, but I don't like putting people at jeopardy, but, unfortunately, I don't control that process.

Media: You mentioned the intrusion for Stephie and Max; have they, at any point, said to you: "We just want a normal life."?

PM: No. One of the things, you know, I want to be really careful about is that, yes, they've had an extraordinary level of intrusion and, yes, they've had all sorts of things, some of which are documented in the media and some of which are not. But, equally, gosh, they've had amazing opportunities, and so has Bronagh and so have I—me, obviously, the most of all of them. But, you know, there are so many New Zealanders that would just want to be in our position. And, so, while I really acknowledge the amazing support that they've given me, they've allowed me to be Prime Minister and be confident and be leader of the party, and I owe them a debt of gratitude I can't repay, but I don't think it would be right for

us to say that it's unfair that we have that, because every leader and every, kind of, "first family", if you want to have that expression, will go through this. We just live in a world where, if you want to put your hand up for the top job, you just get that exposure, and that's what happens.

Media: You talked about the need for fresh leadership, but can National really present Bill English as a fresh face?

PM: Yup, they can, because, for a start-off, I mean, when Bill was the leader 15 years ago, it was a different time, actually, in the cycle of National. You know, it wasn't doing what it's doing now. Secondly, our party was in very different shape back then. You know, we're well-funded now; we've got a big support base. There's just different things happening. And politics is all about cycles. You know, I mean, sometimes you become the leader of a party and the cycle isn't good. And, you know, if you ask Phil Goff whether he thought he'd be a good Prime Minister, he'd tell you he would be, but his time wasn't right. You know, that might be true of some of the others. So there's no question that whoever the new leader is will have just a different style. I think, much of the substance will be the same because we're a very economic-focused Government, but a lot of it will be similar.

Media: You could have been the country's longest-ever-serving PM. Is that something that you wanted?

PM: I'm really happy with the amount of time that I've spent. Look, I've—yeah, of course you can stay longer, but if you're staying for the record of the time, you're staying for the wrong reason. You've got to be in Parliament because you want to make a difference to New Zealand, and to me it was more important about the future of the Government and the future of the party. If I started putting myself in front of the party, then I ran the risk of staying longer, maybe, arguably, getting more records, but equally then leaving the party in weaker shape when I go. I think—I don't know, but if you went and asked a few of the leaders that have hung around for a long period of time, most of them inevitably tell you they probably should've gone a little bit earlier. It's a really hard thing to do. It's an amazing job and it's an amazing privilege but, eventually, at some point, if you can muster that courage, you have to know that it's the right time to do it.

Media: You talked quite a bit at the beginning of this term about addressing child poverty. Do you think you could've done more or could've stayed longer to address that?

PM: I think as the economic opportunities allow there'll be more that we can do in that space, but I really think one of the big things that we're doing, which is really around the investment approach and all the cross-agency activity, is making, and will over time make, a huge difference. And the work that Anne Tolley's doing now with the Ministry for Vulnerable Children and the likes will have profound effects on those who are the least well-supported economically in our society.

I'm actually pretty proud of the fact that the first Budget we did when we came back after the 2014 election was raising benefits, and the fact that, you know, we ensured that doctors visits were free for under-13s, and that we poured more money into areas like Working for Families, and we insulated 300,000 homes. And I say to our caucus all the time: be proud of the things that we've achieved for the most vulnerable New Zealanders, because life in Government is always a balance, but I think that we've had a real mind to help those that are least well off.

Media: Did you not feel a responsibility to continue on and follow through, because you couldn't say the job's finished, could you?

PM: No, you can't say the job's finished, but I doubt any Prime Minister that's honest will be able to say every job is finished and every issue is dealt with. These issues, whatever they might be, from education reform to growing the economy to lifting people out of poverty—they're very long-term issues, and you can make improvements, and we have. I think in lots of areas, like educational achievement, you can really point to some remarkable

results there, but it doesn't mean that every child is getting the education they need, and you just need to keep working on that.

Media: Who do you think would be the main contenders for finance Minister if Bill English becomes Prime Minister?

PM: There's a number that are there. I'll probably leave you guys to speculate and work it out. But, look, one thing I do know is we've got an amazingly talented team, and as hard as this is, the harsh reality is that it allows that talent to get an opportunity to step up, at so many levels, because I know from being the leader that when you make one move it has lots of other moves, and if, ultimately, for instance, Bill becomes the leader, then someone else has to become Deputy Prime Minister and someone else has to become finance Minister, and so forth and so on. So it presents a lot of opportunities.

Media: The Treaty of Waitangi—a unique document. What's it been like navigating that as Prime Minister?

PM: Well, we've been lucky we've had Chris Finlayson. I think, as I said in my opening remarks, he's done a remarkable job as someone that's tried immensely hard to settle the claims and to navigate a fair and reasonable path. I think race relations have come on a long way. I think if you go back and look at the stuff that took place in 2004 and 2005—I mean, Don Brash is still arguing the same things today, but they don't seem to be resonating with the public in the way they were, and I think there's a growing maturity in New Zealand about understanding that the Treaty is our founding document of modern New Zealand, and we as a country, more than anything else, want to live harmoniously with each other. I think, like a lot of those things, you can whip up arguments, but in practice the way that the Treaty has been applied in modern New Zealand under our Government has been effective.

Media: You mentioned you have some things you might want to do later in life. Can you talk about the sorts of things you are interested in?

PM: I'll probably take this and go. Yes, I mean, look, I'm not desperately looking to do anything straightaway, but, at the core of it all, I'm a commercial guy. I think, you know, if the opportunities come I'll go on a couple of boards, maybe in Australia or in Asia or the States or New Zealand, but I won't be wanting to overburden myself and I'll be wanting to take it slowly. And, who knows? Those phone calls may never happen and I may never get rung, but if I do, at some point I'll do a bit of that.

Media: Where do you want to live?

Media: Do you want to live here?

PM: Yeah, look, we're going to live in Auckland. That's our home. I don't think you can, in all good conscience and good grace, be Prime Minister of a country for 8 years and say: "I'm out of here." I mean, it's different if you're Helen Clark and you're going off to the UN. She had a particular job that took her overseas, and I might do a bit of work overseas if I sit on the odd board overseas or do a bit of speaking overseas. But my home is New Zealand—I love New Zealand, and I'm staying here.

Media: But do you have any ambitions for international politics—the UN, or anything like that?

PM: No, definitely not.

Media: Do you think the caucus is going to descend into chaos without you there? I mean, you're the reason that it's so disciplined and stable. Is that a risk now, without you there?

PM: Same answer to that question: definitely not. Thanks very much.

conclusion of press conference