

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2018

PM: Good afternoon, everyone. Look, I'll quickly run through the week ahead. On Tuesday, I will be accompanying the Duke and Duchess of Sussex to visit Pillars. We will meet the public on a walkabout down around the Viaduct, and later in the evening I will host a reception at Auckland Museum. On Thursday, the second reading of the child poverty legislation, which I have responsibility for as Minister for Child Poverty Reduction, will progress through the House, and I will be visiting Porirua for a housing development announcement. On Friday, the Labour Party conference starts and runs through Saturday and Sunday, and will be accompanied by the usual party conference activity, and I look forward to seeing some of you down there.

Look, I'll pre-empt a few of the questions that might exist around the royal visit. I very much enjoyed the time that I had with Their Royal Highnesses yesterday evening. The discussion covered a number of issues, but in general terms, given their recent time in the Pacific, covered issues around the Pacific, climate change, children's issues, and mental health. I also used the opportunity to share a few personal gifts for the Duchess of Sussex. I shared with her a personal gift of a set of earrings—Boh Runga earrings featuring the crossed feathers, which some of you may be familiar with. I also gave a gift to His Royal Highness of a Shapeshifter CD. For those familiar with Shapeshifter, I gave him a copy of *The System is a Vampire* because it includes the track titled "Dutchies", which is the music that the All Blacks enter on to the field with, including, of course, at Twickenham. I also gave him a piece of vinyl—their *Stars* album, which was released in 2016 and is a fine album.

All right. Happy to take any question on these and other matters.

Media: Why was Karel Sroubek not deported?

PM: Yeah, look, this is a conversation that I've had with the Minister of Immigration, and it's fair to say that Governments of both stripes will face these kinds of questions, and these kinds of cases. They are rare—in the order of, you know, 40-ish a year—but it's not unusual for Ministers of both Governments, past and present, to face these kinds of situations. The Minister shared with me the careful consideration that he gave this case, and I can say, from the information that he shared with me, it was clearly, for him, a very difficult decision, and whilst he hasn't been able to share all of the information that sat behind that, I think, just glancing back at some of the past coverage of his entry into New Zealand, reading between the lines you can probably ascertain why the Minister made the decision that he made. But, again, not an easy one for him, not an easy one for past Ministers either.

Media: Are there humanitarian concerns?

PM: Again, whilst he hasn't gone into the details of the case, I think it's fair to say, if you look back on some of the past decisions that have surrounded this individual, you can draw a fair conclusion as to why the Minister might have made the decision he's made.

Media: Is there intelligence that Sroubek's life is in danger?

PM: Again, and while I don't want to get into the detail of this case, I think you can probably draw a fair conclusion on why the Minister made this decision.

Media: How do you balance that with the rights of New Zealanders?

PM: Oh, and look, this is the difficult decision that Ministers of Immigration in this Government and past Governments have to face. It's not an easy place to be in, and that's why I think the Minister of Immigration has said it was a very difficult decision for him, one that he gave a lot of consideration to, and one which he didn't take lightly.

Media: Reading between the lines, his life was in danger?

PM: Again, there's information that I'm not in a position to share, but you might be able to infer from some of the past discussions on this case that this was a decision that could have had significant ramifications, and the Minister didn't take lightly.

Media: At what point is one last chance one chance too many, because this guy has been convicted, arrested for various drugs charges, blackmail, aggravated robbery, and, again, one more last chance?

PM: Yeah, and look, obviously the Minister's now put that in writing and the ramifications for this individual of breaching, I think, what the Minister has set down are pretty significant. But again, this was not an easy decision, and not something that he has taken lightly.

Media: Simon Bridges said that Iain Lees-Galloway should explain or resign.

PM: Yeah, and look, as I say, this is the kind of decision making that has not just faced this Minister, but has faced his past Ministers as well. There are a handful of these that happen for every Minister of Immigration. They will be tough, I imagine, regardless of the political stripes that you might have, but, ultimately, we need to allow those Ministers to do their job. They are the ones that have all of the information in front of them, and these aren't easy decisions.

Media: Don't you think the public's got a right to know, though? This man was sentenced to almost six years in jail for importing 5 kilograms of Ecstasy.

PM: Barry, I'm getting some pretty clear clues on what's gone in this decision making.

Media: Well, no, I'm just asking about the public's right. Doesn't the public have a right to know if this man, if he's released, is going to become a permanent citizen?

PM: Oh, and just to be clear on that, the Minister didn't grant him—this is where it gets a little bit technical—new status. He already had that status, but, of course, it was under the incorrect identity. So it wasn't new status, but he of course needed it to be in the correct name. Again, he entered into New Zealand under a different identity because of—as you'll see from previous cases—the circumstances in which he arrived in New Zealand.

Media: One of the conditions is that he obtains a new Czech passport within five months. Realistically, what do think his chances are of achieving that?

PM: Look, that's not something I have details on. That would be a question for the Minister or officials.

Media: Why has the oil and gas consultation period been so short?

PM: Obviously, this is now a process we're going through in order to allow the block offer for 2018 to go ahead. That's something, obviously, that we want to make sure that we progress this calendar year. So that's why we're going through this process now.

Media: Isn't that really just a tick-the-box exercise though? I mean, it's effectively a week for the public to give their submissions on a significant policy change.

PM: The block offer is not a significant policy change, and that's essentially what this legislation is allowing us to put out—that block offer for 2018.

Media: Prime Minister, do you seriously there'll be any interest in Block Offer 2018 given the sort of situation around it? Like, who would put their hand up at this point?

PM: Again, I think it needs to be put in the wider context. Of course, last block offer, I think, had one successful offer. And so I don't think it would be fair just simply to make that assumption based on the wider decision here, because there actually has been a change in the uptake in the last few years. But, again, we are giving certainty to those who currently hold permits and those who would be seeking an onshore block offer that we will honour the commitments around those permits. And actually, what we're looking at here is giving a greater certainty, rather than year-on-year, around those onshore offers than they otherwise would have.

Media: Yeah, but the point is that rushing through a piece of legislation for the sake of a block offer that is potentially not going to be that useful anyway.

PM: On what basis are you making the assumption that it wouldn't be that useful?

Media: Uncertainty, I guess.

PM: And that's the point I'm making. We've given absolute certainty. For those who currently hold permits, I've given that personal commitment to those who hold permits, and I've done this directly to those in the industry, that those who currently hold permits will have those permits honoured.

Media: But will there be a chance for the public then to have their say on the change to a halt to most new permits if not the block offer?

PM: Again, for the block offer, obviously that's an existing power that's already existed for Governments past and present. Those block offers happen at the discretion of the Minister. This is a requirement that we had to go through in order to make sure that we met the timetable for Block Offer 2018.

Media: Sure, but part of this is the decision not to give any future permits—to halt most future permits. When will the public have their chance to actually give their feedback about that policy change?

PM: And some are using this opportunity, but, ultimately, the decision as to whether there's block offers or not is always at the discretion of the Minister of energy.

Media: But what about the decision to halt future permits?

PM: I think at the moment that people said that issues around climate change and the use of fossil fuels, if that mattered to them, then these kind of decisions matter to them.

Media: What were the royals' reactions to the gifts?

PM: I'd describe them as really genuine, a genuine appreciation. Yeah.

Media: Did you give them to them personally, or does it get passed on through someone?

PM: No, I gave it to them personally.

Media: In a TV interview, Kelvin Davis has said that he is not precious about his position as deputy leader. Do you think he's committed enough?

PM: Yeah, absolutely. You know, I think probably what you're hearing from Kelvin Davis is the fact that he is a politician that doesn't have any ego, that he's in politics for all of the right reasons, and that makes him incredibly good at what he does. He represents people well and he supports me as deputy leader really well, as well. So I am incredibly grateful for the role he plays.

Media: Did he do a good job when he filled in for you in the House?

PM: He's always done a good job. His role as deputy is a very specific job. From time to time, it means he jumps into the role of filling in for me while I'm away, but his primary role is an ongoing one. It is that he sits within our caucus, playing a real support role, particularly some of the pastoral care for our team members, and he does that job incredibly well.

Media: What about in the House, though?

PM: Yeah, and that is one tiny part of the job. And, again, I think it's a part of the job that I thrust upon whoever is available at the time that I'm away and is available in the House. It's never an easy job, but he's always done that job really robustly for me too.

Media: So you wouldn't consider replacing him with anybody?

PM: No. No.

Media: So he'll definitely be the deputy going into the 2020 election?

PM: Yes.

Media: Are you able to give a bit more detail around the nature of the discussions you had with the Duke and Duchess of Sussex on mental health?

PM: Yeah, and look, whilst, of course, there's tradition reasons to keep these—to convey the discussions in a fairly high-level way, what I can share is the fact that I've come away being even more certain that they are very, very genuine in their passion for this area and are very focused on it. I shared a little bit from New Zealand's perspective around some of the challenges that we have, some of the statistics that we have, and some of the groups that we particularly need to focus on within New Zealand, particularly our young people and males.

Media: You said that they gave you a gift—you gave them a gift. Did they give you a gift?

PM: Yes. Yes. So I was given a—it was a community project that Her Highness worked on in the wake of the—with the Grenfell community, a book of recipes, which I think was done some time after that tragedy. So, yeah, it was a really lovely gift.

Media: Have you had—well, obviously, not time to cook any of them yet, but have you had a—

PM: Well, it's only been a space of 24 hours, but I appreciate that you think I'm superwoman. That's great.

Media: Have you had a chance to flick through and have a look at any of the recipes and earmark them for a little bit later; things that you might want to try?

PM: Not quite yet. I am worried about whether or not I can get them down to a milder level of spice, though.

Media: In your discussions with the duke and duchess about mental health, did you get the sense that they were aware about the mental health issues that have been dominating New Zealand politics in recent weeks?

PM: I definitely got a sense that they were aware of the issues that face New Zealand as a nation, but, actually, also an appreciation that this is a global challenge and that we are not alone in our region in facing these challenges, and that particularly we do and should be focusing on young people—an area where, obviously, they both have a real genuine interest.

Media: Often before these trips, royals will get a bit of a heads-up about what's been going on and a country's politics before they arrive. Do you think they knew about the issues that have been discussed around mental health and Jami-Lee Ross?

PM: I couldn't—no, I couldn't say. We had a very general discussion around issues that, actually, I wouldn't say have politics in them but are just challenges that we face as a nation.

Media: Just going back to the deportation decision for a moment, I just want a bit more clarity. The UN refugee convention has provisions which say the State can't refouler people back to a situation of torture or cruel and degrading treatment.

PM: Couldn't—can't recall, did you say?

Media: Refouler, is the word. It's the refoulement provision. Were those considerations weighed in in the ministry—

PM: That would need to be a specific question for the Minister. Unfortunately, I couldn't say whether or not those conventions played a direct role in his decision. But it's fair to say, with issues around extradition, certainly deportation, I imagine that would be factored in.

Media: Prime Minister, you'll be aware that with the previous Government, refugees that did face the threat of violence on their being deported were told that they could just shift to another city and that would therefore mitigate the threat to them. It would seem, again, when people are trying to work out the context, they would be concerned why—either they would welcome the fact that a more compassionate approach has been taken by the current Government. Should we be fair in regarding that as being a possible inference?

PM: Yeah. Well, look, I think what you've highlighted, though, is that there are a range of factors that are weighed up by any Minister, and whilst I can't comment on whether those, specifically—some of the obligations—played a role, it is fair to say that those are the kinds of things that you would have an expectation a Minister would take into account. More generally, also, it's worth considering that my understanding of the way the process works is, had a different decision been made by the Minister, there would still have been an ability to go through a tribunal process to raise, potentially, some of those issues as well.

Media: Prime Minister, do you find anything patronising about a British royal coming over to inspect our military and see if the troops are up to snuff?

PM: No. No, because, actually, I have inspected other guards as well. Is often part of a welcoming ceremony. I've certainly—you know, off the top of my head, I've certainly been through that process in Samoa, I've been through that process in Germany, and so that's often part of that official welcome.

Media: When do you think New Zealand will be a mature enough nation to forge its own destiny?

PM: I wouldn't take that as being a sign of that. I definitely don't think that it was, for instance, Germany bowing down to the superiority of New Zealand in having me inspect their military. I think it's just a part of—often, it's part of those formal welcomes.

Media: In your discussions, did you talk about New Zealand's future in the monarchy, republicanism, anything?

PM: No, no, no. And, look—you know, I've been asked about this a few times before. I do not pick up from the New Zealand public that this is high on their agenda, that this is an issue that they see of such importance that we need to be debating it in the current environment for New Zealand, and I take my steer from them.

Media: Are you concerned with the plight of the Uyghur Muslims in China?

PM: Yes. Whilst I haven't had a recent briefing, obviously, you know, we are mindful in all our discussions in bilaterals and so on around humanitarian issues. But, again, I haven't had one for some time.

Media: Is it something you'd raise with Chinese representation when you meet them over here, or on a future visit to China?

PM: Yeah. Generally speaking, of course, we take the opportunity to raise issues of concern. I haven't—it would be, I think, a bit pre-emptive to say exactly what I would discuss, hypothetically, given I haven't sat down and ordered some of those issues because I don't have one on the agenda currently.

Media: When human rights issues are raised, do you raise them generally or do you detail specific concerns?

PM: Look, it actually depends on the circumstance. I have had situations where we've raised very specific information. You know, some will be familiar with, for instance, where there might be issues around the use of the death penalty that might relate to a specific individual, then we do sometimes go onto specifics. But sometimes we, equally, will keep a high-level comment.

Media: What case was that that you were referring to there?

PM: Oh, I'd need to check whether or not we put in the public domain the individual's name, but we have done that in the past.

Media: Where's the process at with the meth compensation?

PM: I've checked in with the Minister's office. Look, I understand that they're just working through some technical details to make sure that in providing compensation, that we wouldn't have that counted, for instance, as income, and then that would, in effect, cause other elements of benefits in particular to be deducted or reduced. So there's just some

technical work that's being done to make sure that we go through the compensation process in a way that's fair and as we would intend.

Media: Is that going as quickly as the Minister or the Cabinet would expect?

PM: Look, it's very rare that things move at a pace that we would hope. But you sometimes cannot always make provision for some of the things that crop up along the way when we look to roll these things out.

Media: Prime Minister, did you discuss digital entities with the Estonian President?

PM: Ah, yeah, actually, I had—thank you for asking. I actually had a very detailed conversation around just the future use of digital technology, its use in elections, the impact it's had on the way that the Estonian people view issues of privacy. It's fair to say that they have been in a digital-focused space for the delivery of Government services for a lot longer. They have probably changed mind-sets, so not having the same ethical debates. They haven't had the same privacy breaches, and so they're in a probably a bit of a different space to us. But it was a really interesting conversation.

Media: What can we learn from them? Can we model some of what they've done in New Zealand?

PM: Yeah, and I think that probably, obviously, the network that they are a part of, that we're a part of as well, enables those learnings. But some—you know, it is going to be, I mean, they're a population of a quarter the size of ours, and so some things are going to be a little bit different. And, of course, the way that their services are currently—the way their Government agencies have, I think, designed their digital services means they've probably got a bit of head start on us as well. But there's always things to learn.

Media: To what extent is that public perception versus actual sort of capability to do what they're doing?

PM: I think for them it's probably both. It sounded to me, from the brief, you know, conversation we had that their capability is in a very different place. But, equally, again, as I say, they haven't had the same kind of privacy breaches, and they have a pretty solid legal framework for those who misuse access to information, which probably means their social mandate might be a bit different to ours, but I'm, again, basing that just on conversation.

Media: Did the royals meet baby Neve?

PM: Ah, no, no, no. My meeting was quite late in the evening. Naps, Jason—very important to schedule these things appropriately.

Media: Just on KiwiBuild, the first people to get a balloted house from KiwiBuild looked like a couple of people on the fast track to high incomes; nice middle-class people. Why is the Government confident that the balloting system itself won't mean that those kinds of people self-select in the balloting and the people who perhaps the voters might have expected to receive somewhat better houses will self-select out?

PM: You make a lot of assumptions based on probably the pithy descriptions you've seen of individuals. Well, of course, you've got income thresholds in place, and what I would say from the families that I canvassed there—you know, there was a range of different careers in the mix there; people who already had families, people who were hoping to start families, from a range of different quarters of Auckland. The one thing that they had in common, though, was many of them commented that they had not been eligible for any other form of support, but they also hadn't been able to get on the property ladder. And that is what KiwiBuild is about.

We have to make sure, though, we're catering for everyone, and this, in and of itself, isn't going to be the thing that helps those who are on our lower incomes from getting into the housing market. For that, we're looking at the possibility of shared equity schemes, and we also have a programme around, of course, public and State housing. But I equally don't want to allow there to be a group of people who are, you know, earning wages that would put them

in what we would, you know, broadly call middle-income earners, who, equally, just can't get on to the property ladder.

Media: What's the time frame for those shared equity schemes—when are we likely to see them?

PM: Um, I—look, I'd have to ask the Minister, but it's something, obviously, that he's very mindful of as a lever to assist those who just aren't able to make some of the deposit thresholds that are set for access to KiwiBuild.

Media: What was Cabinet talking about today?

PM: A range of issues, of which we'll be making some announcements around some of them in the very near future. All right, everyone.

Media: Did you discuss Lime scooters?

PM: No, no we did not.

conclusion of press conference