

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 22 JULY 2019

PM: Right, good afternoon, everyone. This week, I am in the House on Tuesday and Wednesday as we begin a three-week sitting block. I'll speak at the Hillary centenary celebration here in the Banquet Hall on Tuesday evening. Of course, this week Sir Ed would have been 100. On Wednesday evening, I'll speak at the Climate Leaders Coalition first year anniversary in Auckland before helping to light the Sky Tower green. On Thursday, I'm in Taupō and Waikato for a range of visits and roading safety announcements.

On the weekend, I head to Tokelau until Thursday, 1 August. I will be the first New Zealand Prime Minister to do so since Helen Clark in, I understand, 2004—that's 15 years; almost as long as the wait to bring home the Netball World Cup. We are committed to our Pacific reset, where we are supporting our neighbours in facing their long-term challenges—including those that pose serious threat to quality of life, and that includes climate change. Tokelau has been a non-self-governing territory of New Zealand since 1926, and while there have been frequent visits—as many of you will know—to the likes of Niue and the Cook Islands, Tokelau's remoteness and, perhaps, difficulty in accessing it, has meant it's not had the attention that it deserves, particularly as it is at significant risk of devastating impacts linked to climate change.

This visit to each of Tokelau's three atolls to hear from the local communities about their priorities on climate change, core services like health and education, and preserving their unique cultural identity and language are a really important part of us continuing to build our links and ensuring that New Zealand's future assistance has a clear focus and meets the needs of all Tokelauans.

Now for the details of an announcement many have been anticipating. Today marks exactly four months and one week since the terror attack in Christchurch. It has been 129 days since 51 Kiwis suffered fatal injuries and dozens more were seriously wounded. The 15th of March caused us to rethink many things, and that included our gun laws. Thousands have come forward during the buy-back and amnesty since almost the entire Parliament prohibited assault rifles and military-style semi-automatics. As of last night, more than 2,100 people have turned up to more than 20 collection events. More than 3,200 firearms and 7,800 parts have been handed in, and compensation payments worth more than \$6.1 million have been processed. Many thousands more have declared their firearms for surrender online. Firearm owners have spoken to media and to police at these community collection events to share their views on the process. At the first event in Christchurch last weekend, Ray Berard handed in his AR-15—the same type of weapon used in the terror attack. He had brought it out from Canada, where he'd been in the army. He said there was no need for a military firearm in civilian society. He and his wife had been at Christchurch Hospital the day after the shooting. He said he watched 35 hearses leave.

Recreational hunter Nathan Dougherty handed in his Ruger last weekend because he said, "It's the right thing to do." He said, "We all need to play a part in making society a little bit safer. We give up something but we make each other safer." Malcolm Whalley handed in an old shotgun. He said it was a shame to see it destroyed, but "If it gets the dangerous stuff out of circulation then that's the point." The Deputy Police Commissioner attended the first event. He said he went looking for negative sentiment and couldn't find it.

There is a new normal around firearms. It is a change of mind-set. The most dangerous weapons are being taken out of circulation, ultimately because the wider community agrees it is the right thing to do to make each other safer.

Today, we are announcing the next set of reforms. These are designed to stop remaining weapons falling into the wrong hands.

The next arms amendment bill will establish a register of firearms and licence holders; tighten the rules to get and keep a firearms licence; tighten the rules for gun dealers to get and keep a licence; require licences to be renewed every five years; introduce a new system of warning flags so police can intervene and seek improvement if they have concerns about a licence holder's behaviour; prohibit visitors to New Zealand from buying a gun; establishing a licensing system for shooting clubs and ranges for the first time; set up a new formal group to give independent firearms advice to police, which will include people from outside the gun-owning community; provide for new controls on firearms advertising; require a licence to buy magazine parts and ammunition; and increase penalties and introduce new offences.

We'll also enshrine in law that owning a firearm is a privilege and comes with an obligation to demonstrate a high level of safety and responsibility. Successive Governments have known since the Thorp review of 1997 that our gun laws were too weak. Further attempts to change the system in both 2005 and 2016 failed. Our gun laws date from 1983 and are dangerously out of date with technology, with trade, and, ultimately, with society.

The changes announced today have been decades in the making, and it is now up to this Parliament to deliver in the interests of public and personal safety.

I'll now pass over to the police Minister.

Hon Stuart Nash: Thank you, Prime Minister. I also want to acknowledge that the response by firearms owners to the buy-back and amnesty has been outstanding, and it shows that everyone is playing their part to make our communities safer.

The vast majority of our gun owners are law abiding and responsible, and the law changes will reinforce the positive behaviour that is required of all gun owners. As the Prime Minister has stated, the new law will state clearly that owning a firearm is a privilege. The proposed changes will spell out the duties and obligations that come with this privilege. In order for a person to be given that privilege, they must take responsibility to protect and promote personal and public safety.

Under the current law, we do not know exactly how many guns are in circulation, who owns them, who is selling them, who is buying them, or how securely they are stored against the risk of theft or misuse. The firearms register will address this.

The administration of the system is also very outdated. There are higher penalties for unlawfully taking fish than for some firearms offences. It is significantly cheaper to get a gun licence than it is to license a dog. We need to modernise the system. We owe it to all members of the community—such as the victims of family harm or aggravated robberies—to tighten our gun laws. We also owe it to the men and women on the front line of policing. They turn out to some callouts with no knowledge of what they are walking into. Every month, police are called to 200 crimes where there is a firearm involved. Every year, between 800 and 1,000 firearms are reported stolen. They disappear into the black market and many into the hands of gangs. Police intelligence indicates most illegally held firearms are stolen from legitimate owners.

The legislation being drafted is due for introduction in late August. It will spend three months at select committee for public feedback.

In terms of transitional provisions, I intend to seek Cabinet approval for all firearms licences to be valid for five years once the bill passes. The only licences that can be renewed for 10 years are those that are due to expire between now and 31 December 2019. In the meantime, I encourage all interested people to begin writing submissions so they can take part in the process.

PM: Right, we're happy to take questions.

Media: Which of these changes could have prevented the Christchurch terror attacks?

PM: Well, I'll touch on at least one. You'll hear that we've made changes around people visiting from overseas and their ability to purchase firearms. It will surprise many people to know that that provision currently exists—that you are able to come into New Zealand, visit New Zealand, and purchase a firearm here. So that is a provision that will make a difference, alongside the fact that ultimately, of course, we have moved to outlaw the weapons that were also used in the attack.

Media: So that applies to Australians?

Nash: Yes.

Media: But wasn't he a resident here? Is it—

PM: He was an Australian. He was an Australian visiting. My understanding is that this provision would have meant that he would not have been able to purchase weapons here.

Media: So even permanent residents from Australia will not be able to—

PM: That's my understanding.

Media: Why are we allowing the window to December for those 10-year licences?

Nash: There's about 5,000 New Zealanders whose licences will expire between now and 31 December. We thought it easier just to say from 1 January. We're hoping the bill will pass before the end of the year. From 1 January on, the new licensing regime will come into play. But keep in mind that with regard to the register, we require every field to be filled out within a five-year period. So we think we're pretty much meeting the requirements in terms of registering firearms and getting people who own firearms on to the register within five years.

Media: So just to clarify: so you will need citizenship for a gun licence?

Nash: Yes.

Media: Do you know yet if the National Party will support the bill when it goes through the House? Have you had any conversations with them about that?

Nash: My officials have been talking to National Party officials. We hope they will support it, but that's up to them, and it's a caucus decision that they will have to make.

Media: Do you have any estimates on what a national register will cost?

Nash: Between about \$42 million and \$52 million over a 10-year period—keeping in mind that ACC have estimated that gun harm over the last 10 years has cost about \$49 million to the country.

Media: How much extra are gun owners likely to pay for licences?

PM: That's something that hasn't been determined as yet. But, as the Minister has pointed out, as with most of our licensing systems, we tend to cost-recover for the amount that it costs to administer the regime. A firearm licence, at the moment, for ten years costs \$126.50, but, of course, if you compare that to something like dog registration, that's \$264. So I think people would agree that's a relatively low price point, particularly when part of the regime that we need to ensure is working properly is gun storage. We know that, of course, many of the people who have gun licences in New Zealand are law-abiding citizens. Unfortunately, many of the guns that are utilised in crime are often those that are stolen. And so making sure that guns are appropriately stored is a really important part of our regime.

Media: Upping the licensing regime to every five years—how much more resource are you going to have to put into police to have the arms officers available to do that and carry out these checks on people?

Nash: Well, one thing we were very clear about is we didn't want to create a new level of administration that would be onerous for police to undertake, but nor did we want to create a level of compliance that would be onerous for gun owners themselves. So this will

be an online registrar. It's being built at the moment. We don't think it'll take too much more for police to administer, but, again, we'll—as this goes through the process, we'll get a better feel for the cost. As the Prime Minister alluded to, though, at the moment the cost to the police of administering the Arms Act is about \$13 million a year. They cost recover only about \$4.1 million in fees, and so the taxpayer, at this point in time, is subsidising the regime to the tune of about \$8.9 million. And fees haven't increased for a gun licence, apart from increases in GST, since, I understand, the 1980s.

Media: So we could see the cost of a licence triple then, to make up—

Nash: Well, no. This will go out for consultation. That—the cost of a licence—is not part of the second tranche of changes.

Media: If you're going to cost recover, just basic maths tells you that it's going to cost triple—

Nash: Well, that will go out to consultation. But that is not part of this legislation.

PM: We don't legislate the fees, obviously, because they move. So they don't go into primary legislation. What we've just simply signalled is, relative to some of the other parts of our licensing regime, it is relatively low.

Media: How many non - New Zealand citizens hold New Zealand firearms licences, and will those licences be revoked?

PM: That's not data that I have.

Nash: No, sorry, I haven't got that data on me.

Media: What could it mean for people who come in from overseas for recreational hunting in New Zealand? Will there be special exemptions or anything?

PM: I'll hand over to the Minister for that—it's more of a technical question—but there are specific provisions that will enable someone who's competing or, for instance—but, of course, those guns have to be legal in New Zealand for that to happen.

Nash: Yes, exactly. So they will be able to bring their own guns with them and register that gun and get a temporary licence, which will last for a year, and they'll also be able to hire or lease a gun, but they just will not be able to buy a gun when they're in the country.

PM: Keeping in mind that, of course, the guns that were used in the terrorist attack were guns that would not have been available for purchase in Australia. And so there was a difference in what someone was able to purchase here in New Zealand and what they would have been able to purchase in Australia.

Media: On the administration burden—not so much talking about the register but about those title rules, the warning flags, and the, I guess, carrying out that part of the regime. Do you expect to need more, you know, firearms licensing officers or more resources there?

Nash: Oh, there are a number in our community at the moment, but, yes, look, I have no doubt that it will require a greater level of administration on the ground, but this is what happens when you want to build safer communities.

Media: Do you know how much that's going to cost?

Nash: Well, as mentioned, we think the cost of this over 10 years will be between \$42 million and \$53 million—and that's over 10 years.

Media: And that's the entire regime, not just the register?

Nash: Yes, that's what we believe.

Media: You want to make it easier for the police to raise warning flags about firearms owners. Is that something that's hard for them to do at the moment?

Nash: Well, at the moment, if someone has an A category firearms licence, which is your stock standard firearms licence, police do not have the ability to go in and inspect the

security or the storage of those firearms, for example. What the new regime will allow for is for police to give adequate notice and visit a firearms owner at a reasonable time of the day, just to check that their storage and their security is up to scratch.

Media: But what about the new warning flag system? Any of those warning flags—if they had have been in place before Christchurch, do you think that would have stopped the Christchurch gunman?

Nash: Well, I'm not going to talk about individual situations, but what we think this will do is make the regime a lot safer, but also, for example, medical professionals will have a responsibility to report if they think one of their patients who is a firearms owner may have fallen out of the fit and proper person. It's the same as the drivers licensing regime, for example.

Media: Will things like overseas travel play into that at all, or will it only be for domestic matters? Would someone's overseas travel at all register as a red flag?

PM: I'm not sure how this would link up with the system. That would be quite a complex regime at that point.

Nash: So what we're looking at at this point is how people go about actually getting a licence and what flags are raised when someone who has sought a licence—it doesn't mean that that person won't be given a licence; it just means that the police can dig a little bit deeper to see if they fit that fit and proper test.

Media: What about seeking people's criminal records overseas?

Nash: Well, we hope that the person applying for a licence will comply with the requirements on that. If they don't, and we find out, obviously, that they have lied on their licence application, then I would say that is grounds for revocation.

Media: Will the police be able to go after someone—will police have to go and do that?

Nash: No.

Media: Looking at these warning flags—I mean, someone encouraging or promoting violence, hatred, or extremism; attempted suicides; protection orders; violent crimes—

PM: Yes. Things that you would expect to be considered.

Media: —it kind of seems pretty common sense.

PM: It absolutely does. And I think that just points out the regime that we currently have and the scope of what the police are able to consider is very limited. I think people would expect that the police would be able to consider some of the issues that we are now putting into legislation. But at the moment, that's not what the police are able to do. And so this is why this set of reforms are incredibly important for public safety, but also, in many ways, common sense.

Media: Does it raise privacy concerns, though, where you're requiring medical practitioners to pass on patient details to police?

Nash: It still comes under the Privacy Act. So keeping in mind—for example, in that example that you alluded to—if a medical practitioner has flagged that someone has perhaps got a mental illness that would preclude them from being fit and proper, that can be challenged or that can be assessed by an independent person, but this still comes under the Privacy Act. So this information is not able to be shared, but also it must be substantiated. So, for example, I just can't say "I don't like Joe. I think Joe's got a mental illness.", and the police go in and take his weapons. It has to be substantiated before police can act on it.

Media: Sorry if I've missed this—will 16-year-olds still be able to apply for a firearms licence?

Nash: We're not changing the age under which someone can apply for a licence.

Media: Will a 16-year-old be able to get a firearms licence?

PM: I think it's important to keep in mind the context that whilst we, of course, are tightening up the licensing regime and putting in place tests that I think most people would consider reasonable around someone being a fit and proper person, we still also have been very mindful that a large number of people who look to access guns in New Zealand are using them for very practical purposes—often in our rural communities. So we have sought to strike a balance here to keep guns away from those who seek to do harm or to conduct criminal activity, whilst acknowledging there are practical uses for them as well.

Media: In the past, you've talked about seeking advice about the deportation of the person responsible for these attacks back to Australia. Could you just give us a bit of an update as to where you are with that body of work?

PM: I have no update to give. The focus for us, of course, has been making sure that the alleged attacker faces the criminal justice system in New Zealand—that's where the focus is.

Media: Is that still being considered though?

PM: That's something that I've ultimately parked. We've got a process under way where the alleged attacker is facing the New Zealand justice system, and that's all where the energy is for now. That's not something that any work has been put into—the aftermath of that.

PM: Can I just make sure that we're—we'll just finish off the questions that relate to the Minister and then we can release him.

Media: Yeah, just one more. About the gun buy-back, are you satisfied with the number of guns that have been handed in so far? I note \$6 million has been spent on compensation; that seems quite low, just looking at it from the outside.

PM: But the numbers are reasonable.

Nash: The numbers are reasonable. This was one of the great unknowns. We had absolutely no idea how many of these illegal weapons are in our communities. But, as the Prime Minister alluded to, all the feedback that we have received is that people who are handing in their guns think it's fair. They understand the reason why we are doing it, and I think the police are running a system which has great integrity and is being very successful.

Media: Will owners need to register air rifles and slug guns and the like, under this new scheme?

Nash: Actually, I'm not too sure about air rifles and slug guns. I'll get back to you on that one.

PM: But, ultimately, the register of the actual weapons—we're building this register over a five-year period so that it really can align with the licensing regime, so that ultimately at the point that people are renewing their licences and engaging with the system, at that point we're seeing the register of firearms build; so trying to make sure that we give ourselves and gun owners the time to build that register of information over a five-year period.

Media: How are you tightening fit and proper, because everything listed here is already in the arms code for police?

Nash: It's in the arms code; it's not in legislation.

PM: It's not in legislation.

Media: So fit and proper will be in legislation?

PM: Yes.

Nash: Yes, it will.

Media: Right. Will you—

PM: It's been open to challenge, and there are cases where the police have been challenged on some of their licensing decisions.

Media: Does that leave you open to—you know, if, for instance, someone who has flags or, you know, police have concerns about, doesn't fit within those categories that are in law, doesn't that leave you open to further challenge down the line?

PM: Of course the chance of being challenged is lessened, the greater degree in which we enshrine this in primary legislation. So it is about trying to give that greater certainty. There is a level of discretion, because this is a judgment around a fit and proper person, but obviously there has been quite a bit of effort here to try and codify that—to try and remove the potential down the track for there to be that grey area and that lack of clarity and that potential for challenge.

Media: What about prohibition orders?

Nash: What was that, sorry?

Media: Prohibition orders?

Nash: No, we're not putting our firearm prohibition orders in this. However, later on this year, a discussion document will be released on firearm prohibition orders, but that's not included in this legislation.

Media: So are you starting to introduce a licensing regime for gun clubs and shooting ranges and also the extra regulation around advertising?

PM: Well, obviously at the moment we have a system where people would have been surprised when they're hearing some of the discussion about gun clubs—that it is a reasonably unregulated area. This is about just making sure that public expectation is being met where they are operating.

Nash: Yeah, look, the vast majority of people you talk to always show surprise when they find out that gun clubs or ranges aren't part of a licensing regime. So we just bring it in, as the Prime Minister said, to meet the community's expectations of how these organisations and these ranges will be run.

Media: And in that vein, then, when a gun store opens, do you think you need to introduce rules around informing the public, much the same as liquor stores?

Nash: We're going to have a look at the advertising regime around firearms.

Media: Will Australians who have spent most of their lives in New Zealand but are not citizens lose their licence?

Nash: Yeah, well, we have said that you need to be a New Zealand citizen to own a firearm. But, as mentioned, this is going through the select committee process. If people think that is manifestly unfair, then what I would ask them to do is submit. But we think it's important that, you know, the firearms regime is there for New Zealand citizens. And I reiterate the point that it is a privilege, not a right, to own a firearm in this country, and with that comes responsibilities.

Media: In that case, doesn't that person then identify as a New Zealander and isn't that the exact argument you were making overseas for New Zealanders that have spent all of their lives in Australia—

PM: To be fair, actually, I'd need to check what the reciprocal arrangements in Australia are. Again, though, of course the argumentation that I've been making there is often around accessing, for instance, benefits as a tax payer. What we're classifying here is gun ownership is being a privilege, not a right of citizenship, so I think that's an important distinction to make.

Media: If you're applying for a licence, will they have their social media activity scrutinised; and, if so, how?

Nash: Well, that's certainly one thing we can look at. I mean, what we do know is the Christchurch terrorist was engaged on some sites which were promoting some pretty horrific material. So that's one thing that police will have the ability to assess when they determine if someone is fit and proper to have a firearms licence.

Media: So will they do that for everyone, or will that just be on a selective basis?

Nash: Well, you know, I won't be administering the regime myself. You'll have to ask police once it's up and running.

Media: What kind of feedback have you had about the register so far? Obviously, the idea of a firearms register has just been contentious and has had a lot of opponents like Federated Farmers, and other groups. What have they said to you thus far?

Nash: Well, I think it's only been contentious because in the past it's been tried outside of the technological advances that we now have in place. I mean, you will hear about the Canadian example in the 1980s. Well, in Canada in the 1980s they didn't have the technology that we now have to do this. But in Quebec, for example, they do have a firearms register. It's been in play since 1 January 2018. In my understanding, that's going well. So the vast majority of people that I've engaged with think it's a fantastic idea. But, as mentioned, what we don't want to do is have a system which has a massive administration burden on police or a huge compliance onus on gun owners. That's why it's on—it's like registering a car. When you buy and sell a car, it's up to the owner—sorry, the buyer and the seller—to determine that process has gone through. We envisage the same sort of thing for firearms.

Media: But I guess with a car there isn't really a reason to try and hide that, whereas with guns there has been some people—

Nash: Well, I would argue that the vast majority of New Zealand gun owners are good, law-abiding citizens, and they won't try and hide this. Having said that, you know, police has the ability to go after those who are trying to hide or be dishonest. But I go back to the—you know, it's my firm belief that the vast majority of Kiwi gun owners are good, law-abiding citizens who will comply with the law.

Media: Just back on the social media monitoring, is this widespread licence to spy on New Zealanders?

PM: No. No, not at all. I think, actually, when you think about some of the feedback that we've had in the aftermath of 15 March, you know, there would have been questions raised as to why some of the facts that we found out after the fact about the alleged terrorist wouldn't have been an issue considered at the point that that individual was able to access guns in New Zealand. And so I think the reverse question would be asked if that wasn't something the police were able to consider, alongside a range of other factors. Ultimately, we're trying to determine whether or not someone is a fit and proper person to hold guns in New Zealand, and if someone is very openly espousing violent views—talking about, for instance, wanting to kill others—I think, rightly, New Zealanders would say that's grounds to say they are not a fit and proper person.

Media: Just on the buy-back events, are you concerned that a large number of gun owners are going to leave it to the very last minute to hand over their weapons, and potentially overwhelm police?

Nash: Well, we have given them till 20 December, and I think what will have happened over the last couple of weeks is that people will have seen that the system has integrity, that the price they're receiving for their weapons is fair. And I suspect a number of Kiwis are sitting back and just waiting to see how it worked, and I do—it's my view that over the next few months, Kiwis who do own these weapons will participate in the buy-back, keeping in mind there are a number of ways to return your weapons. You can, obviously, attend one of

these buy-back events. You can call up police and organise a time for police to come around and pick up the weapons. You can turn up at a police station—even though that is the least preferable option, and, if someone is going to do that, we prefer that they call ahead. We don't want New Zealanders, you know, walking down the street with these military-style semi-automatics. But buy-backs is just one way that people can hand in these now illegal firearms.

Media: With the warning flags and the concerns around a licence holder's behaviour, could Māori be unfairly disadvantaged, knowing that they're more likely to be arrested or go to prison and the like?

Nash: I don't think so.

PM: That should certainly not be the case. There should be no discrimination based on ethnicity on the way that these rules should apply. Ultimately, the vast majority of New Zealanders who are seeking to legally access guns in New Zealand have legitimate needs and legitimate means to do so. This is ultimately about making sure, though, that, for the small minority, we have a system in place that, ultimately, protects New Zealanders.

Media: Prime Minister, in the US, there's a lot of people who would argue that the citizenry need to be well armed as a kind of a buffer against Government or law enforcement overreach. What's your view on that?

PM: I would, obviously, disagree with that. I think, actually, the vast majority of New Zealanders would disagree with that. Of course, I think we are a country that of course has always had a very practical need for gun ownership and access to guns in New Zealand. You know, it's something that, obviously, became very obvious to me, growing up in the rural Waikato. But, at the same time, I don't think that extends to this view that every New Zealand citizen has the need and right to generally arm itself. We're a society, I think, that's always drawn that very clear distinction.

Media: Do you think that view would change, though, if we started routinely arming police?

PM: Well, there's no plan to routinely arm the police, and I think that that is part of who we are. I think we do see a difference between who we are as a society and the way that our police force works and others.

Nash: Can I just add to that, though, Prime Minister, that, keeping in mind part of this is protecting the police. You know, as mentioned, police turn up to about 90 instances every single week where firearms have been used in an offence. And what we know now is police may know if someone has a firearms licence, but they have absolutely no idea whatsoever of what sort of weapon that that person has, how many they have, etc., etc. So this will work in a way to protect out police service as well.

PM: Keeping in mind, before the 1980s, police did have more information around the weapons that might be held at a home that they were called out to. Then our laws changed. This, I hope, will provide greater comfort to the police that when they go to a callout, they'll at least know how many weapons might be held at the house that they are attending.

Media: Will the register be used as a way to investigate people or as a tool to investigate people?

PM: It will be used in the same way it's used now.

Nash: No, it won't be. So police can use it, but only for legitimate purposes.

Media: Is there a reason you've gone for five years for the licensing and not three years, as the report recommended?

Nash: We think that five years is practical. You know, we thought that 10 years was too long, because a lot can change in someone's life over a 10-year period. We think five years, we've got it about right.

PM: OK, everyone. I'm just mindful that time's running out. Minister, feel free to go. I'll mop up any additional questions that we can take quite quickly.

Media: A number of recent newborn deaths at Middlemore Hospital have been linked to bed and staff shortages.

PM: Yes.

Media: Is the funding system broken?

PM: Well, we absolutely generally know that we have had consistent underfunding in our health system. We've had record investments in Budget 2018 and 2019, but I am cautious about speaking directly to the situation you've raised. I haven't had a briefing on that; I have seen the headlines. And I wouldn't mind getting a bit more information before I comment directly on that.

Media: But will the Government at some point entertain doing something to help South Auckland hospitals, if you decide there is actually a really dire need there.

PM: Of course, we do take a direct role when it comes to workforce issues generally, and you've seen that, for instance, in what we've tried to do around our nursing workforce. We recognise we have an issue with rural GPs. So, of course, even though these are ultimately matters for DHBs, where there are workforce challenges, we have stepped in. Again, though, I would like to see some of the specific information around what's happening in South Auckland before I make too much further comment on that.

Media: Just on congestion, from our Auckland reporters—the congestion stats came out today: the average motorway user in Auckland lost 85 hours to congestion last year. Are you doing enough to combat that?

PM: Well, we absolutely, again, know that we've had under-investment in both transport but alternatives to using our roads. We do need to provide more options for commuters. They need to be able to have a reliable option to take, for instance, public transport, and there's been under-investment in that area. That's why we're committed to the City Rail Link, and that, ultimately, will bring, roughly, 54,000 passengers at peak hour into that public transport option. So alternatives are required.

Media: Prime Minister, on the Silver Ferns netball team, what do you make of the Silver Ferns not getting any prize money, compared to the Black Caps, who came second and got 3 mil split between them?

PM: Yeah, again, these are arrangements that, of course, I haven't had the chance to look at the detail around. I know this is an issue generally around the equity of treatment between different codes, but particularly different genders in sport that our Minister of sport has been very focused on. This particular code, though—I haven't looked into those differences between netball and cricket. But, as a general principle, I think New Zealanders would like to see fair acknowledgment of our sports people when they reach the top of their code, and that should include netball.

Media: Who would stump up the cash, do you think, and would the Government be prepared to do so, given they won?

PM: I'll put that question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Obviously, though, you know, we're all very proud, and I think people will want to see recognition of that, and that would include, I imagine, having the chance to welcome them and the cup home.

Media: Did you watch the game?

PM: Yes, I did.

Media: What did you think?

PM: I thought it was fantastic. You know, I've always been glad as both a player but also as an observer, when a game is particularly tense, that's quite a short match, because

everyone would have been on the edge of their seats, but that last half—obviously particularly the last quarter—was just phenomenal.

Media: Did you get some revenge on Australia after Scott Morrison failed to budge on deportation?

PM: Well, of course, the matters around citizenship and deportation are matters that, regardless of what is happening in the sporting world, I will continue to raise. Nothing, of course, will act as a substitute for us getting movement on those issues, but I have to acknowledge he did raise the netball with me while I was in Melbourne, so I was very quick to fire off a text as soon as the game ended. I don't know whether or not he had his phone on silent, but if he woke up to a Kiwi victory, then oh well.

Media: Did he text you back?

PM: Yes, he did. He wished us—he said congratulations.

Media: When you became Labour leader in 2017, you promised relentless positivity. Does that promise, kind of, hold through for the 2020 election?

PM: Oh, I'd like to think that I've been fairly consistent on that, actually, from taking office and even in doing this job. There are certainly moments, of course, where it's not easy to maintain that relentless positivity, and, certainly, indeed, where that's not always the appropriate response. But I think, generally—I think people think I've stuck to that.

Media: There's an ad on the Labour Party Facebook page with your authorisation statement, which is kind of a rough interview of Simon Bridges about climate change—

PM: Oh, the climate change—look, I mean—

Media: Is that a break with that?

PM: I do think we still have a responsibility to demonstrate where there are differences in opinions between us. Again, keeping in mind that that ad—all it is is just an excerpt from an interview. So, again, if you don't believe it's positive, then that question's probably not for me but rather the person being interviewed. There are, though, clear differences between the Government and the Opposition on climate change, and I do think voters deserve to know that. And despite taking a positive approach, I actually find it very hard to find anything positive about that.

Media: The air force 757 is not due to be replaced until 2028. Do you think we need to hustle that along?

PM: Look, there will be occasions when there are engineering issues with our 757s, as there are from time to time with commercial airlines. Ultimately, though, the 757 replacement hasn't been a priority for us, and that hasn't changed. I do apologise for those who got waylaid because of that, though.

Media: Did your staff buy you a contingency ticket on a commercial flight just in case the plane broke down?

PM: Of course, keeping in mind there were issues with the 757 prior to our departure. So that was based on there already having been an issue with the 757 before we left. So naturally you would expect that that would be the wise thing to do in the context where at the time there had been issues, and we knew that. So that was the reason why we did. I don't believe that we do that routinely, though, but we did on this occasion because of that issue.

Media: On the climate change issue, has the Government given up on the idea of a bipartisan approach with the zero carbon bill, considering the Opposition seems to be—

PM: No. Look, I haven't given up on that, no. I am still absolutely convinced that climate change is a 30-year challenge that we will all benefit from having an agreed position going forward as a nation. So I haven't given up on that. Obviously, submissions are closing. We'll be in the period where as a select committee soon we'll be hearing from the

public. I'm hoping that will help build some consensus, but it is fair to say that at the moment, though, we have our Paris Agreement targets, and on some of the ideas that we've put forth, I've really struggled to see where the Opposition are willing to make similar progress. We have to do something. We cannot just remain where we are in standstill and just hope that our emission's profile goes down.

Media: Simon Bridges' comments about the feebate and emissions standards were surprising, or what did you think?

PM: Well, I have been interested in what their policy would be, given that, roughly, we're looking at 20 percent of our emissions profile coming from that area. So we do need to do something. Otherwise the expectation will be that other sectors—like, for instance, the primary sector—pick up the bulk of the burden of lowering our emissions. And I would have thought that he would not have wanted to see that happen either. So, ultimately, those are questions for the Opposition. I did see the Opposition spokesperson was more positive about the feebates proposals. So I guess time will tell.

I'll just take a couple more, because, unfortunately, we're running out of time.

Media: What impact has the Reserve Bank's more heavy-handed approach to regulating banks and insurers had on New Zealand's relationship with Australia.

PM: Oh, none. Look, I don't think it has at all. Obviously, though, I don't want to pre-empt the final outcome of the Reserve Bank's work. But, as I said in Australia, it wasn't an issue that was raised with me by Prime Minister Morrison. OK—last two.

Media: Specifically on the differences over the zero carbon bill, where would your bottom lines be with respect to the bill? I mean, as I understand it, the only part of the bill that National's objected to is that bit relating to the methane targets.

PM: Yes. Well, look, obviously, this is going through select committee at the moment, and you've seen, I think, huge ground made and progress, particularly with the way that the primary sector has approached the bill. So you see the likes of Fonterra welcoming the intermediate target of the 10 percent and acknowledging the lower end of the range that's being set and the primary sector leadership group committing to 1.5 degrees. Now, that I think is incredible progress. Ultimately, though, on the content and remainder of the bill itself we're awaiting the select committee process. OK. Last one.

Media: You talked to the media in Australia last week about the need for social media companies to keep their promises on their commitments around online extremism. How would you rate their progress thus far, and what areas do you think they need to move—

PM: Again, there were some specific areas of focus—like, for instance, greater transparency around algorithms, research into how we can better prevent the high-speed proliferation of content that we've seen in the past and the way that the GIFCT—the body that's already being established but has quite a narrow remit—could be expanded to actually provide a much more useful function for the kind of event that we saw on 15 March in New Zealand. Those are the areas of progress I'd like to see. We'll be checking in again in September, but at the moment, it's really about the tech companies being given now the time and the space to do the work that's required. OK thanks, everyone.

conclusion of press conference