

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 11 MARCH 2024
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Kia ora. Good afternoon, everyone. It is great to be standing here confirming that our coalition Government has now completed, as promised, the 49 actions we committed to in our 100-day plan. I'm proud to lead a Government that delivers on its commitments. People put their trust in National, ACT, and New Zealand First to steer them towards a better, more prosperous future, and we were elected to get things done for New Zealand.

As you know, a key focus of our Government is to rebuild the economy, because it is only through a strong economy that we can lower the cost of living, that we can lift incomes, and give Kiwis a reason to stay in New Zealand. We need to get out in the world and, therefore, hustle. And because we won't get rich selling goods and services to each other and ourselves, we must engage internationally to grow economically. That is why our Government has clearly signalled our intention to maximise our trade and our economic footprint across South-east Asia and the world. Foreign Minister Winston Peters has, in our first 100 days, already undertaken 86 engagements with representatives from 53 countries, territories, and international organisations because of the importance that New Zealand places on our international connections to grow our prosperity and our security.

Last week, as you know, I travelled to Melbourne for a bilateral meeting for several ASEAN leaders on the sidelines of the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit. It was a sign of the strength of our relationship with Australia that I attended at the invitation of Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. The opportunity to start and grow relationships with South-east Asian leaders was invaluable. South-east Asia is our third-largest goods export market, and the collective GDP of South-east Asian countries is expected to double in the next decade. New Zealand's total exports to ASEAN are now worth a total of \$9.5 billion a year, representing almost 30 percent growth from pre-COVID levels in 2019. And there is a lot of scope to grow this important trade even further. These countries, therefore, play a fundamental role in diversifying and growing our trade even further, and I intend to engage with them much more deeply in the months ahead as we look to boost trade across the region.

Today, as you know, it was my pleasure to welcome to New Zealand the Prime Minister of Vietnam. Prime Minister Chinh and I discussed opportunities to boost annual two-way trade beyond our current goal of US\$2 billion in 2024 by enhancing tourism, education, and investment flows, removing non-tariff barriers, accelerating trade promotion activities, and fully committing to existing FTAs. As I said earlier, South-east Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world, and Vietnam is a driving force within the region. I congratulated Prime Minister Chinh on his country's extraordinary economic transformation, with economic growth rates above 5 percent for the past decade. This morning, we witnessed the signing of three bilateral cooperation agreements between New Zealand and Vietnam based on education, trade, and finance, and I also announced a new \$6.24 million investment in Vietnam's horticulture sector, which we'll deliver through a partnership with the New Zealand Institute for Plant and Food Research.

In regard to my movements for the rest of the week, I am in Wellington and Auckland tomorrow and Wednesday. On Thursday, I am in Feilding for Central Districts Field Days, and on Friday I am in Christchurch, at Al Noor Mosque, to mark the passing of five years since the attacks on 15 March. With that, I'm happy to take your questions.

Media: Just on the South-east Asia comments, you've obviously made no secrets of particularly India as somewhere that you want to get more closely involved to. When is your next expected travel to the region, specifically India or anywhere else?

PM: Look, I mean, we want to focus our foreign affairs and trade efforts in the Indo-Pacific region, clearly. Initially, it's been about Australia, the Pacific, South-east Asia, North-

east Asia and India are our big priorities, as well as continuing to grow our business in China. With respect to India, Todd McClay went there before Christmas. Winston Peters is there today. And I will be looking to take a big trade delegation there in the back half of this year.

Media: And what do you want to achieve with that, and when do you think is the most likely option of taking that trade delegation over there?

PM: It's in the third quarter, I think, going into the fourth quarter—somewhere around there.

Media: Can I just get some clarity on the food in schools programme?

PM: School lunches? Yes.

Media: You said, during the campaign, that you were going to continue that, that you wouldn't touch that policy, but your associate finance Minister says he wants to scrap it by up to a half. What is your feeling on cutting that programme by a half?

PM: Well, first and foremost, we're not cutting the programme, because the programme actually was due not to be funded from 1 January by the previous Government—so had no plans to fund it beyond 1 January next year. So let's be really clear about that; there's no cuts going on, because there was no money to cut after 1 January next year. What I'd say is that we are very committed to having a school lunch programme in New Zealand here. We think it's a good thing, an important thing; it's going to be a key reality of our Government, but where there is wastage, where there is opportunities for efficiency and greater effectiveness, we'll continue to explore all those avenues, and that's what Minister Seymour will do.

Media: Would you be comfortable with it downsizing by a half?

PM: What I'm interested in is making sure we can reach kids that desperately need that programme, and if there's better, more effective, efficient ways of delivering that programme that might be lower cost, that might actually be—they enable more kids to be able to be reached, we'll look at all of those options. But the bottom line is the effectiveness of the programme's important to us.

Media: Do you know how much per lunch is?

PM: I don't know. I don't have that detail at hand, but—

Media: It's less than \$10?

PM: Sorry.

Media: It's less than \$10.

PM: Yeah, what I'd say to you is, again, there's better ways, like every programme the previous Government had—as I've said before, if it's a good programme, we want to make sure it works even better and it's more effective and it's more efficiently deployed. There's lots of different ways. There's already experiences of different models of delivery of school lunches that vary across the country. There may well be learnings to say, "Let's take one model and actually get that applied in other places; that actually delivers a better result." We're all about the results; we're all about making sure we deliver it in the most efficient and effective way to avoid any wastage.

Media: On interest deductibility, Prime Minister, the announcement yesterday obviously didn't go as far as what was agreed with ACT in the coalition agreement; can you speak to how that was resolved?

PM: Look, I mean I'd just would say to you I think it was a very—we got to a really great place. I mean, this is all about improving life for renters. One of our major challenges, as you well know, is that average rents have gone up \$170 a week under the previous Government. A big part of that was the costs that were loaded onto landlords through interest deductibility and also through some of the effects of the brightline test. We want to

make sure there's a supply of rental property. It's really important we have a high-functioning rental market in New Zealand. We have supply challenges in the ownership market, we have supply challenges in the rental market, supply challenges in the social housing market. All of those things are linked, so they were important decisions for us to make.

Media: But ACT wanted to go further in, and, in fact, that was agreed in the coalition agreement and yet wasn't delivered on, so was there a quid pro quo? Did ACT get something in exchange?

PM: Look, we don't operate that way. We're just a very mature coalition Government that actually works out what the challenges are and what the economic environment that we're operating within is, and so, you know, we may have all compromised, but we've all ended up with, I think, a very good policy.

Media: Why was a compromise made?

PM: Again, it was acknowledgement of the fiscal situation that we've inherited.

Media: So it would have been too expensive?

PM: Again, just acknowledgement of the fiscal situation we've inherited, this is actually—

Media: What does that mean?

PM: It's a very big improvement in the situation, and, as you can see, it actually will be meaning that we put some—you know, stable prices is what we hope to get out of rents.

Media: What do you mean by an acknowledgement of the fiscal situation?

PM: Well, we're just a grown-up Government in the sense of we sit down, look at a problem, we have a policy that we wanted to implement, we looked at it, we know that it's important for us to take those costs off landlords so that we can get a better supply of rental properties into the marketplace. That's what this policy will do.

Media: Yeah, but you said that you've had to make a change because of the fiscal situation. Do you just mean it was too expensive to do it?

PM: Well, we faced it and delivered it in a slightly different way, but it's not a biggie to either party. Our Government doesn't think in those terms. We're thinking very clearly about how we increase the supply of rental properties in New Zealand, and that's why I'm pleased that the policy was announced by David Seymour on the weekend.

Media: Was that statement made in the drafting of the coalition agreement?

PM: No, I just say to you that we believe that we need to be able to make sure that we get the costs out of the system, as we campaigned on. Both parties campaigned on that, we went to the election, talked about it, and now we're doing it.

Media: On the acknowledgement of the fiscal situation, will we be seeing more of this in heading towards the Budget? Nicola Willis seems to be dropping fiscal breadcrumbs all the time about how bad the fiscal situation is and how it's a lot worse than you had anticipated it; is there anything else that you're currently looking at that you thought was safe in the Budget that the fiscal-situation acknowledgement is going to have to change for that as well?

PM: All we're doing is, as we discover information, we're bringing it to light for you. And so what we're saying is there are major cost overruns across the Government. You've seen that with KiwiRail, you've seen it with respect to school buildings. There have been major use of time-limited underfunding happening under the previous administration. A good example of that would have been Pharmac drug programmes and also the school lunch programme I just alluded to earlier. And then we've actually seen a huge amount of money being spent on wasteful projects that hasn't actually delivered. Two hundred and fifty million on Auckland light rail—gone nowhere; nothing's happened. So we're just being

really transparent with you to say, look, this is the reality of where we're starting, and then we have hope because we've got a good plan to get ourselves to a different and a much better place.

Media: Was there also an issue with applying a retrospective tax break to landlords?

PM: Look, again, we just came to a conclusion this is what was needed, and, most importantly, for landlords, for them to be able to have lower costs, which means that is better for renters, and that's what this policy is about.

Media: Was the retrospective aspect of that, that part of the policy that was decided against—was that a problem?

PM: Again, what we did is had a mature conversation about it. We all came to the conclusion that this is the right policy to go forward with, and, importantly, we're getting things done for the renters across New Zealand. That's what this is about.

Media: So was the issue really, they had a look and said in retrospect it was a bit expensive given the circumstance that we find ourselves in, or were there also some—

PM: Well, it's just that we're a dynamic Government. We're looking at the situation we're in, we made a decision that this was the right policy setting and the right increments of what we could do, and, importantly, we've done it. And, again, we've campaigned on it but both parties have wanted to remove interest deductibility—it's a question of just how you'd do that. That's what we've come to in agreement.

Media: We know you've made a decision and that you spoke about it and came to the conclusions. It's how you made that decision we're asking about. And whether the retrospective aspect—

PM: Yeah, sure. Well, I've tried to explain to you, we're a coalition Government that has some good mechanisms for resolving and agreeing outcomes within our Government. We just use our normal processes that we've used from day one. We've talked about those and we built those into our negotiations upfront during the negotiation period, as you well know. We've got a very good work plan in front of us—this is one of the things on our work plan to knock off and to do something about, and I'm really pleased with the outcome. I'm more interested in the outcome, frankly; I know it may be intriguing to you, but actually what matters most is actually, for renters in New Zealand, they get downward pressure on their rents.

Media: But the issue is that the outcome is less than what you promised during the election campaign. So we're trying to get to the point of why that happened. Was it too expensive? Is it difficult for you to admit that it was too expensive, or was it a technicality?

PM: No, I just acknowledged to you that it's just the reality of where we sit with the fiscal situation here in New Zealand at the moment—

Media: So it was too expensive.

PM: —a changing, dynamic set of economics—

Media: So, clearly, like, the translation of that, though, is that it was too expensive—

PM: —and what we're doing is meeting our commitment—sorry?

Media: —but why do you find it difficult to say it was too expensive?

PM: Well, I'm just saying to you we appraise the economic environment as it is and will continue to do so, and where we're delivering our policy we might make adjustments along the way—that's OK. It's important that the policy gets out there and, importantly, interest deductibility's dealt with, and the supply of rental property becomes available.

Media: I think the interesting thing just seems to be your inability or unwillingness to kind of name that issue as being it was too expensive.

PM: I don't know how I can be any more clearer to you. We live in a dynamic world; there are dynamic economic situations and forecasts that we inherit each and every week. We have weighed all of that up; we have made some adjustments to our policies, our respective policies; we've come up with something that we both—have our support; and I'm very proud of it.

Media: And so far, Prime Minister—and with your National Party leader hat on as well—what are you willing to consider around compensation for oil and gas companies, should they be subject to a ban under any future Government?

PM: Look, there hasn't been a discussion or a conversation about that.

Media: Well, there's certainly been comment from Simeon Brown and, I think, Shane Jones about it being considered. So what intel do you have?

PM: I've heard some comments, and I haven't seen those comments and also proposals around that—there's been no proposals that have come forward, shaping that up for us at this point in time. What I can tell you is Shane Jones is very determined to make sure, like the rest of this Government, we actually grow this economy, and making sure that we manage sovereign risk as a result.

Media: Would that be considered corporate welfare, do you think, to do something like that?

PM: Again, I'm not getting into any of that. What I'll just say to you is, yeah, we've got a massive desire in this Government to actually grow the economy—that's what we're focused on. We're not in a position, after three of our last four quarters have actually shrunk it—you know, the economy has shrunk—for us to actually turn off bits of growth. We're going to look at all opportunities for growth; we'll weight them up and work our way through them together.

Media: Yes, so Shane Jones is a senior Cabinet Minister, and he's talking about wanting to progress this. I mean, you would need to have an opinion on it at some point, so I'm just asking what your position is at the moment.

PM: Yeah, and so when a proposal is put on a piece of paper, when a discussion is taking place formally in the confines of our Cabinet committees and Cabinet—

Media: But you don't have a view on anything that there isn't a Cabinet paper on?

PM: —we'll deal with that then. Sorry?

Media: You don't have a view on anything there isn't a Cabinet paper on?

PM: Well, until we have a proposal that's—our Ministers are working on a range of issues, it's important that they actually can go out, get broad-ranging advice; they may have their own personal views. They then bring that together—we have a good discussion mechanism and a series of committees; we work it through our Cabinet process. So until then, you know, that's where we'll pick it up.

Media: Can I just go back to the interest deductibility. Do you still stand by the comment that your numbers were “rock solid” on the campaign?

PM: Yeah—at that time, absolutely. But what we weren't planning was massive cost overruns. You know, how on earth do you plan a KiwiRail project for ferries at \$750 million that ends up at \$3.2 billion? How on earth do you break promises to 350 schools you can upgrade their buildings, and find out that you're probably going to be billions of dollars short on that? How on earth do you not fund Pharmac beyond the middle of this year? How on earth do you not fund school lunches—beginning of next year? So those are dynamic environments and dynamic economics that we will deal with, and we'll adjust to very accordingly.

Media: How did you get your numbers so wrong in the interest deductibility there?

PM: We didn't—we didn't. We just came to a conclusion that this is what we've ended up with.

Media: Well it was too expensive in Government but it—

PM: I just put it to you: if you are thinking about the renters of New Zealand, which is where I'd hope you might be thinking, they will be very grateful for the fact we are doing everything we can to increase the supply of rental properties across New Zealand. How on earth did the previous Government add huge costs to landlords—whether it through the interest-deductibility removal, certainly through the brightline test—that led to \$170 per week in rents going up. That's a big deal for people.

Media: Will rents go down?

PM: Well, we hope that puts downward pressure on rents, and certainly we'll see a stabilising of rents.

Media: Not downward pressure—will rents go down?

PM: Well, we'll see some stabilising of rents. We won't see \$170 per week being added to average rents in New Zealand.

Media: Will you drop your rents?

PM: That's a decision for me and my personal finances, to work that through.

Media: Could you please clarify for us why there will be delays in Treaty settlements, and could you also clarify how many settlements will be delayed?

PM: I'm not aware that there will be delays in Treaty settlements.

Media: Because there is kōrero in Te Ao Māori that they have been notified—those that are in the process of Treaty settlements—they will be delayed.

PM: We want to progress Treaty settlements. We want Treaty settlements progressed and concluded as quickly as we possibly can. I'm thinking of a number where we actually came out of Waitangi, with Ngāpuhi, with renewed focus on how we actually can move that forward or start to move that forward. It's a big intention of ours to close out as many Treaty settlements as we possibly can. So I'm not sure where the comment comes from.

Media: So you can confirm that there will be no delays to any Treaty settlements going forward?

PM: We are very committed to closing out Treaty settlements. It's been a longstanding position of ours. We're very committed to making sure we honour all obligations under Treaty settlements—past, and future as well.

Media: And any of those Treaty settlements that do have clauses in them that might impact on the fast-track bill—will you also be negotiating around that?

PM: Well, I want to be really clear about it. It's important you understand that the fast-track bill that we've proposed, and is going forward, is actually making sure that we will honour all Treaty settlements that we have already committed to, and any future obligations that they—

Media: But these are ones still in progress. Not post-settlements, but the ones that are—

PM: We're going to honour all Treaty settlements. So we've got to close out settlements with the remaining iwi that we haven't got settlements with. I appreciate some of them are more difficult, but we are determined to do that as a Government. We believe very strongly. We're a Government, in a previous form, that closed out the most amount of Treaty settlements of any previous Government, so we're very committed to that.

Media: Can you point to something your Government's done that has made the cost of living better for people today?

PM: Yeah, absolutely. What we've done is we've made sure the Reserve Bank is single-mindedly focused on fighting inflation and putting it below 3 percent. That is a really important distinction and a focus area for them. Separately, we've got rid of the Auckland regional fuel tax, which for low and middle income workers is regressive tax. And as you know, we're working incredibly hard in our Budget to deliver tax relief for low and middle income workers.

Media: Not just for the future—I mean, sort of, right now. Is there any policy you can say, “Yep, that has put more money into Kiwis' back pockets.”?

PM: Yep. Ruling out fuel taxes in Auckland; ruling out fuel tax increases in excise tax over the course of the term, for example, would be good examples of that. But I'd just also say to you: getting the Reserve Bank single-mindedly focused on fighting inflation and getting it below 3 percent. I spoke to you guys two years ago about the risks of rising inflation and said we had some amber lights on our dashboard and if you don't deal with inflation and its cause, you end up with high interest rates, you slow the economy down, and you end up with unemployment. And so we're trying to deal with the cause of the problem, which is getting inflation back under control. A big part of that is obviously also our savings programme that we're driving through our Government agencies, which we believe—an 84 percent increase in Government spending, 16,000 more public servants, huge increases in debt—has fuelled domestic inflation in New Zealand.

Media: You've been in the role now for several months. How have you found having such a high-profile role, and have you been subject to a number of death threats during that time?

PM: Oh, look, I don't talk about security issues.

Media: Have you seen threats towards you—

PM: Again, I just don't touch any of that. That's for me and my security team to manage.

Media: Do you accept that the previous Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, had a high number of threats towards her, and if you were a woman, you would probably be subject to a high number of threats as well?

PM: As I've said before, I think there is more gendered abuse for female politicians in New Zealand—correct.

Media: Do you think \$800,000 towards a documentary about the former Prime Minister is a good use of Government funds?

PM: Those are decisions for an independent New Zealand Film Commission to make. That's not something I'll weigh into.

Media: Under proposed changes to the Arms Act, is it possible that semi-automatic guns could be legalised in New Zealand?

PM: Oh, look, again, as I've said before, we haven't had any proposal or paper come forward before Cabinet. We haven't had a discussion about it, and there certainly has been no decisions made about it. I know that Nicole McKee, our Minister, is working incredibly hard to make sure that she strengthens public safety and also compliance as well. But what I would say is you have seen us move very clearly last week with respect to illegal guns, and there will be change in that space, because, under the FPO orders that we want to see for illegal guns being used by criminals and gang members, we're going to crack down on that pretty hard.

Media: Are you comfortable relitigating the effective ban on semi-automatic rifles, though?

PM: Ah, look, again, what we've said in our party policy before the election was to do a rewrite of the Arms Act. It's an old piece of legislation. We think we can be strengthened in terms of public safety, and obviously also finding the balance with compliance as well.

Media: At the time that legislation was passed, effectively banning semi-automatics, National expressed some support for the idea that sport shooting could be carved out of the ban. Is that still the case?

PM: Look, again, until—in fairness to the Minister, I want her to do her work and then to be able to come to Cabinet with a proposal, which we'll have a deep discussion around through our Cabinet committee processes we have, and then we'll ultimately make a decision.

Media: Could you just outline where the Government's response to the royal commission of inquiry into the Christchurch mosque attacks is at, for the moment, and when decisions will be made?

PM: Yeah, look, I mean, I think we've completed 23 of the 43 recommendations from memory, and what we want to do is we're going to look to move that through, and, you know, ideally, we want to close that out, because it's important, after five years now, that that royal commission of inquiry action get actioned, one way or another.

Media: When will decisions be made about that, and about some of those big choices you face?

PM: We'd like to have that resolved probably by the middle of the year. Sorry, Thomas, last question.

Media: Did you say 43 recommendations because the 44th—hate speech—is—

PM: No, sorry, the 44th—I meant 44; I was just giving you a rough sense of what was being achieved.

Media: Hate speech is off the cards, though—correct?

PM: Sorry?

Media: The hate speech legislation is off the cards—

PM: Again, I'm not going to get into that. We'll have more to say about the royal commission of inquiry. What I'm saying to you is after five years, at some point, you've actually got to close those recommendations out, one way or another. What we cannot carry on with is another five years of looking at things and not actually deciding things and not getting things done. So Judith Collins, as the relevant Minister, is looking at that very closely, and will have more to say about that in a few months. Thomas. Sorry—Thomas.

Media: Have you seen an updated cost for the reinstatement of interest deductions?

PM: Sorry?

Media: Have you seen an updated cost for the—

PM: Oh, I haven't, but our Ministers, both David Seymour and Minister Watts and also Minister Willis—

Media: When will that be published?

PM: Sorry?

Media: When will it be published?

PM: I'm sure you'll see that in due course with the Budget detail, if that's where it normally appears. Jo?

Media: Just back on what Mitch was talking about before, Judith Collins was reviewing all of those recommendations. So can you just confirm whether she has brought anything to Cabinet and whether any of those recommendations have dropped off as—

PM: No, she hasn't. All I've expressed to Judith Collins is a desire to say, look, it's not fair that these recommendations sit out there for five years; we now need to actually get them resolved, in fairness, for the community and give them clarity as to what has been progressed and where we're going to get these things resolved.

Media: Do you know what—

PM: We cannot carry on for another five things still looking at these things and not making enough progress.

Media: That conversation will obviously be part of meetings that you are having this week down in Christchurch. Have you got any idea of, I guess, what the sentiment is around that from the community there, what's on the agenda, what sort of issues you'll be talking about?

PM: Yeah, look, I do. As you know, I had an employee that was killed in the massacre, in my former life. And I spent a lot of time in Christchurch at that time immediately in the hours after the massacre as well. And so I have a lot of sensitivity for the community, and I want to be able to sit down with them, in fairness, just privately, to be honest, and to be able to have them raise their concerns with me, and also check in and see how they are, where they are, and what they feel else needs to get done.

Media: There was some reporting on *Newsroom* this morning about some concerns around the firearms changes and the gun law review. Are you able to talk to, I guess, what you will say to them about that to try to alleviate any concerns there?

PM: Yeah, well, as I said, there'll be a range of topics and conversations that I'm sure they will want to raise with me, and I'm very comfortable, and that's why I want to go meet with them one on one—that's me sitting down with them to talk around the issues and their concerns.

Media: Have you spoken to David Seymour about his comments on TVNZ last week?

PM: No.

Media: You haven't spoken to him?

PM: No—about what comments, sorry?

Media: His comments that he's made about a TVNZ journalist last week and whether he's compromised his position as a shareholding Minister in TVNZ.

PM: Ah, no I haven't.

Media: You haven't spoken to him?

PM: No, I haven't, no.

Media: Have you seen his comments?

PM: Ah, yes, I did, yeah.

Media: What did you make of those comments?

PM: Um, look, I think, you know, the reality is, you know, that, to me, didn't meet the criteria of what you'd expect from a broadcasting Minister, or, in this case, a Minister of the Crown?

Media: What about the fact that he took particular issue—

PM: All of us have issues—everyone in politics will agree that media doesn't cover them right—

Media: Yes, but he has a very specific interest.

PM: Sorry?

Media: He has this very specific interest in TVNZ as a shareholding Minister, and what about the fact that he took issue with TVNZ's reporting of the pseudoephedrine—that he had presented a pharmacist that he recommended that they go talk to. They didn't do that; they took an independent editorial decision to go and interview a pharmacist of their choice. He then criticised them publicly for that. Is that appropriate.

PM: Look, I'm not aware of those comments that he has made with respect to that particular topic. What I'd just say to you, though, is that, you know, all politicians have issues with the media and don't think they get fair coverage. I think you do a good job. I think you're actually a critical part of strengthening our democracy. I appreciate the industry is going through a very tough time at this point in time, but, you know, you play an important role.

Media: But is it appropriate that a shareholding Minister in TVNZ criticises publicly an independent editorial decision that they did?

PM: I think he's expressing his views. As I said, he may not have expressed it the way that I would have expressed it, but the point is he's free to do so. I don't think he's—

Media: He's expressly forbidden to do so—under the Television New Zealand Act, he is expressly forbidden from telling them how to do any editorial decision-making.

PM: Well, again, I haven't seen his particular remarks with respect to the story that Amelia is talking about. I thought she was talking about earlier comments which he made last week, and what I'd say to you is that, you know, from my point of view, those comments—he's right to express his view as he wishes, as do any other politician often does. But with respect to being the shareholding Minister, what I'd say to you is I don't think he's actually contravened that at this point.

Media: Sorry, are you talking about the comments he made about a TVNZ journalist?

PM: That's what you asked me about—that was your original question.

Media: Yes, OK—so, sorry, that's your response to that.

PM: That's what I'm talking to you about—yep.

Media: Are you aware that John Key cautioned his Ministers for attacking individual journalists?

PM: And I have reiterated the same points in my Cabinet, as well.

Media: So you have spoken to Seymour about it?

PM: Not individually to him, but as a Cabinet, I have spoken to my Cabinet about that.

Media: When did you talk to them—today?

PM: A couple of weeks ago—a few weeks ago.

Media: Before he made the comments?

PM: I spoke to my Cabinet, I think, at a recent Cabinet meeting, just underscoring the importance of probity—and I asked Judith Collins to also talk to that as well—to make sure that all Ministers understood their obligations that they have.

Media: So thus—thus—David Seymour ignored your instruction.

PM: No, I disagree—I disagree. He's expressing a view.

Media: But you said that you told him not to—you told the Cabinet not to attack individual journalists—

PM: No, no, I told the Cabinet to be aware of their obligations—

Media: —a couple of weeks ago, and then last week, he attacked an individual journalist. So has he ignored your—

PM: Sorry?

Media: Has he ignored your instructions?

PM: No, he hasn't. No, he hasn't. I'm just making sure that I take every opportunity I can to remind my Cabinet Ministers of their obligations under the *Cabinet Manual* to remind them of any perceived conflicts, real or otherwise. We have those conversations all the time. In the cases of—actually, the judiciary was actually where we raised those concerns recently about making sure that Ministers are more than welcome to talk about the effectiveness of a law but not to actually attack the judiciary individually. That was where my comments were, and reminder was with respect to Cabinet. The same thing happens, and I'll take the opportunity to remind them about any anything else that's contained around *Cabinet Manual*.

Media: Why specifically Judith Collins? What's so special about Judith?

PM: Because she's the Attorney-General and it's important, as she's the link between the executive and the judiciary to just make it very—we take the opportunity in our meetings to remind each other of our obligations under the *Cabinet Manual* and to each other.

Media: Was that after the sort of high-profile court case related to the Posie Parker visit?

PM: No.

Media: Was it after Shane Jones made comments about one of the courts?

PM: No, it might have been after that. That was more in just recent weeks. We just take it—honestly, it's not complicated. We have a Cabinet process. We make sure that everyone's adherent with the *Cabinet Manual*. We make sure that the Cabinet officers are making sure any perceived or real conflicts are well managed, and we take every opportunity in a Cabinet meeting for people to declare their interest and also to remind them of their obligations.

Media: Prime Minister, can you shed some light on the legislation that Melissa Lee is trying to work towards? Even if you can only do a big picture, what is the Government thinking it might be able to do in terms of trying to help the broadcast media in New Zealand?

PM: Well, look, I think—you know, let's be clear. I think there are limited opportunities for the Government to get involved in actually, you know, seeing what we can do around changing the dynamics within a media sector. The media sector is no different from any other sector we have in New Zealand that is often struggling with massive changes in consumer behaviour and changes, outdated business models, and it requires lots of innovation. And, you know, media companies will need to innovate just like every other company does in every other sector that's gone through tough and challenging structural challenges as well. And so for us, you know, what we're looking at is—you know, Melissa is saying, you know, very clearly there's obviously, you know, the tech platform bill coming forward. We'll look at the submissions that come out of that. We'll digest all of that properly and think through whether there's any opportunity for us to do something in that space. But there are pros and cons of that. And then, likewise, there's some outdated legislation that might need to be updated over time as well. But I want to be quite clear: the ability for the Government to step in and to be able to subsidise media companies is probably not the pathway that we will be looking to go down. What we want to ensure is there's a plurality of media voices in the environment. There is. Whether that's here in regional New Zealand, in the cities, different ethnic media, we want to see that and continue to see that. But we have to acknowledge that it is a really tough time, because, you know, the reality is consumer habits have changed, you know, fundamentally. Business models that once existed are no longer relevant. And, as a result, businesses need to innovate in order to find out where their consumer is and where their customer is and deliver products and services that they value.

Media: Are you happy with the level of briefing you're getting? There's been, I think, three stories, now, that have been brought up in this press conference that you've known nothing about. One of them was the delay to Treaty settlements, which was brought up in a select committee and your justice Minister spoke to at the time. One was David Seymour's comments, which was widely reported last Friday. Do you read enough news?

PM: Yeah, yeah, I do. I do, but you asked me for specific briefings. You know, we are determined to get Treaty settlements sorted. I wasn't aware of David's comments around the pseudoephedrine, for example.

Media: You also weren't aware of his comments about the TVNZ journalists as well.

PM: Sorry. Yes, I was. I made a comment about that last week when you asked me on the tiles.

Media: Last week, last week. No, twice you said that you hadn't seen the comments—

PM: I had seen his comments.

Media: —when almost everyone else had.

PM: Yeah. And I made comments for that when you asked me on the tiles last week.

Media: On Friday, Prime Minister, the police were given an offer they said was insulting and would—you know, they'd struggle to continue hiring officers. You promised to deliver an extra 500 police officers. Will that still happen?

PM: Yes. That's our commitment. We know it's tough, we know it's going to be hard, but we're going to continue to grow our police force so we can restore law and order. As for due respect to the negotiation, we won't be doing that through the media. That's obviously for the police to work through with the police association. All right. Last question, Jo.

Media: The Royal Commission into State abuse, they have requested that they get a deadline extension. It's meant to be on 28 March. Brooke van Velden wasn't keen on that but was going to seek some information. Has anything come to you or to Cabinet about that extension and will you accept it?

PM: No, it hasn't, and until I get advice on that, I can't really comment any further on it. Awesome. Thanks so much. Appreciate your time.

conclusion of press conference