

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 29 APRIL 2024
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT

PM: Kia ora koutou. Good afternoon, everyone. I have three priorities for our Government, and it is to rebuild the economy, to restore law and order, and to deliver better public services, and in particular my Government is focused on shifting resources out of the back office and into the front line. Kiwis, rightly, expect that the taxes they pay are translated into better results, particularly in health and education.

In light of that, this morning we announced a permanent increase in funding for Pharmac, filling in the fiscal cliff left in the country's medicines budget at a cost of \$1.8 billion in this year's Budget. The decision by the previous Government to leave a fiscal cliff in the country's medicines budget I think was irresponsible, and under the previous Budget, over \$400 million per year in funding for medicines had been set to expire from next year. If funding had not been renewed, Pharmac would have been forced to cancel eligibility for a range of treatments, putting the health of Kiwis at risk. On paper, it made previous Budgets look better, but the decision just created a hidden liability to be revealed and funded at a later date. We won't make the same mistake.

Essential services like medicines should not be funded today and left hanging tomorrow for the sake of making broken Budgets look a wee bit better. Kiwis can be confident my Government won't let that happen again. We won't put the medicines we all rely on at risk.

This, and our announcement this afternoon, is part of our plan to deliver better public services, particularly in health and education. Today, I am joined by education Minister Erica Stanford, who will outline six education priorities to turn around declining student achievement.

Since coming into politics, the thing that has worried me more than anything else has been the rapid decline in our student achievement and student attendance. To me, there is nothing more important than our kids getting a world-class education that enables them to set off in their lives and do whatever they wish to do. Children and young people at school today are New Zealand's future. They are our future leaders, our future doctors, teachers, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and engineers, and receiving a world-class education not only sets our kids up for success; it sets New Zealand up for success, both economically and socially.

Today, kids and teachers have returned to school, to the start of term two, and today is also the day that the cellphone ban in classrooms officially takes effect across all State and State-integrated schools, although many schools have already implemented this and are reporting good results.

The cellphone ban is one of the first things we introduced when we came into Government, along with the mandatory one hour of reading, one hour of writing, and one hour of maths in primary and intermediate schools. Too many kids are falling behind in the basics of reading, writing, and maths, and that's why we have ensured that the one hour every day is dedicated to teaching each of reading, writing, and maths in a purposeful and a deliberate way consistently across New Zealand. This will help us reach our target of having 80 percent of year 8 students at or above the expected Curriculum level for their age in reading, writing, and maths by 2030.

And, importantly, we need to get kids back to school, which is why we have also launched our attendance action plan, with a target of getting 80 percent of kids back to school for 90 percent of the term. We will continue this momentum in term two, so I will now hand over to education Minister Erica Stanford to detail our six education priorities.

Hon Erica Stanford: Thank you, Prime Minister. Today, I am announcing fundamental changes to priorities in the education sector. Our children deserve a world-leading education, and I am determined that working with the sector, we can deliver that for them. I've been working closely with teachers, education professionals, parents, principals, specialist staff—all of whom are at the front line of education. Their stories and experiences have shaped and

confirmed the priorities of this Government for education—priorities that have been developed based on research and evidence and student outcome data.

The reality that we face is quite stark—I cannot sugar-coat it. Our current school system is not delivering for all students and the equity gap remains stubbornly wide. When I became education Minister, officials wrote to me in the briefing to the incoming Minister. They said that education in New Zealand is not delivering excellent or equitable outcomes, and student experiences reflect this: poor attendance; systematic declines in student achievement, where fewer students are gaining NCEA; our international PISA scores are dropping; and recent literacy and numeracy results for year 10 and 11 show that about 40 percent of our students are failing to meet basic requirements in reading, writing, and maths.

But PISA also tells us that New Zealand records a very strong relationship between socioeconomic background and educational performance, more so than the countries we compare ourselves to. Your means should not determine your destiny. The education system must ensure that all children have the opportunity to experience success and confidence in their abilities no matter what their family circumstance. We are undertaking fundamental change in the system and will have an unrelenting focus on lifting achievement so that all Kiwi kids are equipped with the knowledge, the skills, and the competencies they need to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to a vibrant 21st century society.

My vision for the schooling system is to be inspirational and engaging for learners, to prioritise outcomes and achievement, to develop critical thinkers armed with the knowledge they need to tackle what's coming at them in their futures as they grow up in digital worlds, and to give all students the opportunity they need to succeed and be lifelong learners who love to learn, have the ability to relearn, and are adaptive thinkers who can problem solve, innovate, and create. The change starts with ensuring that schools and kura are provided with a knowledge-rich Curriculum right up to year 13, so that students have access to the same important learning, regardless of where they live, their teachers, where they go to school, and that their teachers are well supported with an evidence-based, detailed Curriculum designed to support student progression.

This is a fundamental shift away from our current Curriculum, that can be described as high level, vague, and lacking in specificity, detail, and content knowledge, requiring schools and teachers to create the Curriculum themselves. Not only has this highly devolved curriculum approach led to a decline in standards; ERO have also found in their recent report that teachers themselves want more specificity in the Curriculum. We will be introducing a Curriculum that is informed by the science of learning, that is knowledge-rich, that develops skills and competencies our kids need. All students will be taught literacy and mathematics in an explicit, systematic, well-structured way that decades of cognitive research tells us best supports them to learn.

Parents must know about their children's progress, and teachers must know how they can best support their students' learning. I plan to incentivise, train, and retain New Zealand teachers and support the next generation of education leaders.

For students who need extra help, we will provide the right options and supports to them to learn, streamline and simplify access to support, and focus on opportunities for early intervention. The better use of data, assessment, and evidence, taking a social investment approach, will better enable us to identify and invest in programmes and supports and services that work.

So, today, I'm sharing six related priority areas that will drive fundamental system change and are the beginnings of a reform of our education system. They are establishing a knowledge-rich curriculum that is grounded in the science of learning; implementing evidence-based instruction in early literacy and mathematics in the form of structured literacy and maths mastery; implementing consistent modes of monitoring student progress and achievement, and clear and consistent reporting to parents; developing the workforce of the future, including leadership development pathways and the strengthening of initial teacher

education; targeting effective learning support interventions for students with additional learning needs; and, finally, using data and evidence to inform decision making.

These six education priorities will not be a surprise to many—I've been talking about them for a long time. They reflect the changes our Government has made so far in education, starting with our 100-day plan and the recently announced second-quarter action plan and targets for the public sector. These priorities will guide schools, education agencies, and this sector on where their efforts and focus should be. They will underpin work programmes and decisions to make sure they're all contributing to achieve the vision and the education system that we need.

Over the coming months, I'll be introducing work programmes in each of these areas, the first of which will be announced later this week. Meaningful change happens when we work together and I'm hugely grateful to the teachers and principals that regularly write to me to help shape this work, and I want to be clear about my intention to work with and alongside the sector to implement these changes.

It's time for a change. The equity gap has been in place for far too long, and we need to close it. Teachers are the greatest asset in our education system, and that resource will make these changes possible.

Prime Minister, back to you.

PM: Thank you Minister. Before we just get into any questions on the education priorities, I'll just run through my movements for the rest of the week. I'm in Wellington until Thursday morning, then I'll head to Auckland until Friday, and on Saturday, I'll be heading down to Christchurch. This week in the House, we'll be having annual review debates for multiple portfolios, including finance, health, and education. On Tuesday, there'll be a one-hour debate for the House to pay their respects to the late Fa'anana Efeso Collins, and on Wednesday, the Hon James Shaw will deliver his valedictory statement. And with that, we're happy to take your questions.

Media: Minister, what are the consequences for schools not complying with the phone ban?

Hon Erica Stanford: We've already put ERO in charge of monitoring, and any school who is not putting the "off and away all day" policy in place will have a visit from ERO.

Media: In terms of the Curriculum, I've spoken to several kaiako from wharekura who said that it was very difficult to assess the outcome of the Curriculum because the Curriculum hadn't been written previously. So, now, will there be assessment before or after, or is there going to be a delay to NCEA assessment?

Hon Erica Stanford: We've already announced a delay to the roll out of NCEA level 2 and 3 for this exact reason. What we found was that—in fact, I had a phone call on the way to the airport last night from an English teacher who told me she didn't know what to teach, and that's because we don't have a Curriculum that underpins our assessment. So we're making sure that we put this knowledge-rich Curriculum right up to year 13 in place before we make any changes to NCEA.

Media: Just back on the phone ban, is it your expectation that schools take phones from students when they enter, or that no phones are brought to school in the first place?

Hon Erica Stanford: The expectation with the cellphone ban—or the cellphone "off and away all day" policy—is it's up to schools to decide how they implement it. We've been very clear over the last term that they were able to make those decisions and consult with their community. They've done that, and there will be differing options for different schools. Large schools can't, obviously, take phones off everyone, but they can make sure, potentially, that they're off and away in a bag. Smaller schools might opt to take them in, and they already do that. So there'll be a range of different options for different schools, depending on their circumstances.

Media: Given that you're referencing that impracticality, do you accept that some schools will have to have a sort of trust system in place, or that they'll expect kids to do the right thing?

Hon Erica Stanford: What we've found so far is that this policy has been overwhelmingly successful. Principals have been writing to me every day, telling me how wonderful it is to hear the noise in the playground. Librarians are telling me kids are taking books out of the library more often. Students themselves are telling us that they don't have the anxiety of having to check their phone every five minutes for messages that are coming in. This is overwhelmingly popular. What we know is that schools will be managing through this change, and they've done so—a lot of them—in the first term very successfully, and I'm sure that the schools who will be implementing it in term 2 will be doing the same because they can see the benefits.

Media: Prime Minister, when you were talking just in your opening statements about the Pharmac budget, you used statements such as, you know, your old favourite "fiscal cliff", "hidden liability", but nothing has changed in terms of the Budget funding cycles—they've always been four years. So isn't it a bit disingenuous for you to be using these sort of phrases when nothing has changed?

PM: On Pharmac, it was time-limited funding and it was due to expire, and that's what's different. And so we're putting funding back in place to make sure that the core needs of—New Zealanders can get access to their medications, as they should. There's a lot of work going on under way with Pharmac, in particular, as we think about how we get better delivery out of that unit, and we actually ultimately support New Zealanders with all the medications that they need. But, again, it was a classic, you know, Labour economic mismanagement trick, where they only funded it for a period of time, and then there was no money beyond that point in time.

Media: I mean, is there scope for you and your Government to look at these funding cycles, because you're making it very political by using these terms "fiscal cliff"—that have always been in place. Are you suggesting that this four-year cycle should be extended up to five or 10 years to combat this?

PM: Well, what you'd see with us is we're not going to do time-limited funding of something as critical as Pharmac drugs—you know, that is absolutely critical that New Zealanders know they can get the drugs that they desperately need. And—

Media: But Pharmac's funding was over four years.

PM: What we saw was time-funded—you know, a budget for Pharmac drugs, and what we're doing is making sure that the money is there over the next four years, with a big investment, to make sure that we've got a really good, solid, core delivery from Pharmac. We've got massive certainty around that, and then we go forward on that basis.

Media: So, using your own logic there, you've got \$1.7 billion over four years. Technically speaking, after that fourth year, you've created your own fiscal cliff.

PM: Well, again, we work to Budget cycles of four years, but there has been a number of, as we've seen—you know, what have we inherited? We've inherited massive cost overruns, a habit and a pattern of time-limited funding that's not fully funded for the full duration of the four-year period, and what we've also seen is projects that have been poorly delivered and huge amounts of wasted money that we never get back. So, you know, those are the three things that we've been wrestling with as we get square and straight, so that as we go forward with the Budget at the end of May, we know exactly where things are at. That's a classic case of where there was time-limited funding in place, as there was for school lunches and other things.

Media: Given, Prime Minister, your view on fiscal cliffs, can you guarantee there won't be other fiscal cliffs in your Budget?

PM: Well, again, we've done a great job over the last 150 days of unearthing them as they have been existing under the previous administration. But, as you know, we want to make sure we've got things fully funded going forward, and that's what we're focused on.

Media: Four-year cycles for everything?

PM: You'll have to wait to see our Budget, but I can tell you that we are focused on making sure we deliver four-year, fully funding programmes, where we can, and what is not going to be happening is we don't stop school lunches all of a sudden and we don't stop Pharmac drugs all of a sudden, and the funding runs out, which has been the habit of what was going on before.

Media: What do you mean by "all of a sudden", though? I mean, the argument that you're putting forth now is the same argument that the Labour Party had when they were in Government, or even the Key administration had when they were in Government. I'm just curious as to what you're doing differently.

PM: We are making sure that things like school lunches, which are important programmes; drugs, which are important programmes for New Zealanders, are fully funded over the course of this cycle of the Budget. That's important to us, and that's what we're going to make sure happens, going forward.

Sorry—Jo.

Media: You also just said four-year fully funded programmes "where we can", so that means, presumably, some programmes are missing out?

PM: No, we're focused on making sure we have a really well-funded Budget that's really clear and transparent about the programmes that we're supporting and the funding that's taking place as part of those programmes. It's just an acknowledgment—it's just a simple acknowledgment that since we've come to power, what we've acknowledged is an awful lot of time-limited funding, which is a convenient way of trying to make your Budget look good. But as the previous administration was overspending its operating allowance by \$600 million a year, on average, over those six years, that was one of the ways in which they were managing to make the Budget look less ugly than it actually was, and that's all we're surfacing—it's bringing that out, put sunlight on it, and fix it up.

Media: Asking that in an alternative way, then: will there be some programmes that won't be four-year fully funded—because I'm just asking for the definition of "where we can".

PM: Well, again, what we're focused on is delivering a Budget at the end of May where we are very transparent and very up front about our investment, so there is certainty about those programmes that we are supporting that they're fully funded. It's getting back—

Media: Sorry, with all due respect, that goes nowhere near answering the question, though.

PM: —getting back—we're just making sure that we have fully funded Budgets.

Media: So all programmes that you've put forward in the Budget will be fully funded for four years—there will be no programmes that won't be fully funded for four years?

PM: Correct.

Media: Can I just ask what's happening with the Māori vaccination rates that you announced earlier on—that's only funded for two years.

PM: Well, that is exactly what we've done—is taken \$50 million before Christmas, as a new Government coming in, and actually made a big effort in a two-year period to try and lift immunisation rates to get to the improved outcomes. At the moment, with Māori under-tuos, it's sitting at just below, I think, mid/early 70 percents. We know we've got a goal of getting to 95 percent of under-tuos in this country at full immunisation rates—that's our focus.

Media: This is for the Minister: with respect to what you've announced today, and you've called it "fundamental", is this the beginning of the end of the so-called inquiry method of education?

Hon Erica Stanford: Look, this is a focus on a Curriculum that is knowledge-rich, structured, and explicit every single year what you must teach and when, and we expect there will be explicit teaching in a structured manner, especially in those early years, because what parents want to know is that their kids are going to school and getting their heads filled with knowledge so that they can go on to acquire the skills and the competencies they need. So in those early years especially, it's so important to have structured, explicit teaching of knowledge.

Media: And the consequence of that is does that also mean an end to the sort of open-plan, "all in together" classrooms?

Hon Erica Stanford: One of the things we're going to be looking into is the evidence behind open-plan learning. Some schools do it very well, with doors that they can close off; others with very, very open-plan what we'd call sort of barnyard classrooms. It doesn't seem to be that there's any evidence to suggest that that works, so it is a piece of work that we will have to undertake.

Media: The Curriculum is, obviously, sort of a massive focus for you and it will require a pretty major work programme—right? So how does that square with 202 people being let go from the Curriculum Centre at the Ministry of Education?

Hon Erica Stanford: The changes to the Curriculum Centre staffing were for the most part around the NCEA change package. Because we're delaying that, that meant that the changes they made to the Curriculum were around those people. The Curriculum changes, for the most part, remain unchanged, and, in fact, we're actually adding roles to the front line in terms of Curriculum leads that will be going out into the regions to help support teachers with the new Curriculum. So there'll be additional roles on the front line, which is what we always talk about—shifting back end to meet front-end need.

Media: You've previously said that a lot of those people will be hired back as contractors. Is that still going to be the case?

Hon Erica Stanford: No. We've never held on staff—well, not as far as I know—Curriculum experts that we only need for a short term to write. Typically, they are always experts that are brought in as contractors for a very short period of time to work on a project base. The last Government did it, the Government before that did it—we've always done that. You don't hold people like that on staff. So there has been no one that I'm aware of that we've let go that was writing the Curriculum.

Media: Right, but you are bringing back experts on a contract basis to write the Curriculum?

Hon Erica Stanford: We are bringing them in—we're not bringing them back; we're bringing them in—to help write the Curriculum, which is what every Government does because we don't hold those people on staff.

Media: Prime Minister, in terms of Pharmac, there are still 140 applications on the options for investment list, including some of the drugs that National promised to fund in the election campaign for cancer. Do you commit to giving Pharmac more funding this Budget so that they can fund some of that options for investment list; not just what they're already funding?

PM: Yeah—well, look, I'm not going to go into the details of the Budget now, but suffice to say there will be more funding for health in general, as we've talked about, in the Budget, and you'll have to see that as we get to the Budget at the end of May. But at this point, what you can be reassured around is there will be more investment going in but also what we have been expecting is, actually—you know, as I said, resources move from the back office to the front line, and that will continue.

Media: And are you still committed to scrapping the co—reintroducing, sorry, the co-payment for prescriptions?

PM: Again, I'm not going to go into our Budget conversations until—as we're in the middle of the process right now. So we'll talk about that at the Budget.

Media: Is it likely that it will survive, and the policy will survive in the way that National campaigned on it, where SuperGold Card holders and Community Service Card holders will still get free prescriptions, because people are, right now, looking at the next few months of their life and getting quite nervous about having to pay that money?

PM: Sure, I understand that, but we are in a Budget process and we'll have more to say about that as we go through that process, and, as you understand, that's the situation. I can't comment on it at this point in time.

Media: Minister, in terms of the Curriculum, education, and getting tamariki and rangatahi back into the classroom, what do you say to those rangatahi who came a couple of weeks ago who said that those school lunches—they bring the rangatahi and their cohorts into kura, it lessens anxiety, it makes them feel more settled at kura. What do you say to them—they're fearful of cuts, particularly those whānau who can't afford to send their kiddies to school with kai. But you're making cuts to the school lunches, and if economics isn't a preventative measure for education, then what do you say to those whānau?

PM: Well, can I just correct you there? Again, we are putting money into school lunches, because, again, it was time-limited funds that were expiring. And the Government—

Media: No, David Seymour said he's looking at making cuts—making more efficiencies.

PM: What we're saying is—yes, but what we're saying is the previous Labour Government had that as time-limited funding for school lunches, meaning there was going to be zero money to set aside for school lunches after a certain date. We're making sure—we think the school lunch programme is important one. We want to make sure that we put money into school lunches, obviously, but we also have said right from the get-go that we want to keep looking at efficiencies to make sure we're actually delivering school lunches in a much more efficient, better way. And so—

Media: So can I just get clarity then? Are you increasing—

PM: —so that's natural, and that's what we expect it to be.

Media: —the pūtea to—

PM: We are increasing money because there is no money there, thanks to the previous administration, who decided that, actually, school lunches and Pharmac would be things they wouldn't fund on an ongoing basis.

Media: Will you be increasing the pūtea that the previous Government had put into school lunches, or decreasing—

PM: Well, there is money that the previous Government put into school lunches—that's the point I'm trying to make to you. It went from expanding to zero and we're now coming and putting money back into it, and we're making sure that that money is going to be efficiently spent.

Media: Will you match what Labour spent on it?

PM: Again, you'll have to see in the Budget. But what we are committed to doing is making sure it is better delivered, and if there's efficiencies and improvements we can make to the delivery of school lunches, we want to be in that mind-set. We want to be constantly looking to improve the way we do things, and we'll look at that as part of the Budget announcements.

Media: Prime Minister, your own former school—Howick College—is not using a phone ban. What do you make of that?

PM: Well, I'll just say to you, this has been an incredibly successful policy. When I think of conversations with principals, with the parents, with the kids across New Zealand, it's very obvious to us the decibel levels in playgrounds across the country are high, as people actually having person to person interactions again and talking to each other and using their social skills, and the second thing that's happening is there's a lot less cyber-bullying. So we think it's a fantastic policy. I appreciate today is the "D-Day" for new schools to be compliant with the regulation, and we expect all schools to be compliant with the regulation. They'll, obviously, be audited by ERO in due course if they're not.

Media: Would you hope that they are audited for not following the rules?

PM: Well, you know, I expect all schools to be compliant with the regulation, and it's pretty clear: it's phones away, all day.

Media: Minister, I just wanted to ask—following up on Amelia's question about the Curriculum Centre—how do you feel about the fact that out of all the people in that centre who have lost their jobs, it was those with a teaching background who are all gone and the people with a policy background have remained? Considering you're saying you've been working with the sector, wouldn't you expect some people with a teaching background to have those jobs still?

Hon Erica Stanford: This is absolutely 100 percent an operational decision. I trust the judgment of the Secretary of Education to make those changes, and I have had no hand in it, of course—that's appropriate. So that's a question you'll need to put to her.

Media: And, just secondly, you also mentioned that you wanted to incentivise teachers. Can you expand on exactly what you're going to do to incentivise people to get into teaching?

Hon Erica Stanford: You are going to have to wait for that announcement—Budget announcement—but it is incentivising more teachers and more people to take up teaching. That's enough information.

Media: Just on the stronger learning support, targeting effective learning support interventions for students with additional needs, my understanding—correct me if I'm wrong—is that Labour had done a review of that. I think Jan Tinetti, as the associate education Minister at the time, did. It was meant to come back in June last year, and then kind of got kicked because of the election. Are you using that review to help with what you're planning to do here, or are you starting from scratch—can you just talk through the process there?

Hon Erica Stanford: Sure. Look, the ministry are using that review and other information that they've got, but, frankly, you didn't need a review to tell you that the system was broken. We already know what the issues are and we will be working—we've got a five-point plan already that we are working on. That work's under way at the moment. But, yes, it will be informed by some of the previous decisions and some of the previous work that was done.

Media: Can you give a couple of examples of what you see as the core issues?

Hon Erica Stanford: Right child, right service, right time—you know, too many parents say to me, "My child is sitting on a wait-list.", and it's the worst thing for a child with learning support needs. We also know that schools find it really frustrating that when they go to apply for living support, there's 10 different pathways and every different pathway takes 10 hours' worth of paperwork, so we're looking to streamline that, as well. Those are just two indications of the work programme that we'll be putting out over the next little while, but I'll have an announcement on this in the next few weeks.

Media: I mean, it's hard to provide more targeted learning support without throwing more money in it, so, presumably, this is an area you're going to spend in?

Hon Erica Stanford: Well, that's something that I'll leave for the Budget. But I would also say we spend over \$1 billion—well over \$1 billion—on learning support, and one of the things you would have heard in my priorities is a better use of data and performance monitoring.

We spend over \$1 billion in learning support, and quite often we have no idea what the outcomes are. So we will be undertaking—in fact, we already are undertaking quite a huge piece of work to make sure that we are properly monitoring and evaluating our performance indicators to every service we provide so that we can stop doing the things that aren't working and reinvest them in the things that are: right child, right service, right time.

Media: Prime Minister, David Seymour said this morning that if you sacked a member of the ACT Party's ministerial team, it would be a breach of the coalition agreement. Is he right?

PM: Well, what I'd say to you is we have a very strongly performing set of Ministers across our Government. It would be a total hypothetical, but as it was—as I talked about the changes I made last week, and I consulted my coalition party leaders, obviously, it would be a conversation I'd want to have with the relevant coalition party leader, as well.

Media: So how would those negotiations work? Would you—I mean—

PM: Well, we're very collegial—as you would have heard David say this morning as well—in the way that we work in our coalition. We are talking all the time, and I talk all the time with the two other party leaders. We talk a lot within our own Cabinet. We have a series of forums that bring us all together to talk about issues, and we continue to make that work very well.

Media: And just in your opening address, Minister Stanford, you said that you got a call from an English teacher that was saying, asking what they—is this part of a new ministerial outreach of yours, to give your numbers to English teachers so they can call?

Hon Erica Stanford: Every single letter that I receive from a principal, and I respond to it, I always put my cellphone number on the bottom and say, "If you need to reach me, you can."

Media: And how often do people take you up on that? Your phone must be ringing off the hook.

Hon Erica Stanford: We also put an email address and they feed back to the Minister and they email us a lot, and I read all those in my weekend bag. But, look, you know, every now and then, I will get a text from a principal or a teacher, who says, "Hey look, thanks for writing back to me. Thanks for your number. Can we chat?", and I'm always happy to do that.

PM: And I have to say that is an expectation that we've set on all our Ministers. We expect them to be engaged with their sectors and we expect them to be talking and out of this building and out of the wood-panelled offices that are here, and actually talking to the sector and actually finding out what's going on on the ground. And so—

Media: Do you do it?

PM: Yep, absolutely—that's why I leave here Wednesday night, and I'm out there Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sundays, talking with people about the issues that they're finding. That is really important.

Media: How many texts and calls are you getting from punters about various different parts of policies?

PM: Quite a few—quite a few—because there's always one thing that someone thinks I need to do that will just change everything. So there's a lot of those.

Media: Have you spoken to Paul Goldsmith about your expectations for the media portfolio, and is there going to be a change of tack in this Government's approach to media?

PM: He's currently overseas. We've had a high-level conversation about that. I've asked him—as I spoke about it last week—to reset and actually think about the things that we—you know, let's be clear: we've got quite limited levers. You know, there is a big global shift, as we have talked about—a consumer shift going on in the media environment. Some media companies are evolving their business models and innovating in a way to adjust to that, others aren't, and what we have got to do is just make sure that the settings and the

enablers are set up so that individual media companies can make those adjustments, as they need to do.

Media: Will there be any consideration for financial support packages or regulating online media?

PM: Again, in fairness to Paul—and, you know, we're having a conversation when he is back. I have my own thoughts on it; he has his thoughts on it. We'll engage with that, and we'll work very quickly to work out what else we can be doing, as a Government, to get the settings right to enable individual media companies to make the changes that they need to. But I want to be very clear: the levers for Government are very limited.

Media: Prime Minister, in terms of section 7AA, do you disagree, then, with the former National Party Minister of Education Anne Tolley, who actually implemented section 7AA in 2017, and then it was implemented or enacted by New Zealand First and Tracey Martin—so are you now saying that you disagree with the former National Party and the former Minister in terms of section 7AA for Oranga Tamariki?

PM: Well, what I'm going to be—really, you know, it's not going to be the answer you want, but the answer is, very simply, as this matter is before the courts this week, it's inappropriate and I just cannot comment on it, and I shouldn't comment on it.

Media: Well, there has been an appeal lodged, but it's not in court, so you can—and, actually, what I had asked was: do you disagree or agree with your former Government?

PM: Yeah, I'm going to say very clearly to you, given there is court action going on this week, is that I cannot comment on that and I shouldn't be commenting on that. So that's what I'm going to do. But we'll talk about that at some other point.

Media: Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister is promising a major speech on foreign policy on Wednesday night. Has that been approved by Cabinet—gone through Cabinet?

PM: The Foreign Minister is doing an exceptionally good job, and he and I and Minister Collins and also Minister McClay are very aligned around wanting to reset our foreign policy and make sure that we hit it with more urgency and intensity. That's what you saw with my visit to South-east Asia, that's what you saw with the Deputy Prime Minister's visit to Europe, and that's what you've seen with Minister McClay being in China last week and heading off to the Middle East again tonight. So, again, we are very focused on lifting our intensity in those relationships. We want a big focus on the Indo-Pacific, as we've talked about before. That's where our national interests sit, both in a security sense and in an economic sense, and both those issues are interdependent, obviously.

Media: Do you know what he's going to say?

PM: I've got a sense of what he'll say, but it'll be very good and I'd encourage you all to listen to it, because it will be very, very good content.

Media: In his speech, is this a positioning on issues? Has that gone through Cabinet—has that been agreed at Cabinet?

PM: It doesn't need to. We've had a series of conversations in Cabinet over the last few months around foreign affairs and our reset of our policy, and I think it's fantastic the Foreign Minister's going to give a keynote speech setting out our direction. He is doing a fantastic job—an absolutely fantastic job—and I think you're seeing very clearly from myself, from him, and from our defence Minister and our trade Minister—all four of us are collectively working together as a team. We have a series of meetings to talk about our approach that happen on a regular basis, and it's all designed for us to lift our intensity and to play our roles as a new Government, given our different portfolio responsibilities.

OK—last question.

Media: James Shaw's valedictory is this week. First question: are you going to go to his speech on Wednesday?

PM: Absolutely.

Media: And, two: did you give any thought during the campaign and coalition talks last year to extending an invitation to James Shaw to have a discussion, at least, about what it might look like to talk to the Green Party?

PM: Well, look, I mean, James is a friend of mine from even before I came into politics, and he and I have always had a very good, strong, positive relationship. But I'd just say to you it was very obvious to us that his other colleagues and also, certainly, other Green members had no intention given the big differences we had around economic policy, some social policy, that actually that was a possibility, and, as you know, we ruled that out well and truly over the course of the last year.

Media: But there were no informal conversations with James?

PM: No—no. OK, thanks very much, team. I appreciate it.

Media: Prime Minister, when will you provide—

PM: Sorry—last question, mate. You can have the last one.

Media: When will you provide an update on whether the Government will continue to support Jacinda Ardern as the Special Envoy for the Christchurch Call?

PM: Look, we'll have more to say about that very, very shortly. Obviously, there's been a good series of conversations about how the model continues to evolve its important work. But watch this space—we'll talk about that very shortly.

OK, thanks.

conclusion of press conference