

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2024
EPIQ TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora and good afternoon, everyone. I trust you all had good weekends and are ready for another week here at Parliament. Before I begin, can I just thank the police for hosting me on my ride along on Saturday night to see different aspects of their work. I've always believed it's important to get out of the office and see firsthand what's happening and I came away, I have to say, with even more respect and more admiration for our police officers, who are doing some incredible, multifaceted work to protect and serve our communities. It was a real privilege to spend some time with them on Saturday evening and early Sunday morning.

Today the first quarterly report on our Government's nine public service targets has been released. And, as you know, our Government reinstated targets to focus our public sector on driving better results for New Zealanders in health and education, law and order, work, housing and the environment by 2030. Setting clear targets helps to focus resources, attention and accountability, and to improve the quality and the delivery of public services. The targets we set are deliberately ambitious and the results from the first quarter confirm that they will be challenging to achieve, but it's a challenge that our Government is up for because better results are what New Zealanders expect and deserve.

We're making some good progress on our emergency housing target. Our target is 75 percent fewer households in emergency housing by 2030. The results for this quarter show that we've already reduced the number by 34 percent and there has even been a little bit more progress since then. One key part of our plan to address the failures of emergency housing is the priority 1 category, which we introduced in April, and it puts families with children who have been in the emergency housing for longer than 12 weeks to the top of the social housing waitlist. There are now more than 1,000 fewer children growing up in motels because of our plan, and I'm confident that the results for the next quarter will show some more progress too.

But the target that I do want to focus on a bit more today is our violent crime target. Restoring law and order is one of our top three priorities as a Government because crime has been increasing in the last few years and Kiwis do deserve to feel safe in their homes, their businesses and their communities. We set ourselves a target of 20,000 fewer people being victims of an assault, robbery or sexual assault by 2029, and the results from the first quarter are based on the New Zealand Crime and Victim Survey, which asked respondents of their experience of reported and unreported crime over the past 12 months. Over the period that the latest survey was taken, almost 30,000 more people have experienced violent crime, and due to the way that the information is captured and reported, any violent crime reported in the latest result could have been experienced between July '22 up to June '24, over two years.

This result adds fresh weight to previous data from police, which also showed a concerning rise in reports of violent crime in recent years, and it's also further proof that the previous soft-on-crime approach has emboldened offenders and created a crime wave that will take a much tougher approach to stop. We've already announced a raft of measures that we're taking to restore law and order—more cops on the beat, stronger powers for police to go after gangs, and support for serious young offenders to turn their lives around—and today we have an update on our pre-election commitment to hold offenders accountable through sentences that better reflect the seriousness of a crime. Victims and the public lose faith in the justice system when criminals receive such hefty discounts to their sentences that they don't reflect the harm caused. I'll now pass over to Justice Minister Paul Goldsmith to talk you through our sentencing reforms. Thank you, Paul.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Thank you, Prime Minister. We've set two clear targets in law and order: ensuring there are 20,000 fewer victims of violent crime by 2029, alongside reducing serious repeat youth offending by 15 percent. We've been clear from day one, we want to

return the victims of crime to the heart of the justice system. A big part of that is denouncing illegal acts and ensuring there are real consequences for crime.

We've had a large and busy justice work programme, part of which involves the sentencing reforms I revealed in June. I'm pleased to announce Cabinet has agreed to all of these proposed sentencing reforms and to introduce them to the House this week. These reforms have three key objectives: making sure punishment fits the crime, restoring the principle of personal responsibility for offending, and better recognising victims, particularly those who have suffered through years of increasing retail crime. These changes will lead to tougher sentences. That is our intention.

So let me recap the specifics. Firstly, we're capping discounts at 40 percent. In recent years we've seen more and more serious crime coming before the courts. However, at the same time we've seen a reduction in the use of imprisonment and shorter prison sentences overall, much to the dismay of victims. This trend, which results from more generous sentence discounts, risks undermining public confidence in the justice system.

We're also introducing a sliding scale for guilty pleas. This will help reduce the number of victims forced to prepare for and endure the stress of trial proceedings, and make it clear that late pleas will not bring big rewards.

Repeated use of sentencing discounts for youth and remorse will become a thing of the past. Such discounts run contrary to the principle that offenders, like everyone else, should learn from and take responsibility for their actions.

We're also setting a clear expectation that cumulative sentences should generally be imposed for offending on bail, in custody and on parole, as committed to in the National–New Zealand First coalition agreement. Those who continue to offend on bail, in custody or on parole show a disregard for the criminal justice system.

As per the National–Act coalition, a new aggravating factor is being established to address offences against sole charge workers such as dairy owners, as well as those whose home and businesses are connected.

From 2019 to the end of 2023, the total number of reported victimisations in retail locations increased by 86 percent and there was also a 72 percent increase in victimisations relating to sexual assault. We've all seen these things. We know that it cannot continue. Similar to how we're making gang membership an aggravating factor at sentencing, the Government has confirmed two additional aggravating factors will be added to the bill: first, adults who exploit children and young people by aiding or abetting them to offend, and secondly offenders who glorify their criminal activities by live-streaming or posting them online. These provisions have been transferred from the Ram Raid Bill that's currently before select committee so that the amendments to the Sentencing Act can be considered together as a coherent package. These changes send a clear message that social media cannot be a tool to glorify or celebrate the actions of callous individuals, and nor should the adults exploit children and young people in the commission of crime. We think it's important to reinforce to the courts that victims' interests should always be at the front of mind in sentencing.

Today you've heard what the Government has agreed to, but now we want to hear from you, New Zealanders, as to whether this goes far enough. We're open for change. We're open to going further. I'll now hand back to the Prime Minister.

PM: Thank you, Minister Goldsmith. The bottom line is that New Zealand is a society that comprises of both rights and responsibilities, and rights and responsibilities help make our society fair and they make it safe for everyone. And the deal we have to the country, and frankly to each other, is a pretty simple one. You can't just take the freedoms and the rights of being a Kiwi without also taking on the duties and the responsibilities of being a Kiwi too. And

sure, if you make a bad decision, you should have the opportunity to turn your life around. But if you continue to make bad decisions and deploy violence, creating more victims and more hurt for your fellow citizens, then very serious and much harsher consequences are coming your way.

As you've heard, we're making significant reforms to sentencing. The message is clear across all of these reforms: offenders must be held accountable for their actions and there must be real consequences for criminal behaviour to protect victims. But as the Minister said, we are open to going even further. We want to hear from victims and we want to hear from the public whether there is more that we can be doing, and I encourage anyone who has ideas, who has feedback or thoughts, to be part of that select committee process.

Before we get into any questions, I'll just quickly run through this week in the House. We will be getting through the remaining estimates debate, as well as considering the committee stage of the Education and Training Amendment Bill, which will reintroduce charter schools, and with that we're happy to take your questions.

Media: You've said that the previous Government was soft on crime but you've stolen their homework in a couple of these sentencing aggravating factors. Which is it: were they soft on crime or did they have good ideas on crime?

PM: There's no doubt that the previous administration was incredibly soft on crime. The message came right from the top and that's why you saw a very big increase in crime. What we're doing is making sure that we are passing legislation quickly to make sure that we get sentencing gripped up, and that's what we're doing right here.

Media: Why did you steal their ideas if they're so soft on crime?

PM: I would just say getting rid of section 27 reports, reinstating third strike, making sure that we hire 500 more police officers, that we actually have strong gang laws that cut down on illegal guns, firearm prohibition orders. Think about our serious young offender categorisation and the military style academies, they're all attempts to make sure—this is one part of it but it's all about making sure we get the settings right to make it very clear to New Zealanders: choose your life of crime, cause pain and suffering on your fellow New Zealander and you're going to be doing some tougher consequences.

Media: Perhaps could the Minister explain why you've chosen to adopt those Labour laws?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, after six years of not getting very far, right at the end they came up with a couple of reasonable ideas, and we've picked up those two around adults exploiting children and the criminal activities via live streaming so we're going to add them to our list. But they had the occasional good idea and we're going to use those when they did, but we're building on a much broader and more comprehensive suite of activities to restore real consequences for crime.

PM: And can I say it's fantastic because given it's one of their ideas and we're strengthening it up—as we have been on fast track, as we are doing here—we look forward and welcome that bipartisan support, and we look forward to a positive vote from the Labour Party as a result, supporting these measures.

Media: 30,000 more victims from violent crime when the target is obviously 20,000 fewer.

PM: Yes.

Media: How big a problem is this going to be and what is the timeline, at what point do you hope at least to start seeing that number coming down rather than continuing to increase?

PM: Yeah, look, I mean, I've set these targets and the reason for the targets is—yes, the targets are important in themselves, absolutely, but actually it's about the conversations that it's driving inside the public service and amongst the ministerial groups on these portfolios. And so we are monitoring these targets. I have sessions with the ministers, with the CEOs, myself. We're saying, "What more can we be doing?" and in this case we've got this going the wrong direction and so we've got to actually get this target stabilised and then we've got to start trunking it down.

That's a consequence now of—our gang laws have just started to come into being passed into law, as you know. They will be operationalised by police. That's an important aspect here. Gang members are one quarter of 1 percent, but actually driving almost one fifth of some of the serious assaults and crime that we're actually seeing here. So it's a combination of everything that we've been doing from day one, starting now to have come through the Parliament, being passed into law, being put into operation. It's going to be a series of those things but we want to see it coming down as quickly as we possibly can.

Media: Are you planning to set sort of targets within the targets—because currently, obviously, it's going up in the wrong direction—just in terms of when you might actually see and what are people on the ground who are dealing with these issues telling you that you might actually start to see some of those numbers trending down—can you give a target of when that might be?

PM: No, I can't, but what I can say is we've set a long-term target, six years from when we came to office, and we're very committed to reporting on that every quarter for the next six years. And sometimes the numbers will go against us and sometimes they'll be—you know, as you've seen with emergency housing and you've seen with violent crime. That is okay. What is important and what's the most important thing is that actual actions are taken to deal with it.

And that's why sentencing decisions being brought forward to announce this is important. That's why you saw us, when we dealt with some pretty abysmal mathematics numbers, as you've seen in the targets as well—we've pulled forward the curriculum a full year and made it implemented much quicker. So that's what I'm interested in, is having a conversation in the public service and with the ministerial group to make sure that—what are we doing about it? Because we can't just talk about it. We can't just have a conversation that just keeps going the same way and keeps doing the same things. What are we doing differently to actually support it?

Media: You're still committed to meeting that target?

PM: Absolutely. Sorry, Jo?

Media: In terms of violent crime, outside of the sentencing stuff and outside of the gang stuff, what is it—I mean, you were out with these guys on the weekend, the police. What is it they are telling you that they need, to bring those numbers down and not see them keep going up?

PM: Yeah, good question. I mean, there was a number of takeaways from Saturday night, which was certainly there's a need for—the police have a lot of their resource consumed with mental health call-outs. One of the things I did actually was with a community policing group about to go out on their night shift, and it was quite clear that that's a big part. And you've heard Minister Mitchell and Minister Doocey talk a little bit about how can we get a better response for mental health, folk under mental health distress, rather than having the police tied up going to the house, then being with the person, trying to sit with them in a hospital to access help and support, when they really want to be out and need to be out doing other activities. So there's that. Mental health was again brought to life really quickly for me, about how much time is consumed with that.

I think there's a lot certainly around Oranga Tamariki and sort of our serious young offending. Again, it was consistent with what we've seen. You know, we've got 14, 15, 16-year-olds just doing repeat offences in a community. And then likewise, the other bit, I think, is technology over time. You know, there's things that we can probably think about there, as to how we get a set of technology and tools to the police that continues to help them do their job through better analytics, through better targeting and more information. Claire?

Media: Have you had any assessments done yet on what the sentencing changes you've just laid out might mean for the prisons muster?

PM: Yes, and I'll let Paul talk to that.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Yes, the estimates could be around about between 1,400 and 1,700 extra prisoners per annum after 10 years, with a cost of potentially around \$160 million to \$190 million over that period.

Media: Do we have the beds?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Yes, we will have the beds, and we've also invested significantly in the Corrections, obviously, in Budget, but of course, our desire 10 years out is that we'll have fewer prisoners because there will be less crime. But the big difference between us and the previous Government was that we want to see a lowering in the prison population but only after there is a reduction in serious violent crime, and that's what we're focused on.

Media: Also, sorry, just one question from my Wanaka-based reporter to you, Mr Goldsmith. Why did you initially exclude the private home ban aspect of the gang insignia prohibition orders from your original Cabinet paper, and then change your mind and include it?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, we didn't include private gang display in private property but then police did make the case that when it came to enforcing the ban, there was a potential problem with people who repeatedly flouted the legislation and were caught. And so what we introduced further down the line was that escalating penalty for repeat offenders, and so if you are convicted three times within five years of flouting the ban, then you will be subject to this much tougher regime where you can't even possess it in your private capacity. And while a lot of people will say, "Oh, this is terrible", well, I'd say it's very easy to avoid: just don't get caught three times within five years for flouting the ban.

Media: What does it say about you, just accepting the will of the police without any kind of select committee process?

PM: I think it says that we're going to back the police and that we're going to make life incredibly difficult for gang members in this country. We make no apologies about that. When you have one quarter of 1 percent of your population driving 18 percent of all the serious crime in this country, that's going to stop. And so if police think there's another tool or another measure that they need, in addition to the process we've gone through with the legislation, so be it. We're going to make sure they've got every tool that they've got so they're backed up, able to do the job that they need to against gang members.

Media: Minister Goldsmith mentioned that it would be roughly, on the prison muster, 1,400 extra prisoners, and I can't remember the exact figure of how much it's going to cost. How does that sit with you, the fact that the prison muster will be increasing? Are you comfortable—

PM: Well, we have a very strong link. We want to see a correlation between crime coming down and prison population coming down. What we're not doing is what the previous administration did, which was to set a target of a 30 percent reduction in the prison population, and crime went through the roof. And so those two things have to be correlated. That is—it is consistent with rights and responsibilities. It's consistent with how we want things to be in New

Zealand. We're going to do a number of things to make sure that we're really tough on law and order, as we've talked about, and a lot of—the sentencing is one part of the many things that we've done. Obviously, you saw us at the Budget make the Social Investment Agency a central Government agency, so that those social services ministers will come off that spine of thinking around social investment to get to the causes of the problem. But in the intervening period, if we have to have 2,000 more prisoners in the next 10 years in prisons because of their crimes and making sure they've got serious consequences, so be it.

Media: Bill English said that prisons were a moral and a fiscal failure, do you have some sympathy to that view?

PM: Yeah, I do. But I'd just say to you, having people out in the community causing harm, pain and suffering to their fellow New Zealanders is utterly unacceptable and we do not tolerate that. And that is the trade-off here, right? Do you want these people in your community, or do you want them in prison? And we want them in prison.

Sorry, I'll go to Mark.

Media: On the private ban for gang insignia, does that sit comfortably with you as a free speech advocate that—yes, in maybe rare circumstances, but you're still giving the police the ability to go into people's homes and prosecute them for having symbols there, that are in a private space?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Yeah, it's tough legislation and it's designed to send a very tough message that we're serious about this legislation, we're serious about the gang patch ban in public places and if you repeatedly flout it then you'll face a very uncomfortable regime.

Media: What put you off including it from the beginning?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, it's an iterative process. We started off with our plans and then we've listened. As the conversation has gone, police made a case and we've responded.

Media: Minister, what is the logic there to not prosecute people with symbols of hate—you know, swastikas or other, you know, terrorist stuff—and then go after the Mongrel Mob? Why not go for both if they're both causing harm?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, we're focused here in this legislation on gang insignia, and I think there's no question across society of the negative impact of gangs on our communities. People are fed up with them. They're fed up with the 50 percent increase in gang membership over the last six years and the mayhem they're causing in our community. And that's why we're giving the police the extra tools they need to deal with gang people in our communities, and this is part of it. It's also around non-consorting orders and dispersal orders and making it an aggravating factor. It's all part of a package to give the police the extra tools that they need, and we're very determined to make it work.

Media: Are gangs worse than terrorism?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: I don't—that's a silly question.

Media: No, it's not, because you're not banning the use of terrorist symbols and you're banning the use of gang patches, and you've just defended that by saying that gangs cause harm. In your mind, do gangs cause more harm than terrorists?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, we're not having a debate about that broader issue at the moment. We're focused on gang membership, and that's what we're focused on here and that's what we're doing.

Media: If someone kept rocking into Parliament wearing a swastika on their coat or whatever, would you be comfortable with police having powers to go into their home and find any other swastikas?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: I wouldn't be comfortable with it, but that's for police to deal with. But what I'm focused at the moment on is the gang insignia.

Media: You wouldn't be comfortable with them going into someone's home to find a swastika?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about the gang insignia and that's the legislation that we're on here at the moment. And what we're bringing before Government, what we're going to be passing this week, is a tough piece of legislation that's focused on dealing with the scourge that gangs create in our communities.

I just want to say, if you want to have a broader discussion around free speech, we can do that another time.

PM: Sorry, can we go to Ben and then we'll go to Adam and then to Thomas?

Media: Prime Minister, there was no acknowledgement of Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori in your opening remarks and I haven't seen anything on your socials. Are you going to be engaging in Māori Language Week?

PM: Yes, I have. I've made a number of videos last week and I'll continue to try and use my limited te reo as much as I possibly can.

Media: Are you taking on board the previous Government's policy to reach 1 million te reo speakers by 2040?

PM: Again, Minister Potaka is working up our policy in that space, but you can see that we want to encourage as many New Zealanders as possible to take up te reo. It's important.

Media: Just on your targets, so you've got two that are deemed at risk at this point, and then you've got more youth offending, more people on the benefit and longer wait times for treatment. Was this within your expectation at this stage that this is what you were going to be reading?

PM: Absolutely.

Media: It was?

PM: Absolutely, yeah, because what we're doing here is—you know, what is the premise of our Government? We are here to improve outcomes and results for New Zealanders. So then you try and say, "Okay, what are the things that matter most to Kiwis?" and these are the things. So then how do you best measure them so that you actually can focus the system and move it beyond just endless meetings, talking, lots of the same conversations, the same activity that we've always been doing, getting the same poor result? And so this is actually our attempt to try and say, right, these are proxies for the outcomes that New Zealanders are looking for.

And then as we measure it quarterly and we open ourselves up for that—and it's very important that we do, and we're very transparent and very straight up about it: what's working well, what's not working well, where we need to work harder, what more bolder, braver interventions are needed to actually deliver those goals. You know, that's where we are. And so we've got a six-year target, we've got four quarters a year, we've got 24 quarters, and the bottom line is we want to drive towards those goals big time. And we have to do that because we have to get better outcomes than what we've been seeing in this country.

Media: Just to clarify further, to Jo's question around the violent crime target, so in those meetings that you're having with the Ministers responsible, do you think there'll be any point at which you'll say, "Hey, look, at this point in time I want to have seen this number going down rather than up?" at any point in the future?

PM: Yeah, I mean, what I do is I chair a strategy committee and I've orientated that time around picking two of the targets and then bringing the officials in, and our conversation very much is: look, the only regret we're going to have at the end of all of this is we didn't go fast enough and we weren't bold enough. So what more radical, bolder ideas are needed to tackle what are very hard and tractable problems, to get a different set of results so that when we discuss this in another quarter, what's actually been—what have we done differently to do it? And a good example to me is we literally got that data on the maths on the Sunday. By the following Sunday we had a plan in place because we actually had called in the Minister, the CEO of the Ministry of Education and the exec team, to say, "Righto, what do we need to do in order to make sure that we deliver on numeracy?" in this case, but we'd also done something similar in literacy and obviously with respect to school attendance as well.

So that's how we're operating within Government. I know it's a different way of rolling but actually it's a really important way because otherwise we'd just have the same conversations over and over and over again. And the results, as we saw in the last six years, keep going backwards and the outcomes aren't improving for New Zealanders, and that's why they elected us to get on and get this job done. And that's how we need to manage the Government and the public service and also a coalition Government, so we have ruthless focus on what's important.

Media: Just on people electing you, a poll came out this afternoon showing that the Nats are up to 39 percent, that's 1.4 percentage points up, showing that your majority in the House with your coalition partners is 68 seats compared to 53. This happens at the same time as there's been this debate about the Treaty Principles Bill. Do you think that wider New Zealand is basically just shrugging this off and saying that's not something that they care about?

PM: Well, I mean, I don't comment on the polls but apart from the fact that I'm here to do my job and the job is to get the best out of my Ministers, to have them very focused on results and outcomes. That's what New Zealand has elected us to do, to get on and get the job done, rebuild the economy, restore law and order, deliver better health and education. I think you've seen that in the 10 months that we've been in office, that we actually are taking that really seriously. We organise everything in Government around those goals and that's what New Zealanders expect me to do.

Media: So what do you put that surge—well, not surge, but that bump in support down to, do you reckon?

PM: Look, again, I haven't thought about it. I just got told the numbers as I was coming into here. But the story for me, very simply, it doesn't change what I'm here to do. I've got real clarity about what we're here to do, which is to fix the joint and to make sure we get it turned around.

Media: Put the shoe on the other foot. What do you think it is about the Opposition parties that aren't really moving the dial?

PM: Again, you'd have to ask them.

Media: Minister, I see on your lapel there—is that the Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori badge?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Yes.

Media: What's so special to you about Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Look, I think it's a very, obviously, hugely important part of our culture. I think it's a good opportunity for everybody to, if they're interested, take stock in learning something new. I'm going to try and learn a whakataukī a day over the week. I've got one for today, which is "okea ururoatia", which is "fight like a shark", which is what we have to do every day in this place.

Media: Do you support te reo Māori every week as well as this week?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, indeed, but it's always nice to have a particular week where you focus on it.

Media: Why a shark?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, this is a dangerous place.

Media: Do you think that catches the spirit of Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori?

PM: A forever language, yeah.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Yes, I think—

Media: Minister, on data, you mentioned about 80 percent more ram raids over the period of 2019 to 2023. What data are you drawing on there?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, it's police figures that we've come from. And the other figure that we use for the target, of course, is the victimisation survey, but it's the police figures we rely on.

Media: Why are you not marrying up those two sets of data? Because you relied quite heavily on police data when you were in Opposition, but you're measuring yourself against the victimisation survey when you're in Government.

PM: What I'd just answer there is there are sort of what are called output KPIs, for want of a better word, or outcome KPIs, which is what the nine that we've selected are. Obviously, there's things that feed into them. You know, you would have seen, for example, in the Auckland CBD—we were talking about it yesterday—you know, we've had a drop in overall crime, retail crime, serious crime. We look at, you know, other inputs into it. But at the end of the day, when we say, "What's the closest approximation that we can find as a measure that represents what the New Zealand people expect us to be delivering for them?" that's why we've chosen these measures. But it doesn't preclude—in our conversations we're often looking at other leading indicators to say: what is actually happening with family violence? What is actually happening with, you know, serious assaults?

Media: It's interesting that you mentioned Auckland statistics there because yesterday you went out and said crime is coming down in Auckland. Meanwhile, you're sitting on data that shows crime across the country is going up, violent crime.

PM: Yeah. Unfortunately you weren't there at the stand-up but I talked about that there, which is to say, look, there is no stretch by any imagination that we have got violent crime coming down across New Zealand. I said that yesterday.

But what I've said is that we have—you know, we've had a hotspot in Auckland CBD. We've put a lot of great effort into there. We've worked together in quite a different way with a multi-agency approach around housing, around MSD, working with the different agencies. Minister Mitchell actually led that group. And from when we put—it's not just the police going in on the

beat which has been important, 53 officers in Auckland CBD walking around, building relationships, but actually it's the way in which we have worked to deal with what are quite complex and challenging needs of people in that area, whether it's been—you know, emergency housing. We've made tremendous progress on that by actually doing something different, right? And so it's about the doing it different in order to try, and sometimes we'll fail and sometimes we'll be successful but we've actually got to try and do things differently to get better outcomes for people.

Media: So if you found the solution by using Auckland Central as a kind of case study, if you found the solution there of a multi-agency approach—

PM: Correct.

Media: —are you willing to put the same amount of resource across the entire country as you did into Auckland CBD to make sure that crime rate comes down, so across all of those agencies?

PM: You're exactly getting to the nature of some of the conversations that you could imagine we are having as an agency, and with Ministers and ministerial groupings as well. That is exactly the issue, is that when you start to look at housing, emergency housing, when you start to look at school attendance, when you start to look at welfare dependency, when you look at some of our crime stats, you're getting to a point—yes, we're getting some good progress through some different management and some different approaches, but ultimately that is one of the conversations we've had. We've actually got multi-agency teams in different parts of the country, but are they all actually functioned right? Are they actually empowered to make decisions right? That's the kind of conversation that's actually taking place amongst ourselves in those internal meetings, in response to, "Actually, how do we deliver that target?"

So you're dead right. I mean, you look at what we did in Auckland and we said, "Right, that kind of has worked". Now, by no stretch of the imagination are we declaring victory in Auckland but the fact that we've seen a 35 percent decrease in overall crime, and I think a 22 percent on serious assaults and a 50 percent decrease in retail crime, that's all promising, good stuff. But we have chosen to work in a very different way since June/July.

Media: Are you committed to funding every other region the same way that you have funded—

PM: It's not just funding, it's actually ways of working.

Media: Well, you've put a lot of funding into Auckland CBD. There's more patrols, there's more cops on the beat there.

PM: Sure, and we've got a lot of money going in across our social services. But this is what we're talking about with the social investment model: what results are getting achieved and what can we hit the photocopier button and repeat around the country? And that's exactly the nature of those conversations. So it's not just—yes, we're very up for spending money where we're going to get improved results and outcomes. That's exactly what we should be doing, is making sure the taxpayer's money is going to the most important area, it's getting the biggest bang for its buck. And we have to turn off programmes, frankly, that aren't delivering those outcomes as well, or reorientate the ways of working to get better results.

Media: You haven't expressed a view on Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown's campaign to have a second bridge across the harbour and not a tunnel.

PM: No, that's a conversation that Simeon Brown will engage with the Mayor on, and also his own transport policy.

Media: He seems to be taking a seemingly pragmatic stance in that it might be a cheaper and more effective way. That sounds like it would line up with your politics, would it not?

PM: I'm just not in a position to comment on that. That'll obviously be for Simeon as Minister of Transport to work through.

Media: What's your view on a bed tax?

PM: Again, it hasn't been a topic of conversation in Cabinet, yeah.

Media: In terms of the fiscal costs of increasing the number of—the prison population, the Government's previously said that new initiatives have to be funded by reprioritisations. Has anything been reprioritised to pay for the fiscal cost of this?

PM: No, because essentially, you know, this was factored into our Budget in 2024, so, you know, at this point we've got enough flexibility in the system. As I said, as Paul said, you've got potentially up to maybe 2,000 extra prisoners in 10 years' time at 2034. You know, we believe that if we can—we want to make sure we can work on the causes of crime and actually get crime down but frankly, if we need more cash to be able to fund that in due course, that'll be a bid that'll be made in future Budgets. But for right now, we've got what we need. You've seen the investments we made in the Budget with respect to 700 more Corrections officers, more prison beds, etc.

Media: So the Cabinet paper today assumes that Corrections can just absorb the fiscal cost of this into its baseline?

PM: Yes, at this point, yes. But we're going to be monitoring it and like everything, you know, that'll be a dynamic process as we go through subsequent years of subsequent Budgets.

Media: The Asthma Foundation says asthma costs the country about \$8.4 billion a year and more investment is urgently needed to educate people to seek treatment earlier. They're also calling on the Government to be tougher on landlords to make sure that homes are up to Healthy Homes standards. What's your stance on those two things, so education for early treatment and Healthy Homes?

PM: Yeah, look, I mean, we want to see continued targeted initiatives to improve Healthy Homes in particular. We're very supportive of the Healthy Homes policy, that'll continue, and the standards that we've put in place.

But also what we are working hard on is actually immunisation rates for under 2-year-olds, for example. You know, there some good examples where we've actually been partnering with Māori health organisations. Set ourselves a goal of 10,000 immunisations—we've actually delivered 33,000 in a relatively short period of time, and a good partnership there between Government and iwi-led organisations. So, you know, we've got to work a whole bunch of aspects of this. We obviously have to build more houses. A lot of the problems/challenges are often around overcrowding and that's been a big focus of what we're trying to do as well.

Media: Can you immunise against asthma?

PM: No, but I'm just saying when you look at respiratory issues there's a lot of root causes that lead into that challenge or that issue, and there's a number of things that you've got to work on at the same time. So you've got to increase the supply of housing so we don't have overcrowding. You've got to maintain the Healthy Home standards and make sure that that continues. We've got to make sure that we're doing everything we can with medical and healthcare support for families as well.

Media: In the Budget documents released on Thursday, there was a memo in there from Treasury about the bid from MFAT in terms of Winston Peters having to save \$15 million as opposed to \$98 million, and they said that there was no rationale to exempt MFAT from the 6.5 percent. So I just wanted to pick your brain about that again. Why, if officials are telling you not to do it, did you indeed do it?

PM: We have a series of discussions through a Budget process with Ministers around their Budget bids and savings and prioritisation exercises that we had them going with. I'm very, very comfortable where we got to with Foreign Affairs, and more importantly, I'm really proud of our Foreign Affairs Minister, who's out there doing a brilliant job.

Media: What was it that Winston said to you that pushed you over the line, to get your way of thinking around to what he was saying?

PM: Well, I mean, we just run a process—the process on every portfolio with every Minister as we're building up a Budget. There's a whole range of conversations that take place about what the goals are, what the level of support and ambition is needed. And, you know, we had a general set of rules around what sort of prioritisation we wanted across the whole piece. As I said to you, some of that would be different by portfolio, and as we look at what we want to do in foreign affairs with the reset and hitting it with more intensity, more urgency, I'm very comfortable with where we've got to there. And more importantly, I'm very proud of the role that Winston Peters is actually doing for New Zealand. I think he's doing an exceptionally good job.

Media: Did you negotiate directly with all other Ministers on the public service cuts?

PM: I have a lot of conversations with Ministers all the time.

Media: Yeah, but did you negotiate directly on the level of public service cuts that are expected of their ministries with every single Minister, and did you give any other Ministers special dispensation?

PM: There was lots of variances in conversations over the months. The process is part of the budget. I sit on that Budget Ministers group with Nicola Willis and our Associate Ministers of Finance. And we as a collective group entertained a whole bunch of scenarios from different Ministers, and we came to where we came to, and I'm very proud of where we ended up. I think we got to a good place.

Media: Until today, the latest data from the Crime and Victims Survey showed that there was no significant difference in the proportion of New Zealanders who experienced a violent offence between 2018 and 2023. So that's the majority of the time that Labour was in Government. Do you acknowledge that there wasn't a spike in violent crime—according to the measure that you're using, your metric for the target, there wasn't a spike in violent crime over the period that Labour was in Government?

PM: No, I disagree. We had a 33 percent increase in violent crime.

Media: So you're using police data there though, right?

PM: Yeah.

Media: So that's disingenuous. Is that disingenuous, using police data?

PM: No, no, no. We've come to office and we've, as I said, looked for the best possible data or measures that we can find. It's not always perfect. You know, in this case we're doing survey data. It's over a two-year period, it's a 12-month capture but—

Media: You've chosen that as the best data, but that data said—

PM: The best way to replicate what we're trying to achieve with lowering—you know, 20,000 less people being impacted by violent crime. And so I appreciate it may not be the most perfect measure but it's the best one that we've got that most closely approximates to the outcome that we're desperately trying to achieve.

Media: But that's my point. By that very measure that you say is the best measure, there wasn't a significant difference in the proportion of New Zealanders who experienced violent crime over the time that Labour was in Government.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: But what you find is there was a significant increase over the last couple of years, and there is a long lag and so that's what we're dealing with. We're dealing with—the stats that came out, that we've released today reflect—

PM: Two years.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: —people remembering what happened in the last year going back as far as July, and so we've seen a bigger increase.

Media: The very same stats that came out in June said there wasn't a significant difference.

Hon Paul Goldsmith: No, well, there has been an increase over the last year or two. And that's one measure and there are other measures. And so I mean it's one of the great challenges in the justice space, is how best to get a handle on the real incidence of crime. This survey of victims is the measure that we're using for this target. There's a whole range of other measures, police measures. I'm actually doing work with Justice to look at ACC stats to get hard evidence of the number of people turning up in hospital having been bashed around. And so we're always studying what's the best way to get a handle on it, but the victim survey is one that we've set ourselves to measure against.

Media: Or, "What's the best way to make a political point?"

PM: No, no, that's actually not fair, I think, you know, Tova, to be honest. We are serious about trying to get different outcomes in this country, and I think when you go talk to New Zealanders and actually say to them, you know, "Are you feeling safe in your home, business or community?" Absolutely not. Have they seen a massive growth in gang membership? Yes. Is gang membership actually driving a huge amount of our problems and serious crime? Absolutely. Are we being tough on that? Absolutely. So, I mean, I think that's a bit cynical. We are here to actually make sure that we deliver outcomes for Kiwis because that's why we do public service. That's why we come to this place to do these jobs. And so I appreciate it's a different model from how previous administrations may have rolled, but we are serious about results and outcomes. We are serious about restoring law and order.

We have measures that I said that are outputs, and also input measures that are leading indicators. They are imperfect, but they are our best go to focus our public service and our own Government and our own set of Ministers on actually what we want them to be doing. And I hold them account for that and I'm working—you know, and we get involved in those conversations. And as I said before, the power is in the conversation about what are we going to do to change the number. Because we can keep having the same conversation we've had for the last six years, which is—man, education outcomes went backwards, health outcomes went backwards, financial and economic outcomes went backwards, housing outcomes went backwards. We are determined to do different.

Media: How can you say that you're still going to hit those targets when your violent crime target is going backwards—

PM: Correct.

Media: —and you can't answer Jo's question, which is that you can't put a time frame on when those numbers are going to turn around?

PM: Well, we have. We've said to you they're six-year targets for 2030. We're going to report on them every quarter. Sometimes they'll go backwards, sometimes they'll go forwards, but the bottom line is I'm interested in results and outcomes. I'm not interested in the petty politics of it. I want to get a different set of outcomes in this country. We cannot carry on the way that we're doing. We said we would turn the place around. That's what we're going to do. And it will be hard because we've got a massive trajectory of results going against us and momentum continuing to go the wrong way. We've got to get that stabilised and then we've got to put actions in place that drive those results down.

So I know it's a very different way of working. It's been different for the public service to understand as well. Certainly in a Cabinet sense, you've got a sense of it. We've got clear targets, we have quarterly action plans, we have ongoing dynamic feedback, conversations between Ministers and CEOs and myself.

Media: Just to Minister Goldsmith, are you seeking cultural advice, as Māori and Pasifika continue to be overrepresented in youth offending stats, to ensure proper support is provided especially to Pacific and Māori young offenders?

Hon Paul Goldsmith: Well, yes. I mean, we're very conscious of the fact that Māori and Pasifika are over-represented right throughout the justice system, both as perpetrators but also particularly as victims of crime, and that's why we're working very determinedly to make progress in both the youth crime and in general crime. And both these pieces of legislation, of course, will be coming before Parliament, and there'll be a select committee process and great opportunities for people to have their say from all backgrounds. And we're certainly getting plenty of advice from officials as well, and continuing conversations with groups such as the Iwi Leaders Forum, and these issues come up all the time.

PM: OK, last question.

Media: Would you like a Public Service Commissioner to be announced this month?

PM: We are working our way through that so we'll have something to say about that hopefully shortly. OK team, thanks so much.

conclusion of press conference