

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 21 OCTOBER 2024  
EPIQ TRANSCRIPT**

**PM:** Before we get into it, I just want to acknowledge what was an absolutely phenomenal sporting weekend for New Zealand. It was an absolute privilege to see so many of our national teams and athletes succeeding at the highest level of sport, and I hope that they know that there were 5 million Kiwis, irrespective of what sport they were following, feeling incredibly proud of them. I thought what the White Ferns did, winning the first New Zealand T20 World Cup in Dubai, was really special, and of course to see a Black Caps win in India after 36 years is pretty special too. Team New Zealand romping home in Barcelona to make the three-peat for the America's Cup—absolutely fantastic, Jenna—the Silver Ferns I think putting in a great performance to beat the Diamonds in the first Constellation Cup test, and lastly our women's canoe polo team doing well, beating Italy in the finals of the Canoe Polo World Cup in China. So a great weekend to remember.

But look, we are fast approaching the end of the year and many New Zealanders will be starting to plan for Christmas and their summer holidays. And the last few years have certainly been incredibly tough for so many Kiwis, with high inflation and high interest rates driving up costs and eating into household budgets, but we're now starting to see encouraging signs that we are turning a corner and that brighter days are ahead for Kiwis and their families.

In the last two weeks we've seen the OCR cut by 50 basis points and inflation fall to 2.2 percent—that is two rate cuts under our Government compared with 12 rate rises under Labour—and inflation within the Reserve Bank's target range for the first time in three and a half years. Those are the numbers, but much more importantly they mean practical things for people in terms of their mortgage rates coming down and grocery shops just getting that little bit easier. This time last year, average mortgage interest rates had climbed over 7 percent. Today they've fallen to just below 6 percent, and for a family with a \$500,000 mortgage that difference could be worth around \$200 in savings on their fortnightly mortgage repayments.

Add to that the extra cash that people are seeing in their bank accounts because of our Government's tax relief to lower middle income workers, and Family Boost payments making childcare more affordable, and for many people our economic plan will be making a real difference to their family budgets. It means that this summer, many Kiwis will have a little bit of extra money to go towards their Christmas lunch or holiday activities for their kids.

And I know it's still very tough for many people out there, and we know that the economy is still not in great shape, but by spending responsibly, reducing red tape and restoring confidence to the business sector. We're beating inflation and we're creating the foundations for future growth. We're doing what we said we would do, and that includes delivering tax relief responsibly even when our opponents and commentators cried out that it would fuel inflation. We've proved them wrong and shown what can be achieved when you have a plan and you start to deliver on that plan and I'm proud to lead a Government that actually delivers for this country.

Today we're also very pleased to announce that we have started work on our first road of national significance, less than a year into Government. I was asked the other day by one of you if I had any regrets so far, and my answer was that the only regret I'll have is that we weren't bold enough, we weren't fast enough to get the changes necessary to make sure we set New Zealand up for a great future for our kids and grandkids, and I mean that. Talk and vision means nothing without action and delivery. Parents can't put their food on the table with a business case. Businesses can't grow with bumper sticker slogans. For our economy to get moving so that every New Zealander gets a better quality of life, the Government needs not just a vision, but it needs to deliver on that vision. And delivering modern, reliable infrastructure is absolutely critical to our vision of making New Zealand an outstanding place to do business,

ensuring that we can attract all the growth and investment that we need to lift incomes for all New Zealanders.

So as of today, crews are on site, starting early works on the Hawke's Bay Expressway, which will see it go from two lanes to four, making a big difference for growth and investment going forward in the region. The RONS project built by the previous National Government are some of New Zealand's most successful state highway corridors, and this Government is moving at great pace to build a new generation of RONS that will make it easier and safer for New Zealand to get to where they need to go, creating a more productive and resilient transport network, driving economic growth and unlocking land for thousands of new houses. I'll now hand over to Transport Minister Simeon Brown to talk a little bit about this in more detail.

**Hon Simeon Brown:** Thank you, Prime Minister. Today is a great day for Kiwi motorists and freight operators, particularly in Hawke's Bay, as early works have started on our first new road of national significance. In July last year on the campaign we announced the Hawke's Bay Expressway as a priority project for an incoming National Government. In this March we released our Government policy statement on land transport, confirming this project as a road of national significance. In July we announced that project teams had been established to begin procurement, enabling works and construction on our first seven roads of national significance within the next three years, including the Hawke's Bay Expressway. Today, within our first year in Government, early works have started.

We all know that New Zealand is faced with a massive infrastructure deficit that is a result of years of underinvestment in the infrastructure that our cities and regions need. We're prioritising the Hawke's Bay Expressway as one of our roads of national significance as it will unleash economic growth and productivity nationally and regionally. It is a critical corridor that carries 29,000 vehicles a day, and links goods and freight to one of our country's largest ports to support economic growth. Starting early works on this road of national significance today allows NZTA to maximise next year's construction season and bring forward the construction of this critical project by 12 to 15 months. That's why today marks a significant milestone for this project.

As the Prime Minister said before, the roads of national significance built by National are some of New Zealand's best highways. That's why we're ramping up progress on the remaining phase 1 projects. Already geotechnical work is underway on the Warkworth to Te Hana section of the Northland Expressway, and main construction works are expected to start on the Cambridge to Piarere extension of the Waikato Expressway by mid-2026. Kiwis travelling on the Pūhoi to Warkworth motorway, the Waikato Expressway, the Kapiti Expressway and the Christchurch Southern Motorway know what benefits the roads of national significance bring. Building a new generation of projects will continue this track record. And I'll now hand back to the Prime Minister.

**PM:** Well, thank you, Simeon. Look, later this week I'll be heading to Samoa for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, alongside Foreign Minister Winston Peters. CHOGM represents an opportunity to connect with other Commonwealth leaders and also discuss a range of issues. In these uncertain geopolitical times, it's important to meet face-to-face to talk about how we can be more resilient in the face of global challenges.

Before we get into questions, I'll just quickly run through House business. This week we will be continuing with the further stages of the Resource Management (Freshwater and Other Matters) Amendment Bill, the Gambling (Definition of Remote Interactive Gambling) Amendment Bill and the Contracts of Insurance Bill. On Thursday morning there will be extended hours for members' business, and the first bill up will be the second reading of Teanau Tuiono's Restoring Citizenship Removed by Citizenship (Western Samoa) Act 1982 Bill. Simeon and I are now happy to take any questions you may have.

**Media:** Firstly, to you, Minister Brown, on Wellington Council, you were to-ing and fro-ing over some sort of iteration of Government intervention. You said you were waiting for advice. Have you received said advice yet?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** I have received it and I'm considering it.

**Media:** What did the advice say, pray tell?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** I'm not getting into the details of that. I've received it and I'm considering it.

**Media:** Can you give us some sort of time frame about how long we're going to have to wait until you give us some sort of sense of what you're doing?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** Obviously, I'm taking it with seriousness and urgency, but I'm not going to be going into those details here today. But I have received the advice and I'm considering it.

**PM:** Sorry, can we go to Claire? Sorry, Claire?

**Media:** Have you been briefed on what the Council has decided today vis-a-vis filling the hole in the long-term plan at all, and what are your views on that? Does it give you any more confidence?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** No, I haven't been briefed on that at this stage. I mean, I met with the Mayor last week, she gave me an outline in terms of some of the work that she's got underway. Ultimately, as I said last week, we've got concerns in regards to the fact they've decided to effectively relitigate their entire long-term plan, and we're obviously concerned about the impact that may have on ratepayers here in Wellington. But ultimately, as I said, I've received the advice, we'll consider it.

**Media:** Have you got any other meetings lined up with the Mayor?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** No.

**Media:** Not at this stage, or do you plan to?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** Not at this stage, no.

**Media:** Can I also just ask you, Prime Minister, just on the Andrew Bayly stuff, are you aware that the complainants sent an email to a bunch of political parties and that that email ended up being recalled by parliamentary IT? Are you aware of that?

**PM:** No, I'm not. I was in functions on Thursday evening, I got told late Thursday night, I spoke to Andrew first thing Friday morning. I am conscious that the correspondence from the complainant was sent around widely amongst all political leaders, from what I could work out.

**Media:** Wouldn't that be quite unusual, for parliamentary IT to recall something like that and say that it was because it was spam? Would that need to be a directive that would come from another political party? Do you know anything about that?

**PM:** I'm just not aware of that as an issue. It's the first I've heard about it.

**Media:** Were there any issues with anyone among the National Party receiving that email?

**PM:** Not that I'm aware of. I just was aware I received the—obviously, the letter came in from the complainant. On Thursday evening was when I got told about it, I think it came in late

Thursday afternoon and then, as I said, I met with Andrew on Friday. That's all I'm aware of. Sorry, Jo?

**Media:** Would you have expected Andrew Bayly to have actually spoken to you when he received that first complaint, which he responded to?

**PM:** Well, look, when the issue was raised with him, he apologised and was quite appalled that he caused hurt and insult to somebody. He felt that the matter had been resolved. Clearly, it wasn't. He got it wrong and he unintentionally made someone, as I said, feel hurt and insulted, and it's important that he's corrected that. But in this case, he—once it was raised with him, he apologised fulsomely, thought the issue was resolved. It clearly wasn't.

**Media:** What about the various thresholds, though? Obviously, you're quite keen to know the information so you can deal with the information quickly. In hindsight, in this particular incident, would you have expected Andrew Bayly to have actually raised this matter with you the first time, not for you to find out after the fact?

**PM:** Well, look, again, I mean, the issue was raised with him. He apologised. He thought he'd done it fulsomely. He thought the issue was resolved, and clearly it wasn't when the letter came in on Thursday, which was when we found out about it. What I—

**Media:** *[Inaudible]* no surprises for you, that it should have been raised the first time?

**PM:** Well, again, in fairness, he thought he had—the issue had been resolved and that he had done what he had done, which was fronted up and apologised to the individual concerned. Clearly, that was not the case, you know, and as a result my conversation with him on Friday morning was to say, "Hey, you know, you've clearly got this horribly wrong. You've caused hurt and insult to somebody. I expect a fulsome apology to them", which he did, and he also fulsomely apologised to me and reassured me it wouldn't happen again. And that's the standards that I expect going forward.

**Media:** The question though, Prime Minister, is what your expectation of your Ministers is when it comes to letting you know about those situations. So, is it your expectation that Ministers—when they get complaints of that nature, do they need to come to you straightaway, or are you happy for them to deal with it in the first instance, and if it escalates from there, then come to you? At what point do those issues need to come to you?

**PM:** Well, the first thing is his behaviour didn't actually meet the standards that I have of him as a Minister. They obviously caused and heard an insult to an individual, as you've identified and seen through the letters that have been sent around, and importantly, he's given me reassurance it won't happen again. In this case, he thought that he had—when the issue was raised with him, he was quite mortified and appalled by it. He apologised.

**Media:** Can you answer the question, with all due respect? What's your expectation of when you should be informed?

**PM:** Well, my expectation is that he felt that the issue had been resolved. It clearly wasn't. And then importantly, when I found out about it, he apologised to me, he's apologised to the victim and—

**Media:** But are you satisfied with the timeline?

**PM:** Sorry?

**Media:** Are you satisfied with the timeline in which—

**PM:** Yes, because in fairness, he thought the issue had been resolved.

**Media:** Given that the email was sent to various other different leaders of political parties and various different officers, do you suspect some sort of political motive behind this?

**PM:** No, he got—he clearly got this wrong. He caused hurt and insult to an individual. His behaviour was inappropriate and wrong. He’s admitted as much. He feels mortified by that. He’s apologised to me, he’s apologised to the person, importantly, and he’s reassured me that that’s not going to happen again going forward. That’s what I’m interested in.

**Media:** Why did you not strip Andrew Bayly of any portfolios?

**PM:** Because, again, I spoke to him about it on Friday morning, I asked him, you know, to reassure me that this would not happen again, he did that, and he understands the standard that needs to be met.

**Media:** But why did you feel as though the threshold wasn’t met whereby it was necessary to strip him of a portfolio?

**PM:** Because when the issue was raised with him, he genuinely was mortified by that. He reached out immediately, apologised to the individual concerned. He has subsequently apologised again to the individual concerned, apologised to me and reassured me it won’t happen again. That to me says that he understands the gravity and the seriousness of not meeting those expectations that I have of Ministers.

**Media:** But is it a genuine apology though, if he hasn’t accepted—if he disputes some of the facts? Like he’s disputing that he swore at the guy, he wouldn’t even be drawn on whether he used the “loser” word, so if he’s disputing some of the facts, how much of a genuine apology is it?

**PM:** Well, I can tell you in my conversation with him, he understood he had got it totally, utterly, completely wrong. What he had intended to be some light-hearted banter clearly was not the case. He got that totally wrong, and he has apologised to me and to the complainant, quite rightly, more fulsomely about that.

**Media:** Prime Minister, if this behaviour turned out to be repetitive would it then warrant consequences, if it comes out that a Minister, speaking generally, had multiple instances of something like this occurring?

**PM:** Yes, I mean I’ve made that very clear to him. You know, this is not a standard that I expect from any of my Ministers. He has genuinely, genuinely—and that’s what I’m always looking for in these cases. Have you internalised and understood how much hurt and insult you have caused, and what have you done to make that—as best you can, to make amends? But importantly, I would expect going forward—and I’ve told him that very clearly, and he’s given me reassurances that there won’t be this behaviour again.

**Media:** Generally speaking, if this was to happen repetitively, what would the consequences be? What’s that process?

**PM:** Well, each case is different, but I think you’ve seen me, over the last two and a half years deal with any personnel issues within my caucus or within my Cabinet, I think, pretty fairly and pretty swiftly. And I just—and it doesn’t make it right, because what happened here was someone was hurt and insulted by his remarks and his comments, which were way off beam and not right. It’s right that he has got contrition, genuinely so. He has genuinely, authentically apologised as fulsomely as he possibly can, and he’s given reassurances that it won’t happen again.

**Media:** Prime Minister, you're saying that he has authentically apologised, but the words that have come out of Minister Bayly's mouth are that he is sorry that someone was offended, not that he's sorry for what he did. Is there a more authentic apology that is forthcoming?

**PM:** I can tell you in my conversation with him, and I went through it with him on the Friday morning, it was very clear to me that he knew that his remarks and his comments and his interaction with that individual had caused hurt and insult.

**Media:** Are you confident that no one within the National Party made any request to the parliamentary IT service that would have resulted in that email being recalled from the other political parties?

**PM:** I'm genuinely unaware of that issue, until Jo just raised that now.

**Media:** Do you have confidence that none of your team did that?

**PM:** It doesn't sound like something my team would do, and I can just tell you I'm not aware of that issue.

**Media:** Would you look into whether that was the case or not?

**PM:** I'm sure it's something my office will look into, but what I'm interested in is making sure that the person who's been hurt and insulted actually gets a genuine apology and, most importantly, that Andrew understands that that behaviour is unacceptable.

**Media:** Aaron Gilmore joshed a waitress at a National Party function and had to resign from Parliament. Melissa Lee failed to present a paper on the Warner Bros Discovery situation, she lost her position in Cabinet. Why then is Andrew Bayly different?

**PM:** Again, as I said, you know, the issue was raised with him after a visit to this business. It was raised with him, he immediately was appalled and mortified that that had caused hurt and insult in the way that it did. He clearly got it very, very wrong. He showed tremendous attrition and a genuine apology to the individual concerned, and also to me and to our—you know, for letting our Government and myself down and not meeting those standards. He understands the standards and he's going to make sure that it doesn't happen again.

**Media:** He didn't really show contrition, did he, though, because his first apology wasn't directly to the worker, it was to the business, in which he mentioned the worker and sort of apologised for causing it. He didn't contact the worker until the day in which the Government was releasing the information publicly to the media, so there is a question there of how much he was apologetic.

**PM:** Oh, look, I can tell you in my conversations with him on Friday morning he clearly understood that he had got that very, very wrong.

**Media:** But it's one thing to be conciliatory to the boss, it's another thing to be genuinely apologetic to the worker himself.

**PM:** And he has subsequently made sure that that worker—he's available to meet with that worker to have a further conversation if they so wish. It's up to them.

**Media:** He only reached out directly to the worker at 1.30 pm, after he'd spoken with you on the Friday morning.

**PM:** Well, again, he's making sure that actually the message has got through to the worker. He only had a contact for the business that he had visited. And I don't doubt his genuine contrition and his genuine realisation that he got this so horribly wrong in his interaction.

**Media:** What do you make of the fact that he disputes some of what happened? What's your read on that?

**PM:** That has not been in my—there was—he can argue that—or you can argue all day long. The reality is he has admitted that he was wrong and that his words and his interaction caused hurt and offence.

**Media:** Andrew Bayly told the media that he didn't say the words, "F off".

**PM:** All I'm just saying to you is that I have spoken with him. I am convinced that he genuinely realises he's got that horribly wrong. I have got reassurances from him that if it happens—you know, that it will not happen again, and also that he understands that that's not the standard that we expect of any of our Ministers in our Government.

Sorry, I'll just come back to you, Jenna. Can I go back over here? Sorry.

**Media:** Prime Minister, in your conversations with Andrew Bayly, did you at any point say or imply to him that he should have come to you sooner?

**PM:** No, because in many ways he felt he had that issue resolved, and once it was raised with him, he immediately tried to get in contact with the individual and offer that apology, which, you know, he believed would be passed through to them. But importantly, what I want to make sure when I'm having those conversations is: has an individual registered that they got it wrong, that they caused hurt, and then what have they done about that, genuinely? And more importantly, what are they doing going forward to make sure that it doesn't happen again?

**Media:** Just on the backdown by the Solicitor-General on Friday last week, do you think that was the right call to make? They said that there was a wave of public pressure. I mean you were loathe to comment on it yourself but upon reflection, was that the right thing for her to do?

**PM:** Yes, it was. I welcome her independent decision to review those prosecution guidelines and to withdraw them. You know, the reality is she'll now work with the Attorney-General to make sure they're reflective of our Government going forward. And the reality is that we're a Government that believes that all New Zealanders should be held equally accountable before the law, and I'm sure she'll do that work with the Attorney-General.

**Media:** Was it disappointing that it actually got to the stage where she wrote those prosecution guidelines given the Cabinet circular, that you were pretty explicit in the Government's direction in terms of need over race?

**PM:** Well, look, the key thing is that she's realised she got it wrong. She's withdrawn those guidelines. She'll work with the Attorney-General to make sure we've got something reflective of our Government.

**Media:** Did you ever speak to her directly about that?

**PM:** I didn't, no.

**Media:** Prime Minister, what was your reaction when you saw that Health NZ had spent \$60,000 on catering for themselves at the same time that they were reporting to the Minister that they had extremely big financial worries going on?

**PM:** Yeah. Well, look, Health New Zealand has some very serious financial challenges. It's important that all money—I know Shane Reti has made that point expressly clear to Health New Zealand, that they should spend money wisely. On the other hand, also it is important

that leadership groups can come together and actually work out, you know, and get aligned on what they are trying to do as well. But in this case, yes, it is important the money's well spent.

**Media:** To pick up on that, we're talking about \$9,000 of canapés at the same time that Margie Apa was saying explicitly that they were getting into this situation of \$130 million in deficit. Is the right leadership team in place at Health NZ when that is the sort of calls that they are making? On one hand they're telling the Minister, "We have got a financial crisis over here", while also spending \$60,000 on catering for their own staff.

**PM:** Yeah, look, ultimately it's an issue for Health New Zealand. It's an operational issue. We've been very clear. They've signalled that they've got financial management challenges. We've also made sure that we've made the message very clear through the appointment of a Commissioner that we expect money to be well spent, and well directed towards delivering outcomes for New Zealanders.

**Media:** Your answer is always that Lester Levy has been put in place to deal with this—

**PM:** Correct.

**Media:** —but if you're not happy about the decisions that are being made, then is Lester Levy the right person for the job if he's not doing anything about the leadership that are making these poor decisions?

**PM:** Well, ultimately, yes, the Commissioner and a chair of any board will make a decision about a CEO and an executive team and a management team, but what I'd say to you is Lester Levy is doing an incredibly good job in a very difficult situation. Health is without doubt a very complex portfolio. It has lots of moving pieces. We've put more money in. We're trying to make sure it's delivering on its core targets, we're increasing our workforce, we're making sure that we, you know, can get this and be a better quality organisation that when we put more—as more money goes in, it actually delivers better outcomes. So I think we're very lucky and very fortunate to have Lester Levy step up and take on pretty much a full-time job, 24 hours a day, trying to turn the healthcare system around.

**Media:** Prime Minister, would you like to see Team New Zealand bring the Cup back to race in New Zealand?

**PM:** Well, look, the first thing I'd say is it's fantastic—less than a day after they've actually secured victory, just to say what a fantastic job they did. It's a feat of New Zealand sportsmanship and yachting at its very best. It's a great showcase of New Zealand's technology. Ultimately, that will be a decision for Team New Zealand to make. We're happy to entertain any proposal that they wish to put to us. I just do acknowledge, however, that it's really tough times for New Zealand as well, and so we'd have to weigh that up against all the other things that we want to be able to do and to be able to deliver for New Zealanders.

**Media:** But you are willing to put some taxpayer money toward it?

**PM:** Well, again, it's going to be up to Team New Zealand as to determine where the Cup's actually held, and we would be open to receiving a proposal from them.

**Media:** They haven't been in touch already?

**PM:** No, but again, what I would observe is that it would be important for me to make sure we move through that process pretty quickly and give everybody clarity. Having observed the conversations in past years, I think it's Team New Zealand's decision about where it gets held. Put a proposal to us and the Government will genuinely give it some consideration, in light of other priorities that we have, acknowledging it's a pretty tough time. But importantly, it's pretty exciting to see what those yachties did.



**Media:** Grant Dalton told 1News last week that the Government needed to put a proposal to Team New Zealand, that it wouldn't be them coming to you, it would be the other way around. If we wanted it as a nation, if you as a Government thought it was a priority, then their expectation is that you would take a proposal to them. What's your thoughts on that?

**PM:** Well, I just say Team New Zealand gets to choose where the event's held. That's their decision. So, as I said, we're happy to have a conversation and happy to kick that off now that the Cup's been won. I think it was a bit premature last week.

**Media:** Are you going to pitch for it? Is New Zealand as a country going to pitch for it?

**PM:** Well, no, Team New Zealand gets to choose the venue. They'll engage with us when they want to engage with us on a conversation. We'll go through that process pretty quickly so that we have clarity and we don't go through the palaver that we've seen in previous times, and we'll come to the decision.

**Media:** The Government would need to indicate that it's willing to make some significant financial contributions.

**PM:** And we've made that clear. We're very happy to have a conversation with Team New Zealand.

**Media:** On the Manawanui, have you decided whether you are going to visit it on your trip to Samoa?

**PM:** Yeah, look, there's a lot to do in that three days, but I do want to actually meet with our personnel who are working really hard with their Samoan counterparts to mitigate the environmental impact in particular, and have been there on the ground dealing with the personnel issues, initially. But obviously now we've got a team of over 50 people under the leadership of Commodore Brown, who's doing a great job, I think, organising the team but also communicating where we are with the Manawanui.

We've had some good news in terms of we've been able to bag those vents, which has sort of slowed down any release of fuel coming out of those ventings. We've also—the major fuel tanks remain intact and importantly we've taken—I think today we took off—this afternoon, we took off the second container. We've got one more container to remove tomorrow off the reef and then the work continues on, which is now working with the salvor to identify how we can safely extract the fuel out of the main fuel tanks off the ship, then de-risking, obviously, large-scale environmental impacts. We've got teams that have actually been looking at beach debris and cleaning that, if there's anything like that, but we haven't seen evidence of impact on marine life or anything at this point in time.

**Media:** So that would be you meeting with personnel offsite, or would you be going to the—

**PM:** I'm not sure. It's really—with CHOGM being in full speed, just making sure I just don't want to be a burden on logistics within Samoa. But having said that, I will find a way to be able to meet with the team.

**Media:** Have you had any conversations about the investigation, whether there needs to be any subsequent ones?

**PM:** No. We've got a very robust process with the Court of Inquiry. That's a well-established process. We've got—as we've seen, the Court of Inquiry leadership has been proposed. It has outside influence, independent influence as well. I'm very comfortable with that process and I think it's important we let that run through so we can establish the facts of actually what happened.

**Media:** Prime Minister, personally, are you a royalist or would you support New Zealand becoming a republic?

**PM:** Yeah, I'm a soft republican, I'd say. I think somewhere in my lifetime, New Zealand will choose to become a republic. But I'd just say to you right now, I'm also quite a fan of the royal family and I think at the end of the day, this is not a topic for New Zealanders. New Zealanders are deeply concerned about the cost of living, as we've talked about. They're deeply concerned about restoring law and order and delivering better health and education.

**Media:** How relevant is a British monarch in our region, in Samoa, in the Pacific, in New Zealand? How relevant is King Charles?

**PM:** Well, look, I mean, I think they've served New Zealand incredibly well and will continue to do so.

**Media:** Could you be more specific when you say they've served New Zealand incredibly well?

**PM:** Well, I mean, they're incredibly dedicated people who—and as I said, I'm looking forward to actually having a chance to sit down and spend some time with King Charles as well. Sorry, Jack?

**Media:** Have you met King Charles before?

**PM:** No, I haven't. No, I haven't, so it'll be a first.

**Media:** Do you think Māori would think that the British monarchy has served New Zealand well?

**PM:** No, what I'm saying to you is our current constitutional arrangements are not something that I don't think New Zealanders are up for a big debate about right now. It doesn't say that it won't happen in the future, I'm sure that it possibly will. But for right now, New Zealanders want us to be very focused on the things that matter most to them, and this isn't one of them.

**Media:** India's currently pausing trade talks with a couple of countries, Peru and Oman, and seems to be taking on a different kind of strategy. Have you had any advice on what this more cautious approach might mean for any potential trade deal with New Zealand?

**PM:** Not at all. I mean, as you know, our job this year, in the first 11 months, has been to build a relationship with India, so we've got the foundation in place for further conversations around security and around trade. That's taken the shape of, you know, Todd McClay, our Trade Minister, meeting with his counterpart six times, I think three of which have been in India. Winston Peters has already been to India. Both Winston Peters and Judith Collins will go again very shortly. As you know, we hosted the Indian President here earlier in the year, I've spoken with Prime Minister Modi on the phone, had a good conversation there, had a very good interaction with him in Laos last week, and so we are both very determined to make sure that we strengthen and deepen the relationship between India and New Zealand. So I'm confident those conversations will continue.

**Media:** But given it's pausing talks with countries that are already in trade, already ahead of us in that queue, what do you think that's going to mean for our position in any potential deal?

**PM:** In my conversations with Prime Minister Modi, we were very aligned on the fact that there was more for us to do in both the trade and other areas as well of the relationship.

**Media:** Are you concerned at the number of board members who are stepping down from the I Am Hope Foundation?

**PM:** Well, we expect the organisation to have good governance and I'm sure the Trust will deliver that.

**Media:** But are you worried that there's any issues there? Are there any problems there?

**PM:** No, but we'll be monitoring closely to make sure the Trust has good governance.

**Media:** Gloriavale leaders and lawyers are saying that 400 children are still at risk of harm in the Christian community. What is the Government doing to protect these children?

**PM:** Well, I mean we have a number of Government agencies working in the Gloriavale community across a range of issues, and we'll continue to do so and we'll continue to monitor it very closely.

**Media:** It used to be an interdepartmental approach, it's now become very siloed again, which actually makes it quite difficult for different departments to know what other departments are doing, so some could argue that the impact that will have on those 400 children is actually worse. What active work is being done to ensure that those children are protected?

**PM:** Well, I disagree. We will be watching very closely and I expect all our agencies to do so. Richard?

**Media:** It was pretty clear from that health document dump that Health New Zealand is going to reach another deficit in the current financial year, quite a sizeable one. How are you going to accommodate that inside your operating allowance?

**PM:** Well, as I said, we've got a different philosophy from the previous Government on Government spending. It's not just the operating allowance, which you know is very constrained and we've put some very tight limits around ourselves so we've got disciplined spending in place, but we're also questioning the amount of spend that already goes on across Government and as a result, we're finding programmes that actually don't have the effect that they're supposed to have.

We want to make sure we churn that amount of money as well and make sure that we're getting good value from that spend as well, and that's what you saw us do through the course of the mini-budget before Christmas and again at the main Budget where it was confirmed and we generated something like \$23 billion worth of Government savings. I think it's rather unusual in Government that Government only focuses on the Budget incremental money and doesn't focus on the layer cake that sits underneath it of previous commitments around spending, and we need to make sure that the sum of the total pool of money is actually working incredibly hard. I think there's a lot more that we can get out of that. Sorry.

**Media:** Returning to the Cup, Mayor Wayne Brown has said a bed tax could help Auckland Council fuel or fund some sort of bid to host it. Would that be a good use of—or is that on the table?

**PM:** You talk to that.

**Hon Simeon Brown:** Oh, look, I think, you know, Wayne's got his views. I think as the Prime Minister—as the Prime Minister said though, if Team New Zealand puts forward a proposal, if they're interested in hosting it in New Zealand, that's a question for them.

**PM:** I don't think policy on bed taxes being brought to bear with the excuse of trying to secure an America's Cup is probably the right way to go about it.

**Media:** If now is not a good time to have a big discussion about constitutional change, why are you supporting the Treaty Principles Bill through first reading?

**PM:** Oh, because we've talked about this before. It's a coalition commitment. As you know, we'll support it at first reading, but not beyond that. And, you know, as I said, New Zealanders want us to focus on the things that matter most to them and that is really about fixing the economy, restoring law and order.

**Media:** Is the Treaty of Principles Bill not something that matters to New Zealanders?

**PM:** I can tell you we've made a commitment in our coalition agreements. I didn't get what I wanted; David Seymour didn't get what he wanted. We came to a compromise and, you know, we'll support it at first reading but not beyond that, as we've said. Sorry, Thomas?

**Media:** Just further to Richard's question, is what you are saying that Health New Zealand will have to metabolise its existing spending to plug any deficit that eventuates, and there is no circumstance that you can see in which you would top up that funding increase that you have already signalled for it next year? There is no way they're getting more money?

**PM:** Well, I mean, you know, we have a series of funding in health already across New Zealand. It is probably getting closer to \$30 billion, from memory. We have committed in the last Budget to put \$17 billion of new money into the system. What we are wanting to make sure is that we actually have a high-performing Health New Zealand. Clearly it hasn't been and that's why I've appointed a Commissioner there to get that job done, because we want to put good money into a great organisation that's going to deliver outcomes, and I don't want it lost in bureaucracy and I don't want it lost in a poorly functioning organisation. So that is very much our focus.

**Media:** Just to be clear, are you saying no more money if it requires it to plug that deficit—that any deficit will have to be plugged by metabolising existing money?

**PM:** Well, I can tell you that is the conversation that is happening when I join the Budget Minister's conversations for next year that we have already started. We are expecting to make sure that all Government spending, whether it is new or old or previously existing money, is working incredibly hard. I don't think that is an unreasonable thing to expect.

**Media:** Tomorrow's the final hui-ā-motu run by the Kingitanga in the South Island. What's the way forward in your mind, as Prime Minister, to bring—I don't know—a bit of kotahitanga that everybody speaks about when it comes to these hui? How do you get that going forward?

**PM:** Well, I think that hui will be particularly interesting. It's an opportunity for Māori coming together to talk about how they advance their own economic interests and, therefore, that of the country as well. I know there's been—I've met with Ngāi Tahu twice this year in a top-to-top meeting and I can tell you they have huge commercial ideas and creativity about how to move things forward. There's also input coming in, as I understand it, from First Nations communities from Canada and other parts of the world as well. So I think it's exactly the conversation you want to be seeing, which is that we know New Zealand does well when Māori are doing well, and if Māori can actually find new ways and accelerate their commercial and economic development, that's a good thing.

**Media:** Have you met with the Māori Queen?

**PM:** I haven't yet but I plan to, and yes, I really would like to. So I've got that on my calendar, it's just getting that organised.

**Media:** When?

**PM:** Shortly, I hope, yeah.

**Media:** Do you have any thoughts on the major hikoi planned to be hitting Parliament in November?

**PM:** No, look, I appreciate people have a right to protest in New Zealand. It's an important part of our democracy. We just expect people to do it peacefully and legally. Yes, Jake.

**Media:** Prime Minister, have you met Keir Starmer before and what will be on the agenda when you meet him in CHOGM?

**PM:** Yes, I have met him before, I met him in Washington—I think he was three or four days into the job. We spoke mostly about the personal transition of coming into Government and, as a new Prime Minister, how that works with respect to family life and other things and how you juggle some of that. But we'll sit down and have a formal bilateral when we're in Samoa together.

**Media:** Will AUKUS be on the agenda during those talks?

**PM:** I imagine there will be a range of topics on the agenda in the bilateral relationship, also how we can work together in the region and also our perspective on global affairs as well.

**Media:** What's the top priority between New Zealand and the UK?

**PM:** Well, again we've got a UK–New Zealand free trade agreement and it'll be about making sure that we continue to develop that and to build out from there. Sorry, last—Ben, you haven't asked a question, right?

**Media:** Is there an update on where live exports are at, in terms of bringing that back?

**PM:** Still an ongoing conversation but obviously we need to be reassured that we've got gold-plated animal welfare standards in place, and so that'll be an ongoing conversation through Cabinet.

**Media:** Has it run into some hurdles? I think Minister Hoggard was hoping to be out for public consultation like August/September, and that hasn't happened.

**PM:** No, not that I'm aware of. We're working very clearly, as you know, through our quarterly action plans, and so those are the priorities for the immediate three months in front of us, and that's what we're trying to close out before the end of this year. But, you know, we're open to live animal exports, it just needs to be done at the highest possible standard and making sure that all animal welfare considerations are in place.

**Media:** Can we just go back to the meeting of the Budget Ministers?

**PM:** Yes.

**Media:** Are you saying that the Budget Ministers are looking at the total spend in the Budget as a totality, and that they're going to presumably rob Peter to pay Paul?

**PM:** No, load of rubbish. I think when you come from outside the political process, you don't just look at the new money coming in. That's all the point I've been trying to make to you. We look at the total spend of Government and we say, look, if there's programmes that aren't

really getting results or are that effective, if it's OK to actually move and reprioritise that funding to things that are. And likewise, we want to make sure we're getting a good return on it. It's all taxpayers' money at the end of the day, and so it's not just a cost plus mentality that we need to bring into Government finances. We need to look at the total spend and make sure that it's delivering the results, and we are results-led. And then we work out how money is best and resources are best deployed, when they're often finite, to deliver those outcomes and those results.

OK, last question, Jenna.

**Media:** Minister Brown, really quickly, can you rule out an observer being appointed to Wellington City Council by the end of this month?

**Hon Simeon Brown:** I just said, as I said earlier, I've received the advice. I'm now considering it.

**PM:** OK. Thanks, team.

**conclusion of press conference**