

Report on the Grey Power Board lobby trip to Wellington

13 September to 16 September 2010

The lobby group was Roy Reid, Federation President, Dick Stark Portfolio holder for Health, and Miles Jackson Portfolio holder for Local Bodies and Election Strategy. Mrs. Violet McCowatt withdrew for health reasons.

As a result of the Canterbury Earthquake many of the Ministers and MP, s were unavailable at times arranged in the proposed agenda and resulted in some hasty rearranging of various meetings. It was pleasing to see that all parties were working together to get the earthquake area into recovery mode. We extend our sincere thanks to all the MP, s who made their time available to meet with us. All meetings were an exchange of viewpoints and we received an opportunity to have a frank discussion with everyone that we met, with many requesting to meet with us on future visits.

New Zealand Audiologists

Karen Pullar Chairperson Himanda

Peter Stubbings President NZ Audiological Society

Janet Houghton President elect NZ Audiological Society

Hazel Armstrong Chief Advisor to NZAS.

We met with this group to discuss the way that ACC are treating those with noise induced hearing loss and trying to reduce the amount of entitlement to natural hearing loss in the elderly. It was noted that the ACC proposed regulations are ageist and contrary to the Positive Ageing Strategy because they will prohibit many elderly people from obtaining hearing aids resulting in the loss of quality of life, increased rates of depression, social isolation and dependence.

A case can be made to increase the hearing aid subsidy from 1 October if the GST component is not increased. The DHB,s needs a Budget item to provide Adult Audiology services.

A need is also seen that ACC do not proceed with the proposed regulations and re-institute the Accord process.

They also felt AAC should work with industry to prevent hearing loss.

AAC to sit down with the Audiologists in the manufacturer of hearing aids.

We support the Audiologists Moratorium over the proposed Hearing Loss Issue and hope to have a "Round Table" meeting with concerned parties.

Ministry of Social Development.

At this meeting we met with Dianne Rogers(Chair), Warren Hudson,(Senior Services),Tim Bryers(Gold Card), Lyn Cousins (Older Peoples Policy), Derek Senior (Working Age People),Natalie Lavery, Vivienne Jenner, and Denise Stephens(Office for Senior Citizens)and Brian Perry (Research)

As Senior Services have recently been formed into a separate division from Work and Income new Seniors Managers and staff are now working across the country, and are actively participating in local senior support networks. Their vision is to have older people happy, healthy and living in their own homes for as long as they can. They will try to make it easy to access entitlements, find out about support and assistance that is

available to superannuitants. This service will build and be enhanced over a 3 year period. On line services will be expanded over the next two years.

The "Supergold Card" continues to attract new participants and the list is available to members on the website. The cards will no longer have an expiry date on them unless the holder is entitled to have a Community service card.

For information on the card the website is www.supergold.govt.nz

Older Persons Policy.

We had asked to be updated on overseas pensions being transferred to New Zealand and how section 70 of the Social Security Act applies.

Since 1938 New Zealand Benefits and Superannuation have been reduced by the value of an overseas pension, with people receiving New Zealand superannuation being the largest group affected by this policy. A quarter of all recipients of NZS were born overseas with 12% receiving an overseas pension and 50% of those born overseas receive no overseas pension. A direct deduction can take place if the person on NZS or his/her partner receives a STATE pension from an overseas country. Section 70 generally requires the dollar for dollar deduction of the amount of any overseas pension on 2 criteria.

1. Forms part of a programme providing Benefits and pensions for any of the contingencies for which a NZ benefit may be paid.

2. Is administered by or on behalf of the overseas Government paying the overseas Benefit.

Changes from 1 October 2010

Personal tax rates decrease

New Zealand rates increase

Temporary GST compensation of 2.02% until 31 March 2011. The temporary compensation will be replaced by the annual adjustment effective from 1 April 2011.

The Disability allowances also have a permanent increase of 2.02% from 1 October 2010.

We were also updated on unemployment of those over age 50. There were 12537 over 50 registered as unemployed at 1 Sept 50 -54 =5117 55 – 59 = 4031 60 -65 =3389 with the biggest number being in Auckland 4215 Otago /Southland 1326 and Wellington 1185. This trend has continued during the recession.

Abatement rates have increased from \$80.00 to \$100.00 for unqualified spouse superannuation, DPB, Invalids and widows benefits.

We also discussed the need for a 6 monthly review of Superannuation and benefit rates if there is a sharp increase to the inflation rate, as well as expressing concern over the shopping list used to measure price increases.

We had also asked for a Dollar figure to be stated for the level of poverty and were given the figure for single living alone as \$245 per week and couples as \$377 per week but as New Zealand does not have an official poverty line but publishes poverty figures from using a range of measures especially if a house is owned or rented so housing costs are deducted before setting a figure for poverty.

Office for Senior Citizens.

They are preparing

Bookmarks with safe driving tips to be distributed by the AA Service....

Information for carers, for people with disabilities to enable them to be prepared for coping in a disaster. Get Ready Get Thru. www.getthru.govt.nz
Positive aging strategy reporting on activity from both Central and Local Government. Web based reporting can be found on website www.osc.govt.nz.
We also expressed concern that the age of entitlement was being discussed but were assured that MSD are doing no work towards this.
This was 3 hours well spent.

Hon Luamanuvao Winnie Laban.

We met to hear a verbal report on the meetings that she and Sue Kedgley had held throughout New Zealand on Rest Home Care and Home Care. A written report is nearing completion and will be released in the near future.

Dianne Crossan. Retirement Commissioner.

We took the opportunity to discuss the removal of Married couple rate for superannuation and the Commission would also like to see the Unqualified spouse superannuation stopped and all entitled to receive superannuation get the same flat rate with an allowance for additional living costs for those who live alone.

Also sees a need for more provision of services for those aged over 90 years

There is also a need to have a consumers group trained to speak on consumer needs.

Also discussed the need for ACC to pay 80% of income from earnings for those aged 65+ who work full or part time, especially now that the elderly are being encouraged to work after age 65.

The retirement Commissioner stated she would like to see a seminar for real older people 90 plus, actually have their own case manager.

We look forward to the Commissioners # yearly report to Government due to released in December 2010.

Mr. Chai Chuah

Director, National Health Board.

We asked that consumer groups needed to be represented on all Committees that make recommendations for the welfare and care of the various age groups.

The current Health system is not sustainable in its present form and the new National Board will do many functions that the District Health Boards had done and considerable savings should be achieved.

We raised the wastage of Medicines and the huge cost of the wastage.

There should be a delivery of better quality care and change will occur due to better monitoring of performance of all DHB,s.

After us stating that we considered there were too many bureaucrats in the health system, he stated with his own staff, he keeps asking them, have they talked to older people, have they ever been in a clinic, i.e. go out and see what is happening in the real world of health, we felt this was a refreshing view coming from someone holding a top position in the new Health board.

Chai asked that we attend a National Health Board meeting and he attend our Board meeting to discuss our concerns about Health.

Sarah Hamlin and Anne Foley
Ministry of Health Disability Services.

This meeting was an opportunity to be updated on services being provided for the disabled.... We were briefed on the revised accreditation framework for health professionals undertaking assessments that could result in applications for equipment and modification services for people with disabilities.

More assessments to be done in the applicants home for the need to improve showers, steps and home needs. The Ministry will pay for all items with a cost of more than \$50.00.

Ministry expressed a concern that elderly people need to plan home renovations to meet the aging process well in advance of the need.

We suggested that Lifestyle Design be included in negotiations.

Hon. Jim Anderton. Leader Progressive Party

We were unable to meet with Mr. Anderton as he was attending to urgent Electorate work due to the earthquake.

As we wished to discuss Dental care for the elderly we met with David Cuthbert his Policy advisor and Sally Griffin his Secretary.

Mr. Anderton is advocating affordable dental care as 50% of New Zealanders do not receive regular dental care. He is developing a subsidized system in conjunction with Dentists, dental therapists and hygienists but still has a long way to go.

David Cuthbert gave us a copy of a speech that Jim had made to Grey Power Mana Tawa Association in August.

He also said if Mr. Anderton leaves Parliament this policy will be picked up by Annette King for Labour.

Oral health is not a health target for the current Government. Another problem is a shortage of Dentists in the provincial areas and this could be overcome by extending the same scheme for Doctors having their student loans paid if they agree to work in hard to staff areas. We are asked to support the campaign for affordable dental care for the elderly as lack of dental care is a major factor in poor health.

We suggested an immersion scheme similar to the medical Doctors scheme be investigated.

Ministry of Health

Alison Randall DHB and PHO

Elizabeth Knopf and Ann Foley Elder care

We discussed after hour services by Doctors in semi rural and rural areas. The cut back of hours is requiring long distances to be travelled at high cost and in many cases loss of subsidy resulting in an emergency visit to the Doctor after hours being unaffordable.

We also made a case for increased subsidy to keep many smaller rural rest homes open as is the case with a rest home with 17 beds in Golden Bay facing closure.

Hon. Bill English Minister of Finance and Deputy Leader National

We discussed the increase of GST and the effects that this will have on those on lower fixed incomes due to increased prices. The need for increased subsidy for rural health care and rest home care and asked if he would fund the shortfall in funding to the Collingwood Rest home so that the integration of health services in Golden Bay has a chance to succeed. The cost of after hour's doctor's visits was also raised with the North Canterbury situation as an example. We also raised the continual increases to food prices and the effect this would have on inflation and the need for a six monthly review if the inflation rises as some commentators are predicting. We also raised the question of Kiwisaver payments from 1 July 2012. He sees these payments being in addition to superannuation.

He also stated that a rise on the eligibility of Superannuation

Was not on the "radar at present"

As well we raised the need to discuss having some of policy objectives being included in his party policy manifesto.

Hon. Annette King Labour Welfare.

We discussed the future of National Superannuation in regard to the introduction of Kiwisaver payments as from 1 July 2012. She assured us that her party saw Kiwisaver as a saving scheme and payments from it would be in addition to superannuation.

We also had the opportunity to discuss the need for regular reviews of the Superannuation and Benefit payments if there is an increase in inflation and food prices. Also discussed State House tenants' having to vacate after ten years of residence, She was against this policy.

Hon. Darren Hughes Labour Transport

We discussed the need for a continuation of Road safety courses for older drivers, a need to reduce the blood alcohol level for drink drivers, compulsory third party insurance to be included in motor registration fees. He felt the need there was still a need for the Driver Education course (Safe with age)

We also discussed Gold Card Travel

He also stated he had a bill in the ballot to lower the alcohol test from .080 to .050 something the government reneged on, when recommended by the Law commissions recommendations, Failing it being drawn, this was likely to be Labour policy going into the next election in 2011.

Hon Damien O'Conner Labour Rural Affairs

A discussion was held on the retention of Rest Homes and Medical services in rural areas. He also saw a need for more private money to be invested into rural services but is aware that the financial return is a barrier to such investment. Rural areas also have no choice of services due to limited supply.

Made a comment that all major surgery in the South Island could end up in Christchurch under the present political regime.

Dr. Russel Norman Co-leader Green Party, Sue Kedgley, and Kevin Hague Green Party Health.

This was an opportunity to discuss Green policy. We also discussed Home care and Rest Home care as well as rural health care and the provision of after hour's medical services.

The Law Commission report on alcohol was discussed and the need for change to licensing laws.

Russel is willing to attend any Association meetings on request.

Hon. Paula Bennett Minister of Social Development

We were told that her Department had contacted 16500 receiving superannuation in the Canterbury district to check on their welfare needs as a result of the earthquake. They had also endeavored to visit all those aged over 80 years to check that were coping with daily needs.

We also questioned the rates for Single Sharing and a Married couple as quoted by the Prime Minister in a letter to superannuiants. The rates were misleading.

We also spoke about a need for a six monthly review of benefits if the inflation rate rises quickly after 1 October.

Disability payments will be adjusted for the GST increase.

Ross Robertson Labour Senior Citizens

This was a time to discuss a wide range of topics that are of a concern to the elderly.

He saw an opportunity for Abbyfield type housing being established but also staffed by a registered Nurse to provide oversight to medical needs for residents.

Ageism needs also to be addressed.

Hon Peter Dunne Minister of Revenue, Associate Health Leader United Future

Had a discussion on Superannuation. He sees Kiwisaver as a secondary savings scheme which will supplement superannuation. We also discussed the provision of after hours Doctors services in semi rural and rural districts. The effect the increase in GST will have on living costs. He was also prepared to discuss any new policy initiatives that we may wish to promote to him in the lead up to the election.

Hon. Phil Goff Leader Labour

He raised his ideas on removing GST from healthy foods if elected as the government. He predicts that over half of New Zealand households will be worse off as a result of the cuts to income tax.

We were invited to send him policy issues that he could consider to be included in their manifesto. Also discussed the issue of Kiwisaver on superannuation from 1 July 12..

He will treat these funds similar to a private superannuation scheme which will not reduce the level of superannuation payments.

He is happy to discuss any policy issues that we have at any time.

We also raised concern about the increasing food prices occurring; Sue Kedgely was concerned about the high fruit and vegetable prices that supermarkets are charging, in the present supermarket duopoly situation, particularly to the small grower, who is

dictated by large grocery concerns, as to what they will buy at their price. Small growers are getting around this by organizing growers markets.

We also raised the situation where supermarkets are raising prices prior to the advent of GST.

Age Concern

We met with Ann Martin CEO and Lesbeth Gronback

We took the opportunity to discuss Health including after hour services retention of smaller rural rest homes and the provision of better and affordable Dental care for the elderly. Superannuation and the proposed change to age of entitlement as being discussed by the Retirement Commissioner. There is also ongoing work being done jointly by both of groups on Retirement Villages Codes.

Hon. Tony Ryall. Minister of Health

The Minister advised that he had a report suggesting that rest homes need 80 beds to be viable. We dispute this figure as it would mean the loss of many smaller rest homes that operate well in smaller communities. We also discussed the closure of the Collingwood Rest Home in Golden Bay and asked that the Minister ask the DHB to integrate this home into the integrated health service currently being implemented and for Government to fund the shortfall.

We were told by the Minister that progress is being made in reducing middle management staff in the Ministry and DHB with approx 700 less people now employed, the bonding scheme is working well with 300 more Doctors employed as well as 1000 extra nurses. More operations are being done and all Cancer treatments are now being done in New Zealand.

We discussed the Home care and Rest Home care and were given copies of the report on Aged Residential Care Service Review written by Grant Thornton. More money is being spent on home care this year and the Minister is hopeful that the funding will be better utilized.

We also raised the way some of the interviewing went on by the contracted people for the review of the Home Help back in June. We advised the Minister of a situation in Christchurch, where a couple was told at the initial interview, an hours shopping was replacing an hours cleaning, this was not required as they are capable of doing their own shopping. The Minister requested details of this instance, where he intended to follow it up. This information has subsequently been sent to him, where he has a Ministry of Health official looking into it.

Also raised the costs involved in treating drug and alcohol related illness.

We also raised the need for after hour Medical care to be available in semi rural and rural areas to save cost of travel and added fees. A nurse led service is a possible way of overcoming this problem.

As the Minister was concerned about a news release on the Meals on Wheels cuts in Helensville we gave him copies of the minutes from the meeting between the DHB and the people who service was to be cut.

Labour / Green Rest Home and Home care report.

We met with Annette King, Winnie Laban, Sue Kedgley and their support staff and were briefed on the Draft Report which they hope to launch in October and those Associations that took part will be invited to attend.

Stuart Nash Labour Taxation

Stuart asked us for a meeting so that he could discuss a policy that he is developing in regard to taxation for those receiving superannuation. As this is only in its formative stage we agreed not to release details but will be invited to comment again. We also discussed the Banking system and the big outflow of profits from overseas owned banks. He sees an urgent need for growth in Kiwibank.

Hon.. R Dyson and Iain Lees-Galloway Labour Health.

As Iain is also part of Ruth's Health team she wanted him to meet with us and take part in the discussions.

We discussed the same items as discussed with the Minister of Health but received a different view point on the matters raised. As Ruth had been working in her Electorate dealing with the problems residents are facing after the earthquake she updated us on her thoughts on what needed to be done.

Hon. John Carter. Minister Senior Citizens and Civil Defense

Most of this meeting was an update on the Ministers involvement with the earthquake. We expressed our thanks for the work that had been done by staff of the Ministry of Social Development n checking on the elderly in the Canterbury area.

He also was concerned that many of those un-insured will be those with no mortgage and many Elderly could be affected as they have not needed insurance to meet the mortgage insurance requirements.

He has asked that we keep him informed of any problems the elderly in Canterbury may have.

He congratulated the Christchurch and North Canterbury Associations on the way that they had contacted their Members and the support given.

Hon. Simon Power. Minister of Justice and Minister of Commerce.

We discussed the Legal aid system and were assured that Legal aid would be available to all who need it but the abuse of the system has been dealt with.

The ever increasing cost of food was discussed and the way food prices have been going up in recent weeks and the 1 October GST increase still to be added.

We also discussed the Law Commission Report on Alcohol and the measures that the Government intends to implement. We see a need for the Board and Associations to make written submissions to the Bill when it comes to Parliament. We suggested that Liquor Trusts be set up to control the sale of alcohol but the Minister was not keen on this and thinks Local Bodies can manage licensing in their own areas if they are prepared to do the Work. Smaller Councils may opt out and this would be covered in the Bill.

Hon. Nick Smith. Minister for ACC

We discussed the natural hearing loss that ACC are applying to hearing loss claims and raised several questions as to why the ACC are dismissing claims. We asked that more work be done with the ACCORD group.

The Minister wants to have a share of costs between ACC and Health Subsidy.

We also raised the high cost of the ACC levy on motor registration and asked if this could be reduced and a charge be made on a user pay basis paid on the price of petrol. The Minister was concerned that this may not work as tax on Petrol is dedicated to Roads

We also discussed the cost of the Emissions trading scheme and the money being invested into Forestry.

The Minister also raised the retention of the Joan Whiting Rest Home and assured us that he was working with other Ministers to find a suitable outcome.

This was a very cordial meeting and we were impressed with the way that the Minister received us and his open and frank replies. .

Over all this Lobby trip while suffering several disruptions due to the commitments Ministers had relating to the recent earthquake, we consider it very worthwhile, it was evident that while several Ministers were having trouble meeting original appointments , they were determined to meet with Grey Power at some time during the three days.

A major highlight was the meeting with the Director of the new Health board Mr. Chai Chuah.

R Reid

D Stark

M Jackson