

## Presidents Report Grey Power AGM 2008

---

It is a privilege of which I am well aware to be able to address you once again as President.

I have attempted to represent the views of the Federation to all politicians and have made contact with members of all parties and leaders in the House of Representatives. Also, during our visits we have established firm relationships with a number of the personnel from various ministries.

Whether we like it or not the only people that can change the current situation of the elderly are the politicians and while they are advised by a large team of bureaucrats and other advisers, it is they who, in the end, will determine our future well being. Cabinet remains the final decision making body and it is fair to say that we do not have many friends in that arena.

It has been an interesting year and our main thrusts as always have been health and superannuation. Essentially our message has been that the current level of superannuation is just too low for many elderly to live adequately, let alone comfortably.

I would like to quote from one of the many letters that I receive from members:

“I feel sick when I read of the spending by MPs and their partners and wives on their personal travel, typified by a recent headline ‘MPs partner flies through \$32,500’. Whilst we the elderly struggle away on approximately \$11,000 per annum who do these people think they are? “.

The writer goes on “The elderly seem to be humiliated and downgraded just because we are old. We the elderly have skills to offer which no-one wants. We have people skills, family skills, trade and technical skills but we are old. Can you please make an appeal for improvements on a blanket basis for the elderly? By this I mean a proper adjustment to our annual increment.”

I certainly agree with this viewpoint as we all currently face future increases in power charges, petrol prices, dairy foods, rates, meat (a delicacy and rarity for some) and state that we are consistently trying to convince government that the level of superannuation is too low and must be raised.

Another letter I received was as follows

“I am at my wits end as to how I am going to manage as every time I go shopping now the prices seem to have increased. Being a married couple on just New Zealand Superannuation we are finding it increasingly difficult to keep ourselves fed, clothed and warm whilst a holiday is just out of the picture altogether. We have both worked all our lives and contributed to the country but the meagre level of Superannuation is just not enough to live in any kind of comfort.”

## Presidents Report Grey Power AGM 2008

---

What I will say however is that we have been well received by all those we have met as they recognise that Grey Power may have something to offer them but we have to accept that neither of the main parties are elderly friendly.

I will not detail the activity of the board members as that is covered in the portfolio reports; suffice to say that all have contributed to the affairs of the Federation in the way that they have considered appropriate.

The main contribution of the Board members and remember that Zone directors are board members also, is the discussion that has taken place at either the Board table or via email or fax.

We use the latter means of communication, as there are matters that come to the fore in between the board meetings that require action prior to the scheduled board meetings so that the decision making is continuous.

As one can imagine there is a very diverse range of opinion and advice but nevertheless the final majority decision is accepted and supported by the members

However I would like to make special mention of the support that Vi McCowatt provides to all board members and to all associations and advise in my opinion that without her tireless support in assisting at the office we would not be the competent low cost organisation that we are.

Credit must go to our office staff who do a terrific job in making sure the office runs smoothly – Janie Harding has been with us for some years and more than adequately handles any queries that are raised as does Sharon McCowatt.

Two portfolios need special mention, as they are fundamental to the organisation. I will be brief about them as there is a report from all portfolio holders to follow later in the agenda.

Health has been split and Les Howard and Dick Stark have taken responsibility for selected areas. However our association with the Ministry and other non government organisations remains strong and effective

We have established contact with many senior personal in the Ministries of Health and Social Development and other non government organisations involved in the health of the elderly. Our committee members are participating in a number of government committees which in essence means that we are considered as being sufficiently important to be consulted and included in the decision making process. We are currently developing a suspensary loan scheme for dentures, glasses and hearing aids.

Superannuation is of course our major consideration as it is the lifeblood of our members. Apart from an adjustment to restore the lower level of the band in which superannuation

## Presidents Report Grey Power AGM 2008

---

operates, the current government has done little to address the low level at which superannuation is set.

Information from our members indicates that many are struggling and frankly for someone on New Zealand Superannuation with no other income he or she is in difficulties especially if living in rented accommodation.

We believe that the payment should be raised to the top level allowed and each partner in a marriage or civil union should get 36.25% of the average wage rather than the 30.5% as currently paid.

We should go forward and the election strategy committee will no doubt provide the necessary basis for this but in the superannuation area which is our main concern we must continue to press for six monthly adjustments and a level of at least 35% of the average wage to each partner in a marriage.

In general we need to take stock and consider how we should progress towards our goals in all areas – the portfolio holders will give an update of our activities.

We, as with politicians get very little publicity when commenting on issues of the elderly as the media is just not interested. I believe that they see the elderly as part of a generic social issue and find few headlines in covering our real concerns.

Some members hark back to the glory days when the elderly and their meetings were the favourites of the media because at that time the media supported any group that was against the then government and we with our campaign against the unfair surcharge put us in clear conflict with that government.

To return to those days we would need a real media backed cause and the plight of the elderly is not that because the elderly have been marginalized by political parties and the media alike. We are just not news.

Never the less our concerns are real and pertinent and extend into many areas.

Living costs continue to escalate and many prime cuts of meat are beyond most and a leg of lamb, once the stable Sunday dinner, is merely a far memory. The level of New Zealand Superannuation is just not enough for most.

Apart from food costs other costs continue to rise and are unavoidable for all – predictions for electricity are that it will double over the next five years – it has already increased 40 % over the last four years .

At Association and Zone meetings around the country I am asked the question – “what is Grey Power doing for the elderly?” Unfortunately this is not an easy question to answer as we are continually engaged in dialogue with Ministers, Opposition and coalition partners, Ministry officials and like organisations

## Presidents Report Grey Power AGM 2008

---

We are never sure whether we are successful in our endeavours to influence the politicians but we are sure that our organization is being consulted more and more by the various political parties.

That said, neither the present government nor the previous government have been very elderly friendly. In reality, despite the development of the excellent relationships and contacts mentioned above we have achieved nowhere as much as we hoped.

In fact, all our gains have come not from the main parties but from coalition or supply and confidence arrangements.

The National/NZ First Coalition at the behest of NZ First did remove the surcharge, the Labour Alliance coalition did restore the lower level of 65% of the band in which New Zealand Superannuation falls at the behest of Alliance, the Progressive Labour coalition did reduce doctors and subscription fees at behest of the Progressives and latterly the supply agreement between NZ First and Labour raised the level of superannuation to 66%.

You will recall that the lower level of the NZS band was reduced to 60% because the elderly were to make this saving and save the country from the economic Asian crisis but just how was never explained. Labour as a result of a 1999 election pledge did restore the level of NZS to over 60% and back to the original 65%, but it was a restoration rather than a lift in level.

It is therefore opportune to suggest to you that if we are to be successful as we would wish then your own approach may need some examination.

You must consider whether in this climate of MMP where the main bargaining power rests not with the party with the greatest number of votes but with the coalition partner, that we should take advantage of this.

Until we can influence the nature of the coalition partner, we can't take advantage of this of this aspect of our political system.

Until we can influence the strength of the coalition party then we will not be recognized as a voting block and the coalition party will tend to ignore our claims.

This mean that instead of adhering to years of first past the post loyalty to one party or another and religiously voting for that party, you must consider what political party offers the best outcome for you and abandon past party loyalties.

You must no longer think along traditional party loyalty lines but place your vote where the best outcome for you lies.

## Presidents Report Grey Power AGM 2008

---

I'd like to thank the Board for the support through the year. Additionally, I'd like to acknowledge that the Associations have also been very supportive throughout the year.

Graham Stairmand  
National President  
Grey Power Federation NZ Inc