

Who you are, what you do, what made you want to run for TOP?

I kind of got shoved into standing, I always had some interest in politics but really I was going through sciences and getting frustrated that the reason we were hitting a brick wall was not because the science was too hard, but the government regulations stopped us actually implementing solutions that we were coming up with to solve things like climate change and medical issues. For me that was really where I started getting into politics at large. I got involved with TOP because I was willing to put evidence first, and they have a policy on gene editing, which no other party has, and this was a big draw. So I got involved with writing that policy and recently decided to stand as a candidate as I believe it is a much more effective way to get change, going directly to parliament, rather than trying to raise a voice. If parliament has good ears then you don't need to do much protesting, if parliament is deaf then you need to do an awful lot.

Are you from Dunedin?

I was born in Dunedin, but I have moved around a lot. I left Dunedin at the tender age of 6 weeks old, from there I went to Whanganui, Auckland, Lincoln, Burn, Christchurch Central, then back to Otago for my third year of study.

Would you support a universal student allowance, and postgraduate student allowance?

We would like something even better, a universal basic income. The entire reason I did and honors instead of a masters, or a large part of the reasons, was because you could get an allowance for honors but not masters. The postgraduate system really skews what people would ideally do, so would absolutely be in favour, but really in favour of the UBI at \$250 per week. So that would mean all students would get \$250 per week. Having this instead, you open university up to everybody, the group of people that go to university is somewhat selective and while it should be a great equaliser of society it really doesn't act as that, so have a UBI is fairer and also the students win where they get something and can keep working.

Do you think the current system does not encourage people to go straight into university, especially considering the comparison between wages, the jobseekers benefit and student allowance?

So I think it's less of a financial incentive and it is instead the lowest risk pathway. It feels like you go to high school. Go to university, and then get a job. It feels like this social contract is broken because instead of going to university so that you can get a good job, it is like go to university or you can't get a good job at all. That's a bit soul-crushing, and also we seem to be seeing an inflation of qualifications and you need to be more and more qualified to get the same positions. What we have is an innovation policy coming soon that looks to address some of these things. It starts back at getting better course advice all the way back at high school, back at year 10 where students start picking their subjects. It's really just helping people as they leave high school thinking about really where they want to go. And to us the UBI gives you this.

Jobseeker, although it's more that student allowance, is hellish to get onto, not that Studylink is easy, but for me this is the other massive drawcard of the UBI. You don't have to engage with these institutions.

Do you think universities are overly reliant on international students for income?

So I think the University of Otago has positioned itself well in capping international students around 30%, that's helped us maintain a robust student intake through COVID. Other universities that are more reliant have felt the impacts of that. For universities it's more about incentivising then to turn out high quality degrees at the end rather than focusing on intake right at the start. There's a number of things that we would like to look at doing to ensure that we continue to deliver high quality teaching. As long as the teaching is of a high enough quality and the degrees are worth it then I have no problem with taking on more foreign students. It's really whether our universities are up to the job of delivering for these students, or are we actually just starting to mill people through, which is really where we don't want to be.

What do you think of the policy of penalising students that move overseas, particularly through the student loan scheme?

It's quite brutal because we are always told that for your career to get where you need to go you get some overseas experience, but in doing it you then need to take on more student loan! So I understand why the government has done it, because they have invested in you and they want that investment back, but it also feels like it tough because if there is no work where students are they have to go overseas, and if they go overseas then the interest hits them. It's problematic for the science path, the sciences career track is quite a difficult one in that it is fairly unsecure for a long time, and a student loan on top of that really makes it harder. I would love to see it changed, but with something like a UBI in NZ students would have so much more money while they do their qualification that the loan as such is not that bad.

What are your thoughts around student housing and flatting in Dunedin? Do you feel more broadly that there is a housing crisis developing in Dunedin?

Yes! Yes there is. I've been through a number of really rough houses in being a student here for a couple of years, and in Christchurch I managed to find a flat where I was paying about \$70 a week and it got robbed three times that year, and the ceiling fell in in the bathroom, and the landlord was completely absent and still at the end tried to take us for all our bond. So we absolutely have a housing crisis, and it's not a quick fix unfortunately as so much of our economy is based around housing. So we want to flatten the housing market so that it doesn't keep growing, so that way more people should be able to get into the market and less people will effectively be able to be slum lords. So that's the housing price side of things. And on the renting side we really need to make sure that the rental warrant of fitness is functioning at a high enough standard. And we have some other policy around renting rights as well focusing on things like long term rental options.

How do you plan to vote in the cannabis referendum?

I do plan to vote yes, it is something that I struggle with a lot, it's something I don't use myself, but when I look at the harms that come from an unequal punishment of who uses it, it is effectively a tool of systemic racism. So removing that seems like a good idea, and research in areas where it has been legalised hasn't shown an increase in youth rates. Also once it's legalised you can have an active public health campaign to inform people around the benefits and risks, especially people under 18.

Would you support a law change to allow the use of spectrophotometers by OUSA to test drugs?

I have no problem with OUSA buying specs, but it is an interesting question. At the higher level I would support pragmatic approaches to limiting harms from drugs, on the issue of pill testing specifically there's some mixed evidence coming out of Australia around how effective it is at reducing harms. It's a nice idea to make it so drugs can be tested at festivals, but then there is a lot of evidence showing that many people don't take drugs because of the risk itself, so when you make it safer to take them, that is problematic because the drugs themselves are harmful. We also need to be careful about putting things in place that indicate we endorse behaviours. I would be quite firmly against OUSA being the ones that administer these tests, because there would be a huge liability.

The law change around cops turning a blind eye to testing at festivals is effectively the law change we are looking at?

More specifically making it so that we are not liable for testing them, it is quite unclear now the legal liability for supplying testing services

I would need to take a better look at the evidence, I know that specs are pretty good but less able to identify complex mixtures. I am unsure whether it would work in practice, so at this point I broadly support pragmatic approaches to drug use, but wouldn't support a law change for this without clear evidence.

How are you going to support the LGBTQIA+ community?

So that's a community that really is marginalised in a lot of ways. Our avenue to support is really to just listen, I'm not from that community so I am not deeply entrenched in understanding of what the real issues going on there are. Where possible I've tried to do my reading. They face a lot of difficulties, and a policy approach is quite a difficult one, at the top we make rules that apply to everybody, which does mean it is not as targeted, but in the case of something like a UBI it can be really transformative to know that you will be supported with a base level of income no matter what. A lot of these issues boil down to discrimination based on sex, which we really should have enshrined in a constitution, which is another one of TOPs policies that really could help those communities with knowing that their rights are enshrined in a constitution.

Do you support a written constitution?

Oh yeah! I reckon it would be very useful and it really gives you a kind of bottom line. I don't think it needs to be overly prescriptive, but you want to enshrine some of those really core rights into a constitution so that you can go back to it and say this is a line that can't be crossed.

How have you engaged with the BLM movement and what do you think is the path forward for dealing with racial inequity in New Zealand?

So I was quite challenged when it started really picking up steam, and my initial gut reaction was to start reading and get an idea of what's happening and its context. I reached out to a few of my friends who are POC and asked how I could help this rather than make it about me. Especially when you are a candidate in election year it is very easy to start token electioneering around this. But I reached and listened to as many people as I could in that area, and really the best way I could engage would be to try amplify voices from people affected and really that's the route I took.

What do you think of the fact that nearly all of the Dunedin candidates are white males?

I've had a lot of chats with some of our volunteer groups and it's a really difficult time to be someone of colour or a woman in a prominent setting. So a lot of the time we have people who like to stand up but know that it will take too much of a cost on them. So it's disheartening that we have a landscape where people don't feel comfortable just standing. I think it speaks volumes to the need to make it easier. We've got a long way to go until we've reduced the difficulty for these groups.

What are your feelings around defunding the police and prisons? And the development of a parallel system of justice?

So defunding the police is a very short word for what is not really defunding the police. So in this context, New Zealand is very different from the United States, we do have areas where we could definitely improve on, though our police are more community focused. We need to keep working on that, making sure that police are part of the community that they serve, rather than having them be a force unto themselves. I think looking at projects that help people engage with police in a positive manner is really important, with funding I think you want to go in the other direction, if there is an issue you want to support them to solve that issue rather than start penalising people for making the wrong move there.

How much demand do you think there is a demand for police specifically, rather than other services that cover off? For example mental health callouts?

Either you employ a lot more people that are specifically trained in these areas, or you start really training police to handle these situations better, and I genuinely don't know which one would be better. I don't see why police could not be trained here, and you could not have one or two specialty police that are trained to respond to these callouts, and have police with a wide range of roles. I think there is a slight issue with narrowing police down to just dealing with criminal acts because that community policing aspect goes and you start getting more animosity towards just

the police, because that is all they do. I would really want to look and see what needs to be most effective.

What about the development of a parallel justice system as an alternative pathway to courts for Maori?

It's interesting, I did a bit of reading up on Moana Jackson to try and get an idea of his central thesis and it was really eye-opening his 1980s work around what it means to be Maori in the criminal justice system. Since 2014 we have had an alternative iwi led process, and I haven't been able to get any statistics, it gets a lot of praise and it sounds like it is working, but I haven't been able to get a statistical breakdown of the effect it has had on these communities. I'm a bit more hesitant on having a separate pathway, if it is community focused and looking at bringing people back into the fold of society I don't see why it should be limited, if it's a great system and it is working then we should be able to roll that out wider.

I think the idea is that it incorporates Maori values and understanding and there might be a limited applicability to others?

Yup, that is true. I think if you have built an infrastructure that has the capacity to put in Te Reo Maori concepts and practices, then that infrastructure could be adapted to other groups and minorities, or even the white majority where we could execute justice better. TOP we want to see justice reform because the prison population is too high and isn't actually tracking with our crime rate at all.

What are your thoughts around the recent extension of prisoner voting?

I don't have any problems with it at all, I think it is good that people are engaged with voting and good that we are getting more people voting. It's more bringing them into the fold of society, and I think that is really important.

So you and TOP, do you think prisons have a role as a deterrent to crime?

The literature doesn't back that up, probably fortunately. There is not a good correlation between heavier and heavier sentences and people not committing those crimes. There are an awful lot of factors that go into it and the reading that I have done suggests that we should keep people engaged with communities and really connected with societies so that they don't have the incentives to commit crime in the first place. You still need some kind of system of justice, that feeling that victims are properly being protected and being given the justice that they deserve as well, so there are always those conflicting interests.

How are you going to support the mental health sector?

Money! So funding goes an awfully long way, simply increasing this is a very effective start and then we can look at the best way to tailor that so that we are getting there before there are issues. I would like to see a regular mental health checkup, like where you go to your doctor it is a regular

thing, but there is first a lot of ground to be made up for people to trust those services and actually share.

How will you respond to climate change? And how will you centre indigenous and pacific involvement?

So, number one, technology. I really want to see a country that moves forward past climate change rather than ban away and scuttle back to a past where they thought things were better. Climate change is very real and happening now and we have made huge strides in technology that mean we can mitigate it as long as we embrace them. One of our policies is around gene editing, there are some trials going on around some grass that could cut down the methane emissions that cows make. But we are not allowed to use that technology yet, so some changes to the regulation around gene editing could have that sort of impact. We also want to reinstate a proper emissions trading scheme that doesn't just cut out half the people that are emitting the carbon. Also we have a pollute and pay policy where really those putting out that pollution should pay for the cost of it afterwards. In terms of bringing that into making sure we hear indigenous and pacifica voices, we are all in this together in that we are all of the same island and we are going to be hit hard by it, so we are very open to listening and finding any solution that works. TOP is very open to listening to any voice that has some good evidence behind it and an effective remedy for mitigation.

In terms of gene editing, what is that looking towards reforming?

So the Bill that most directly deals with it is the Hazmo???? Act which defines genetic organisms anything that has been modified in any way based on a technological timestop ages ago. New technology that modifies small bits of DNA without introducing new DNA, they are not allowed. So we are in this crazy situation where we can do less changes and it is more illegal. We propose a tiered system, so currently we have GMO not-GMO. We have conventional methods at tier one, minor changes at tier one, if you put in whole genes but from organisms that are similar that could be tier two, and those levels we want lightly regulated, but then the final level is when you are crossing over DNA from fish into tomatoes, or something like that, that level we still want to see regulated.

Which laws would you be pushing for a change in?

So for TOP, our core focus is tax and housing. So rolling out our UBI with a flat tax it would really be transformative in terms of peoples daily incomes, so those even moderately well off would save a whole lot of money doing this, and it will really only hit people that have huge assets, and for us that's absolutely core. And then the environmental side would be really coming after that, and of course the gene editing policy is my pet favourite.