

Who are you? Why are you running in Dunedin? What got you into politics?

I was born and raised here in Dunedin, educated at Kavanagh College, graduated from University of Otago, I did my undergraduate degree in commerce and I am a chartered accountant by trade. I did masters in health administration from at the University of NSW while I was CEO of Mercy hospital, and I spent about 14 years in the health sector in health service roles both with providers and funders before becoming the MP in 2008. This is the 5th election that I have contested in the what's now Dunedin electorate, previously Dunedin North.

I got into politics a little bit by accident. I'd become politically active on the periphery of the National party, but essentially as the president of the private hospitals association lobbying the Clark government, and became quite frustrated at the lack of awareness, understanding and appreciation of the symbiotic nature between private and public health care. It all kind of came as a rush when Catherine Rich, my predecessor, announced her retirement in 2008. Then I went through a rapid process of consideration and then sort of sticking my hand up and going on the roller coaster that has lasted for twelve and a half years now.

What was it that drew you to the National party? And what continues to draw you to them?

I grew up in South Dunedin and came from would you would probably describe as a Labour family, we were a Labour leaning family, particularly my parents, my father was a barber and then a watersite worker, my mother was a registered nurse. They were probably more Labour leaning. I never was, I grew up as a child in the Muldoon years, was fascinated by him as a person, but not him policy wise. I then went through in my adolescent years in the Longey-Douglas years. So I grew up when the National government was one of the most left wing governments we had and the Labour government was one of the most right wing. So I probably didn't frame a sort of left-right political leaning in the traditional sense. Then of course we had MMP and the further blurs peoples boundaries, so I consider myself to be centre-right, with far more socially iberal views than people give me credit for, given that I voted against certain conscious things. More around a preference for the state not to be involved in people's lives, but I'm definitely economically conservative. I've always aligned myself with the National party principles of self-responsibility and freedom, loyalty to the sovereign and the state, but essentially targeting support where it is needed rather than that sort of universal left thinking which is certainly underpinning this government.

So you weren't drawn to the Act party?

No. I have always voted National except for once, and that was Bob Jones' New Zealand party when I was 18 and first able to vote. Bob Jones, the property developer in Wellington had a party that polled 12% in that and had it been under MMP would have brought a sway of MPs, but he didn't get a single seat, but managed to bring down the Muldoon government because those votes

were mostly taken from National. He was extremely socially liberal and economically conservative, after that it was National all the way.

Are you supportive of MMP?

Like any electoral system it has its strengths and weaknesses and I think we are seeing one of its weaknesses in the continued demise of minor political parties that support the government. Minor parties tend to support the extremes, even the centre extremes, so they tend to fall by the wayside and we end up back with a two or three party system, which is kind of the antithesis of MMP. The Greens are a really good example where they could use MMP to a much greater advantage than they do because they could be like the German Greens, truly on Green issues and able to go with the left or the right. Because those minor parties tend to suffer more than the government does, and faster, we've seen that with the Maori party, with United Future, with NZ First in the past, though they came back. That's the problem with our form of our MMP. On the other hand everyone can be represented and National has a member base in Dunedin which is a pretty hard left city. The biggest criticism I have about MMP is local representation and the size of electorates now, which for Waitaki and what's now Clutha-Southland is the size of a small European nation, one person simply can't do that. Regional New Zealand is poorly served by MMP.

Do you think this has been a particular problem for the Maori electorates?

Rino Tirikatene has the devil's job trying to serve here a community that covers not just the South Island, but into Wellington. It's just impossible for him to do that in a way that I know he would want to. So it's a big issue, and a solution obviously lies in the hands of Maori, but most Maori are not on the Maori role. So we've talked in the past about whether Maori seats remain needed, because they were established in the 19th Century, because at that time you could only vote if you owned land, but that's a matter for Maori.

What are your thoughts on a universal student allowance?

As you heard yesterday, I'm opposed to universal anything. I think the government's role is to target need where it exists the most. I think there is a universal element to support for students right now. 75% of student's living costs are provided by the taxpayer. As far as the degree to which the balance is funded by loans and allowances, we have the system to recognise that some people are better equipped to manage the financial costs and benefits of their degrees. I don't see education as a wholly public good, there is an element of public and private benefit to education. Doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers are all going to earn considerably more over their careers than the people who flunked their degrees. If we were to put more support into tertiary and education more generally I think it would need to go to the people who need it the most.

Do you think with the current system of means testing parental income that the parental income is an accurate reflection of the support that students actually receive from their parents?

Probably not, but it is the best of a bunch of poor proxies that we have. I was a member of the previous government and Peter Dunne was the Minister of Revenue and tightened up the definitions of parental income, because there was a lot of sheltering of income in trusts and so on. That meant that, in his words, only the very poor and the very rich were getting student allowances, and that was unfair. So we fixed that by making sure that that sheltered income was included in the definition of parental income.

We can have a conversation about whether the quantum or the thresholds for being well off are right, that's a different question from the universal student allowance. So the long answer to a short question, while I don't in principle support it, but if we are talking about better targeting that is a different conversation.

What are your thoughts on the current threshold?

To be honest I've focused so closely for the last few years on health issues that I wouldn't be able to tell you what they are, despite the fact that my daughter is a victim of government policy in that she would get a student loan, not a student allowance.

I believe the threshold is \$70,000, I think after tax

Even after tax that is a relatively low family income to be a threshold. I think it's a sort of either you cross the line or you don't. There's a number of ways that that support can be provided. As I said it is already $\frac{3}{4}$ taxpayer funded, the overall costs of study. That is a conversation we are going to have to continue to have as part of our tertiary policy in a few weeks.

What are your thoughts on extending the winter energy payment scheme to students?

Yup. I opposed the principle of a universal winter energy payment in any event, so if one was to say we don't need to give this to retired millionaires and this would be better targeted towards those that need the winter energy payment the most, if we were to have that conversation student could be very much part of it. I know it is a later question, the state of student housing, but I will segway into it now. This is a longstanding issue, particularly in Dunedin, the state of dilapidated student housing, I used to live in a flat where the ANZ bank is now and the star community newspaper did an expose on the terrible student housing and used our flat as the front page photo, and we were pretty chuffed about that. The previous government did a huge amount to support people insulating homes, we did about 330,000. What didn't tend to happen as much as we would like was landlords taking up those warmup New Zealand heat smart options that were available to them. We did increase the insulation standards for all homes. This government went even further than that, in fact probably overdid it in our view. Bear in mind that the costs of all of those eventually fall on the people that pay the rent, because being a landlord is not costless and is cash poor and it is becoming a poor investment for many.

So, housing I think has to generally be a focus of any government, but I think both governments have worked steadily towards improving housing stock in New Zealand.

What would National be looking to do around mitigating that housing crisis in Dunedin? Noting that comment about landlords beginning to find this a poor investment.

The irony of that is that there are very few places that people can invest their money that they are going to receive anything like much of a rate of return at the moment. Fixed interest is nearly zero, the stock markets are volatile, and having got out of housing as a potential investment it may be that they come back into it. Dunedin will be the beneficiary I think of what needs to happen nationally, and that is RMA reform. It has to take place. We talked about this for years in our time in government, and we couldn't get the necessary minor party support, we couldn't get Labour's support for it, so the reforms that we did weren't good enough frankly. This government has taken three years to even get to the start line, which isn't a criticism but a measure of how complex resource management law is in this country. It is because I think in large part we blend the environmental and planning imperatives into one piece of legislation, and they often don't sit that comfortably together. So if we can unpick some of that and have better planning laws that have lower environmental impact than say putting a steel mill in or dam or something. What governments have done, including this government, is put in place side-stepping legislation like creating special housing areas, and they were very effective. This government has just passed fast track legislation for 11 major projects, some of them are housing projects. So in the short term we've got to speed up consenting so that new houses can be built. That's a National strategy that Dunedin will benefit from. But to link to another issue, rapid population growth by our standards in a short period of time leading to a real squeeze on housing is not going to be met by current plans. And then we've got the hospital, we are going to bring in another 1000 workers, so that's another five to six hundred families that will come in. So I am a big fan of modular housing, I don't think we should be building ghettos but I think we've got a model of a house being 230 sqm on 700-800 sqm in developments in Mosgiel or where the land is, we've got to think smarter about temporary housing demand being met with modular homes. Whether students become the beneficiaries of that indirectly because Dunedin North has been cleared out of anyone that isn't a student pretty much, so there's kind of a spillover effect, so if that can meet the needs of families then student accommodation could be freed up down in this area. And then with public transport students can live on city rise, or South Dunedin or Fairfield as long as transport networks are improved, and that would take pressure off housing supply and price down here. The bus system has got a whole of a lot better. There are a number of solutions.

What are your thoughts on a postgraduate student allowance?

I was meant to go and research this, I can't answer the question because our tertiary policy is coming out soon and I must confess that I haven't researched it.

My understanding is that it was removed under the previous government.

Yup! Steven Joyce was minister of education and he made a few changes.

The three current parties in government promised to reintroduce postgraduate student allowance, and we have our eyes wide open looking for it.

What are your thoughts on the universities generally in New Zealand being reliant on international students as a source of income? And also their ability to look after the international students that they already have?

So, I think there are three main groups of international students, and in our postgrad study area international students are not only incredibly important in adding to our body of knowledge, research and talent in New Zealand, they are actually treated pretty well in terms of that they are eligible for scholarships and domestic fees anyway. The broader university demand for international students here I think is a reflection on the quality of our universities and I think is a good thing. If a university becomes overly reliant on international fees to balance the books, that carries with it some risks. It diverts attention away from their core teaching requirements. The biggest area of international education thought is in non-university, generally PTEs and I've long had a concern about the quality of education that is being provided by some of them, but it is our second largest service exporter and New Zealand has a global reputation for the high quality of its education. I don't have a problem with tertiary institutions trading on that, we just need to be careful to get the balance between domestic and international students right.

What do you think about interest in student loans kicking in when people go to work overseas after university?

I personally support it! They're not interest free, it's just who pays the interest and at the moment the taxpayer pays the interest. For some graduates getting postgraduate training overseas is very beneficial to the country, but most of those students are graduating and going out to earn big bucks in those countries, so they should pay the interest.

Will the National party be repealing fees free?

Our discussion document on education has proposed it should be dropped and that there are other options that could be pursued. The one I liked didn't actually make the cut. We currently have a voluntary bonding scheme for doctors, nurses and vets I think there is an opportunity to supercharge that by for example forgiving debt for every year people stay in New Zealand.

Would you consider extending schemes like that to all students?

Yeah. So we would provide for the student loan. We already write off nearly half of it for bad debts because people leave and don't come back. I think we could incentivise that being invested in a different way. There's a thousand ways you could do that, and our policy when it comes out will probably have a different tack.

Would you support a law change to enable OUSA to get a spectrophotometer to provide drug testing to students?

Well the question you're asking I think if I might rephrase it is should drug testing be made legal? I take a health led approach to anything illicit drug related. Is the policy change going to make the health of New Zealanders better or worse? I have a real worry that we are in a period of normalising drug use and demonising cigarette and alcohol use. If you were to ask a person who was opposed to the liberalising of alcohol laws that if we had our time again would we have made alcohol more readily available, they would probably say no, to which i would then say why do we follow the same path with illicit drugs? Did liberalising alcohol laws make the health of New Zealanders better or worse? Well it would depend on who you ask. I think you get now a lot of people drinking nothing and then a lot of people drinking a lot. Has the binge-drinking changed on campus since I was here? I think in frequency it has, we certainly did it, though not as often. Back to the question, on balance I would say no. But I've got adolescent children and I am not naive to the fact that they will be exposed to certain things and I want to make sure they are safe. So I am not rigidly opposed to it, I am just leaning away from it as a solution.

How do you plan to vote on the cannabis referendum?

I haven't finally decided, but it is likely to be no. I've held and expressed the view that this is a simple equation for me about how you make people healthier. I would probably have voted for decriminalising, but we have gone for full legalisation with this grand plan to licence and tax. I don't think this is realistic. If you are going to tax it at the same rate as tobacco you probably need to increase the retail price several fold above the black market that won't go away.

In terms of having to tax at the same rate as tobacco, why is that?

Because you want to discourage it.

Is that the point of the taxation?

It's the point of the tax for tobacco.

But obviously cannabis is different?

Well it is, but the question of harmful effects... I don't care what people do with their bodies in the comfort of their own home, that's entirely their choice. When I start to care is when the taxpayer and the crown is being asked to fund the consequences of that behaviour. We generally have those consequences paid by the user. So, then you would have to measure drug use, say what are the negative effects of cannabis use and how does this affect government spending and then measure that and apply if you are going to be consistent.

I believe the Dunedin study suggested that legalising cannabis wouldn't result in a significant rise in consumption, so you wouldn't see much of a change in health impacts than we are currently experiencing. But also it commented that cannabis is less physically and medically harmful than tobacco.

The problem with cannabis is that a lot of the effects are contested or could come from different sources. I was involved in a very fractious debate earlier this year with an American writer called Alex Berenson who has written extensively on the link between cannabis use and psychosis, and that was contested.

Noting that Alex Berenson is a journalist not a psychiatrist.

Absolutely, his wife is a doctor. You are quite right, but I think we need to be careful not to shoot the messenger. The message is what matters and the question is, the science is contested, so it is very hard to attribute for example the incidents of psychosis to specific drug use. You've got to do things like population studies and identify whether psychosis has gone up since cannabis use has gone up. Not only the amount of use but the potency of the cannabis, that's what worries me the most.

The principle is the same, measure the harmful effects and price them into the product. That'll create a price differential between that and the black market and home grown, so that means there will still be a black market.

How are you going to support the mental health sector?

We've got the Pattinson report, and lots of platitudes, but very little progress. So I'm much closer to the mental health policy document, which is in the final stages. We think there is some terrific stuff in the Pattinson report, we were disappointed that while we came late to the party in response to growing need for mental health services in the community, we had a couple of dozen initiatives underway and they just got wiped by the current government. Then they went back on the road again and announced a 1.9 billion dollar investment, which wasn't 1.9 billion over four years because most of that was existing spending. The highest number I could get to was about \$780 million, but they haven't spent it! So one possibility is to spend the money that has been allocated, I'm a big fan of really beefing up psychotherapy counselling, primary care and community care, psychological first aid, that was an idea that came out of young Nats. The whole R U Okay campaign is really good, but could we back that up with a better understanding of what to spot? I think we can.

If you talk to people who have had loved ones self harm, or attempt suicide, the first thing they will say is 'we didn't know', 'what did we miss'. I think there is an opportunity to provide each other with the basic tools to be able to spot what might be troubling people. We propose a dedicated minister of mental health, but above all we've got to get on with the things the government said they were going to do.

Would you support directing services away from the institution of the police as it stands to other services like psychiatric first responders? I'll caveat that by noting that we are aware that the police in New Zealand are different from the police in America, but also noting there is demonstrable systemic racism in the police and many other institutions in New Zealand.

The easy answer is no. It is not an either or, you don't fund the police or psychological responders.

It does seem to feel like that.

Well that's not how budgets are built. There is an element of zero sum game, but we have been very clear in our support of social investment strategies. Social investment is probably not the best term to describe what we were talking about, what Bill English championed for years because it is not about investment so much as intervening at the right stage and right circumstance to prevent downstream dependency, on people, on state, on drugs or whatever. Youth offending for example, I remember a report written a few years ago indicate that $\frac{2}{3}$ of youth offending in South Dunedin was committed by 18 kids. We knew who they were, what their needs were, so could we have targeted them more to prevent the chaotic existence that led them to offending? The answer is yes. We don't have a very large police force by our population and geographic standards. So defunding isn't the answer, diverting them into prevention and the community is a much better way. The last thing I'd say is, we think about offending, but I'm more interested in victimisation because for every offence there is a victim, even if it is on property. I've been very fortunate in my life to have not been the victim of a crime except I had a car broken into a few years ago and I felt quite violated by the simple act of someone smashing a window and taking out a stereo. I can't imagine what it is like to be personally violated or have a house burgled. For every police officer we have they are preventing, investigating and prosecuting on the behalf of those victims. We need to have fewer victims, not fewer police.

In terms of prisons specifically I believe it is a TOP policy that they would like to see the prison population reduced by 40% and noting that there has been a notable reduction in the prison population the last 3 - 4 years. What are your thoughts on the role of prisons and the idea that we should be reducing our prison population?

We can all agree on that. Everybody wants fewer people in prison. We wanted to achieve that and we did so successfully by having fewer offenders, fewer repeat offenders. Violent offending dropped significantly in the 9 years of the Key-English government. Therefore we were able to offset growth in population and we were facing the return of Australian convicts. We did actually have a lot more people on remand awaiting trial as a consequence of two very high profile, several high profile offences committed when people were on bail conditions. We made some amendments to the Bail Act, we also made some amendments to the sentencing Act, though I can't remember what they were, and that did lead to an uptick to the number of people and duration in incarceration. But nobody wants to have a lot of people in prison. When Bill described it as a fiscal and moral failure it was a precedent to committing to reducing repeat offending, and that's what we did. Repeat offending is going up now, and if the prison population is going down you've got to look through the data to ascertain what is going on there. It's because people are being released earlier, not because they are committing less offences. Is it the right time to release them? Well we have a sentencing Act that prescribes when people are eligible for release. The goal is the same, it is the means that really matters.

Would National be committed to taking a firmer stance towards Australia on issues like refugees on Christmas island and the release of prisoners to New Zealand?

The reality is Australia is a sovereign country that determines its own policies. We are very close and have harmonisation in a lot of ways, but the reality is we can't force them to do anything they don't want to do. What we can do is line our policies up with them, for example Australians get residency on arrival, everyone else goes on a pathway to residence that takes much longer and Australia 17 years ago flipped that around and said you will never be a resident, no matter how long you live here. So, it would be tempting to line our immigration policy up with theirs, but I don't think that speaks to our values.

How are you going to support the LGBTQIA+ community?

Firstly, the goal more broadly is to make sure everybody feels more included in our community, regardless of how you identify. I think we've come much further than most countries in being able to do that. I don't have any insight into the LGBT policy, but I do have a health lens to go over this and there are a couple of things that I am interested in. Gender affirmation surgery had limits on it that the current government lifted. I support that but it's actually not producing that much more in the way of gender affirmation surgery.

Am I correct in thinking that there are no doctors in New Zealand that are actually able to perform that surgery?

That was one of the barriers and they had to go overseas at quite extraordinary cost. There is one now I understand. The other area I am quite interested in is health information where identification, this really matters to the gender fluid community. The ability to be able to identify in health records as either male, female, or other is not sufficiently broad to be able to capture the range of people. So that's important and I think that needs to change.

Do you think more generally that we need more education, both within our school system and also within our healthcare system for our healthcare professionals about the needs and experiences of the wide spectrum of the members of the LGBTQIA+ community?

I would probably say secondary rather than primary, there is a point of maturity that makes it easier to understand difference. The healthcare community, absolutely. It's part of a broader cultural awareness need. Whether that starts at undergraduate level? They are so busy studying other things that how to care for somebody, they don't learn that. Nursing is better at those sorts of cultural safety elements.

What are your thoughts around the development of a parallel system of justice as proposed by Moana Jackson?

I think we would benefit from a better definition of tiro rangatiratanga. I don't think we will ever get there, there are so many interpretations that we just won't get to a shared understanding of what

that means. So the goal is to continue conversation at all levels and all situations. The Moana Jackson view of a wholly separate justice system I don't think is workable, people don't live in one world or the other. But I have absolute confidence that we can do more for iwi based support for offending. As Minister for Police I have visited a Marae based judicial process that was being trialed. I had to be sworn in because it was not like an open court. It was a marae based court, there was a fellow charged with common assault, the victim was there, it was hardly like a court, but it dispensed a form of appropriate justice. My simple definition of justice is people get what they deserve and this was a really good process. If people saw that I think they would be comfortable with this being done more broadly. In my view you can't have separate laws for people under the law. The question is how it is interpreted and whether we can eliminate the biases in our justice system. And the answer is yes, we can do much more, but we are starting from a not terrible place.

How have you engaged with the BLM movement and what do you think is the pathway forward for New Zealand in terms of reducing racial inequalities in our society?

Formally, not at all, but supportive in principle of all efforts to remove overt and subvert racial bias. It exists, it would be naive to think that it didn't. We are one of the most diverse nations on earth. If we look at our comparisons in terms of racial harmony using OECD and WHO measures, we rank extremely highly as one of the most tolerant societies. But racism exists and one of the solutions I think, and I'm not a fan of affirmative action by the way, one of the solutions is to ensure that the organisations we fund as a government look like the communities they serve. The one place we don't have that problem is in immigration New Zealand surprisingly, they look very much like the people they are serving. I think that helped. That's going to be one part of breaking down some of those biases.

In light of a fact that you are not a fan of affirmative action, how do we work to achieve that representation across, particularly, sectors like law, the courts, the police, noting that there are inequities in our society that are not overcomeable by the individual.

I'm not sure that they aren't overcomeable by the individual, but institutional change will be the biggest driver of improvement. Why don't I like affirmative action? It's because it is a conscious form of bias in the opposite direction.

Is that inherently problematic?

Let me tell you where I first experienced it. When I was a student here my summer job was as an employment officer with student job search. When I was doing that in 1991 and 1992 I was in what is now a branch of the university bookshop. So we would have jobs listed through employers, we had targets to have a number of women and Maori and certain ethnic groups, and if we fell behind we would consciously seek out jobs we thought would work rather than at a transactional level making sure the right person was put forward. So other people were being discriminated against. That sat uncomfortably with me. But that's not the solution, the solution is to reduce the

inequity by having a set of policies that make sure over time access is equal. So it is tremendously important to overcome, we just have to be very careful not to create biases along the way.

How would you respond to climate change and how would your policies centre indigenous and Pacifica culture and practices?

Well science, science, and science. I think we need to make sure we use technologies to reduce our carbon and greenhouse gas profiles without throwing industries under the bus. I worry that there is an overly simplistic view of the world that if we have fewer farms and fewer cows the world would be a better place. That's not true, if global warming happens and demand for the protein remains high, then poorer producing countries will prevail and greenhouse gas emissions will go up. Closing the Tiwai aluminium smelter would likely produce an increase in carbon emissions because that aluminium would now be produced by countries that produce their power by coal. We need to take a measured and sensitive approach to it, and the government's role has to be in incentivising. There was a big thing made about EVs. The government fleet was going to be transitioned to EVs. They've only bought about 90 vehicles and we have to rapidly accelerate that and also tap into the provided centres for greater uptake of EVs. I was in Japan last year and I was gobsmacked by the number of EVs on the road. So there are a number of things we can do over multiple fronts. Taxing and banning is probably effective in the short run, but probably wouldn't have the desired effect if we were truly wanting to reduce global emissions.

How will the National government support farmers in the transition away from industries that emit a lot of greenhouse gases?

You ask how we will transition away from these industries, I don't think this is the only answer. I frankly believe, my personal view is that we farm in places that we shouldn't. On the other hand water is a vital complaint of improving water quality. So water storage is a really important part of that. The rivers around New Zealand that have shown the greatest increase in quality are those where water storage strategies are being employed. Genetically modified grass, we've got to have that sensible conversation about a science driven approach to reducing methane emissions. I talk to farmers and they are annoyed at farmers that do bad practice, but they are also quite offended by the portrayal of their industry as dirty because they are the custodians of that land and want to pass it on, and they work incredibly hard to take a science driven approach to reducing their impact on the environment and keep working to encourage that.

What are the three biggest areas you would personally want to change?

We are in a recovery period, so it is a regulatory reform agenda that allows the country to recover as quickly as possible. So I think regulations that create handbrakes on progress need to be looked at. So planning laws, RMA, potentially employment law around the margins. Then other policies, whether they are underpinned by law, that will stimulate economic growth and investment in productive ways. You do need to spend a shedload of money to recover from Covid, but spending in one productive parts of the economy that will create growth and generate tax revenue for the crown, because we have got to pay it back, should be the dominant focus.

