

The Lobby Team of Dick Stark, Roy Reid, Ian Anderson and the writer Les Howard, met with various Government Ministers, MPs, Ministries and other organisations allied to Grey Power from 17 to 20 August 2009. This was a very busy round of meetings, fitting in as many as possible, with the group endeavouring to get the best information for the Grey Power Membership and sow as many seeds to advance the Grey Power cause.

The following is a summary of those meetings:-

Chris Fleming

Aged Care Rep from DHBs

CEO South Cant DHB

I met with Chris Fleming in Timaru, 3pm Fri, 7 Aug 2009. In the DHB Sector each CEO has to be involved in a Health Sector so, in his capacity as CEO of SCDHB, his is with Aged Care in the Residential Sector as well as home-based.

When asked about the Access to and Funding of rural resthomes, he stated that next week there is to be a pilot meeting between the DHB and Home Care Providers (Martin Taylor) and two others to decide on an Aged Care Review focussing on :-

(a) Modules of Care. (b) Demand & Supply. (c) Workforce. (d) Costing.

This is an initial meeting and when some agreement is reached then all stakeholders, including Grey Power, will be asked to become involved. The matter of rural rest homes will be decided on the cost basis for small rest homes and I don't think they are sympathetic to funding rural rest homes. Grey Power will have input to this when consultation begins. Home Based Care will be an alternative where possible.

The DHBs are committed to Un-announced audits and don't want to see more audits than at present but they do want them to reflect the day to day running of the facilities and want the results to be made public.

Ministry of Social Development

An almost completely new team took part in this round with the head, Dianne Rodgers away on leave.

We were advised that the amendment for the Enduring Power of Attorney will be before the House in October. This amendment covers the problems experienced by couples when they each want to appoint one or the other as EPA. Under the present regulation, a couple cannot both use the same legal firm and accordingly results in huge expense for them.

The amendment is for the use of one firm but using two separate lawyers. We are still concerned at the expense because lawyers are adept at charging their clients and the appointment of EPAs is still expensive. However, it is better than the current legislation.

The matter of the Super Gold Card and in particular public transport: the use of the Super Gold Card is of great assistance in area where there is a public bus service but of no use whatsoever in areas of no service. We mentioned perhaps a scheme could be introduced in areas of no service to help communities to purchase/run their own bus service so that all Super Gold Card Holders may benefit from the scheme.

We were also advised that power companies have been approached for discounts to Super Gold Card Holders and that the scheme is still being developed.

We brought to their attention the matter of a couple on the unqualified spouse rate of National Superannuation where the couple who run a small business, is not permitted by the Ministry to have depreciation and legitimate expenses deducted off the business income before the abatement rate of 70 cents in the dollar kicks in at income over \$80 per week. WINZ allow the depreciation and expenses on income but the MSD does not.

MSD still believes that most household incomes have sufficient NS income for a reasonable standard of living.

Hon Sue Kedgley MP Green Party

Hon Russell Norman MP Co-Leader Green Party

This was the first time we had met with Russell Norman and was quite interesting. Sue Kedgley is always available on a Monday afternoon.

The Green Party is concerned that the Home Insulation Scheme introduced by National earlier this year, will not be taken up by those on low incomes because of the huge gap between what the government pays and the final cost to the home. Although finance is made available through Banks and Local Councils, with the Local Bodies adding the loan onto the rates: interest free and paid off gradually, the concern is that Local Body Rates are too high already without anything extra added. EECA is looking at the increasing high cost to have heat pumps installed.

The Green Party is also beginning a campaign re: the Country of Origin

Labelling and it was interesting to note that Cadbury Chocolate had bowed to public pressure and ceased the use of palm oil in their product. We were also informed that other products had palm oil in them under the guise of vegetable oil. The labelling of all products is coming under fire as the Green's state that all products should show their ingredients on the label. A 0800 number will be in operation in October to report on the campaign.

The Greens are also concerned about the hidden agenda of Rodney Hide re: the City of Auckland and they are in favour of Spot audits of rest homes and the closing of small rural rest homes.

Russell Norman is on the team for the enquiry into the trading banks not passing on the reduced rates to their customers and a website has been set up (bankingenquiry.org.nz) for reporting such problems.

Hon Ruth Dyson MP Labour Health Spokesperson

We told Ruth Dyson about the impending closure of small rural rest homes with the DHBs cutting finance to them in December. It was of concern that the patients in these homes would be required to go to larger homes in other centres away from friends and families etc. DHBs are also cutting back on non- medical assistance and some people are being re-assessed by phone without being informed of that re-assessment. At the end of the call they're told that they had been re-assessed and that their home help had been reduced or cut out completely.

We spoke of our concern at the make up of the Health Review Committee set up by the Minister of Health. The committee are all ex-DHB members who have had the opportunity to make changes but have not done so and it is headed by a member of Business Round Table. There is no Consumer Representation.

We also expressed concern that audiologists were "ripping off" patients by charging \$2,000 to fit a hearing aid.

Hon Peter Dunne MP Leader United Future Party

Peter Dunne is also Minister of Revenue and we mentioned our concern at the suspension of the contributions to the Cullen Fund. He replied that there would be little difference to the age eligibility or the rate of 66% of the NATOTWW. The PM was firm that he would resign if the age or rate altered. There is really no retirement age in NZ now and people work as long as they want to if they have employment.

We told him about the MSD not taking into account depreciation or expenses for those on the Unqualified Spouse Rate whilst WINZ did, and he promised to look into it. His Tax Advisor, Ainslee Fenwick would be available to answer any tax questions we might have.

On Parole, the policy of his party is to be tight on violence or sexual-natured crimes and if you do the crime you do the time with no automatic parole for these offenders, and that drug and/or alcohol addiction should be addressed in prisons rather than waiting until after release.

Hon Bill English MP Minister of Finance

The Minister stated that the contributions to the Cullen Fund were designed for times of budget surplus and that there would be no difference because National Superannuation was a budget requirement and was funded from government revenue. It was allowed for along with all other budgeted requirements such as defence, police, health etc. It was provided for annually in the budget. If there was less in the fund then more would be provided from taxation.

He was interested in the Home Insulation Scheme and how quickly the available money was being used up and who was actually taking the scheme up.

Ann Martin Age Concern.

We have a good working relationship with Age Concern and support each other on matters of mutual interest. Age Concern is concerned about the Unqualified Spouse Rate of NS and the impending closure of smaller rest homes. Electricity prices are another subject we join forces on as their members have the same problems we do.

An enquiry re: financial advisors responsible for many members losing their savings and interest on those savings, is to take place and we will be, where we can, again supporting Age Concern when it comes to submissions.

They also have reservations about the makeup of the committee into the review of the Health System and that assistance for rural rest homes will be cut or lowered in December. Like Grey Power, they do not want rural rest homes closed with the upheaval of patients to other larger homes away from friends and families and are very unhappy with the cuts in Home Help. They also stated that if people opt to remain in their homes, then care should be made available to them as it costs less to give home help than to pay full rest home care.

Hon Annette King MP Deputy Leader Labour Party.

Annette King is an avid reader of the Grey Power Magazine and mentioned that she had noticed that John Key was to be a regular columnist in the magazine and to balance the articles she asked that Labour Leader Phil Goff be also given a regular column in the magazine. This is something I do not have a control over but believe the request has merit and could not think why Mr Goff should not be given that opportunity.

We asked her if she would support a review of the Widows Benefit and the Sickness Benefit as neither had been reviewed for a long period of time and she agreed and stated there needed to be a review of all benefits in the social security system to avoid the poverty trap.

She is critical of what she calls the unemployment merry-go-round where the government has made money available to employers who take on young workers and give them \$5000 towards each your worker employed. She is of the opinion that this is detrimental to older workers and that employers will grab the money to employ the younger workers. She also expects the government to increase GST and to prioritise health care.

Dr Peter Moodie Pharmacist

Dr Moodie stated that a High Cost Medicines Panel has been set up to advise the Minister of Health. He stated there were some very good people on the panel including a health economist, Paul Hanson and an ex-MP, Joy Quigley.

Dr Moodie was critical about the laser treatment of Macular Degeneration and that the drugs presently in use such as Avastin etc were a better option.

Jo Goodhew MP National

Jacqui Dean MP National

In previous visits these two MPs have been very supportive of Grey Power and what we set out to achieve. However, this time they were not so forthcoming and appeared to not have the same interest as previously. All Lobby Team Members left their meeting feeling let down.

When we criticised the makeup of the Health Review Committee and stated that the members were mostly ex-DHB CEOs etc and that a member of the Business Round Table chaired the committee, they began

by denying that allegation but, when they decided to get a copy of the committee membership they found we were correct.

We asked them about the use of the school dental bus to visit rest homes for oral health of patients but were told that staff were rostered on holiday during school holidays and that older people would have difficulty getting on the bus. I wonder how it is that older people get on buses to use the Super Gold Card concession.

They did advise us that the government had bonded 900 doctors and midwives in NZ.

We advised them about the closure of smaller rest homes.

This was a meeting that left us feeling somewhat flat and the attitude was nowhere as welcoming as when the two MPs were in opposition.

Hon Paula Bennett MP Minister for Social Development.

We went to this meeting wondering what sort of reception we would get from the Minister. We need not have wondered. The reception we received was first class and her interest in the older person could not have been faulted. After the criticism I levelled at the Minister following our previous meeting, I received a letter from her requesting another meeting and a fresh start. This is exactly what we had and top marks to the Minister for the effort she put in to her portfolio on behalf of our members.

We asked the Minister about a review of the Widows and Invalids benefits and she stated that it was a long time since the last review. A total of 4.5 Billion dollars went into all benefits and that she would ensure that help would go to those who needed it.

She also promised to look at the expenses incurred by those on the unqualified spouse rate being counted as income and was also told of a case manager who had shown a lack of respect for a client. She stated that a lack of respect would not be tolerated in her portfolio.

We discussed disability issues and benefits that apply for disabled persons and that there were 'special needs' grants available.

All in all, an extremely satisfactory meeting and we look forward to future meetings with this Minister.

Sue Primrose MoH Disability Services

Sue Primrose is always good value but is hamstrung at the moment because the budget she has to work with is insufficient for the needs of those she is responsible for. Disability services covers all the aids people with disability require in their homes such as walking sticks, walking trainers, wheelchairs, ramps, handrails etc that improves the lives of the disabled. She is not happy that those born with a disability do not receive the same consideration as those who are disabled later in life. The present budget is 100 million dollars and is not enough. They also cover audiologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists etc and, in fact, Sue was an occupational therapist.

She was critical when advised that some patients were being re-assessed and not informed that their interview was a re-assessment.

Sue is looking for ideas to spread the money available so that patients are not inconvenienced too much.

Hon Darren Hughes MP Labour Transport Spokesperson

Darren is always a pleasure to meet with and can be relied on to answer any queries in an honest and forthright manner.

He is critical of the cuts in adult education at the expense of 10 million to 35 million dollars allocated to private schools. If people want to send their children to private schools, they should meet the expense as it is their choice.

On the matter of increasing GST and the Proposed Capital Gains Tax, he is of the opinion that, because the friends of the National Party will shout down the Capital Gains Tax, the push will be for the increase in GST.

We asked him if he considered that question time in the house was of any benefit and he spoke positively on question time. Caucus apparently meets daily to consider topical questions and all questions are handed to the Whip by 11am. He then decides what questions will be concentrated on and they are then sent on to the relevant ministers etc. The Ministers are then briefed on the answers but what are not known are the supplementary questions where the MP required to give an answer is more or less on their own. He is of the opinion that question time is a very valuable tool.

Hon Leanne Dalziel MP Labour Justice & Commerce

This MP is very knowledgeable and also passionate about alcohol abuse. She states that alcohol is probably society's biggest problem as most people drink in some form or another. Our culture of binge-drinking is a serious problem and she blames the availability of alcohol outlets and that parents supply their youths with alcohol. She does not have a problem with alcohol being consumed or obtained in a controlled environment, such as in the hospitality industry, where there are penalties for supplying to intoxicated patrons but the many outlets such as supermarkets and dairies etc are the main problem.

She advised us of a website www.lawcom.govt.nz where a summary of the law report is available and invites Grey Power to make submissions. Ms Dalziel will make herself available to speak at Zone or Association meetings on the alcohol problems.

Dr Jim Primrose MoH on charge PHOs

Jim mentioned the Health Discussion Document 2007 and the Government Primary Health Care Strategy. The Health review is chaired by a Murray Horne and Jim is of the opinion that he is a good chair. This is not necessarily born out by others we met with. He has an economics background and our criticism of this committee is that it is full of ex-CEOs etc from DHBs.

He believes the increases in the Health Budget will still be made but at a slower rate than previously because of the economic climate and he has promised to supply documents and links for the strategy through Dick Stark.

Maria Williamson MoH Rest Home Care

Maria was previously in the Ministry for Social Development and was heavily engaged in the Enduring Power of Attorney legislation before being transferred to MoH.

Maria is aware of the problems facing smaller rural rest homes and is of the opinion they should be kept open and that funding should continue for them, perhaps by becoming community trusts. Any complaints regarding rest homes should be referred to the Older Person Manager at the appropriate DHB.

Where there is a 'residential care means assessment' there is now provision for debt to be taken into account when accessing people's needs. This covers items as telephone, electricity and any other

outstanding or current debt. The gifting allowance has been raised and now stands at \$27,500 over 5 years.

Hon Clayton Cosgrove MP Labour Justice Spokesperson

We asked Clayton Cosgrove about Labour's policy on Parole and he replied 66% of sentence to be served before parole offered and no parole for life sentence, in spite of the fact that New Zealand has the second highest incarceration rate per capita in the world. He further stated that both hard and soft options in the justice system had been tried with varying success and he favours some sort of disciplinary requirements for younger offenders.

Clayton was and always is keen to meet with us but in this instance was required to be in the house to speak on some legislation. However, he ensured we were advised of his commitment. Although he was a little late he nevertheless ensured we did meet.

Hon John Carter MP Minister for Senior Citizens

This minister is always available and keen to meet with us and he informed us that he values our meetings and views.

He is concerned with access to residential care and the re-assessment of home care for those who choose to stay in their own homes rather than go to rest homes. When we mentioned the re-assessment by phone and people not informed in advance that they were being re-assessed, he was quite indignant and stated that this should definitely not take place and that people should be advised in advance.

He advised that there was a large increase in money for hospice and palliative care and that there was to be a complete overhaul of health. He also said that he had impressed upon his colleagues that when mentioning National Superannuation they should remember to say the rate of 66% was for a married couple and that a single person living alone received approximately 40% of the NATOTWW.

Hon Phil Goff MP Leader Labour Party

Hon Ross Robertson MP Labour Senior Citizens Spokesperson

This was a joint meeting and the Health Review Committee was the first matter for discussion. Mr Goff stated that Murray Horne who chairs the committee, was a member of the Round Table and would not be sympathetic to our needs. He is concerned that there would be cost-cutting at the expense of care and that Widows Benefits would be phased out.

He is critical of the employment scheme for younger workers in that the \$5000 subsidy available to employers, who took on an under 25 year old worker, would result in older workers being disadvantaged. Both Phil Goff and Ross Robertson spoke on this with some concern.

Ross Robertson is available to speak at Grey Power meetings at zone/association level. Both MPs have concern also for the impending closure of smaller rural rest homes.

Hon Judith Collins MP Minister of Police

Unfortunately our meeting was due to start at 5-30pm but we could not arrive until 5-40pm. The Minister had a late-scheduled meeting with the deputy prime minister at 5-50pm so our meeting was somewhat curtailed but to the Minister's credit she had a Police advisor, Inspector John Spence to assist both her and ourselves.

We discussed the anti-smacking legislation and were told that the cabinet would decide on action after the result of the referendum.

We also asked what could be done to restore communities' respect for the police. The reply was that there was a lot of respect for the police but in some cases, some members of society had no respect for anyone including the police and that respect had to begin in the home.

Drug and alcohol abuse was also discussed and in some places, district councils had set alcohol free zones. Inspector Spence stated he had success getting "boy racers" out of his area but that they had simply gone to other areas.

Hon Nick Smith MP Minister for ACC

This was probably one of the most revealing meetings we experienced during the visit. The Minister advised us that there was a loss of 4 billion dollars in ACC. This meant that the range of options was more or less limited to either a reduction in coverage or an increase in levies or perhaps a combination of both. He stated that motor cycles were responsible for 10% of the total cost. Levies would need to increase and would need to be balanced to be acceptable.

The Minister for ACC is also the Minister for Climate Change and this is where the most telling information came in. To cover the CO2 emissions there would be an increase of 7% in electricity before Christmas and later there would be an increase in motor fuels of between 4 and 5 cents per litre.

With the Energy Minister stating that electricity companies should not be putting up their charges in the near future, we find the Minister for Climate Change wanting to increase electricity by 7% prior to Christmas.

There would be an increase for NZ air and shipping to cover for emissions but international travel would not be affected as it was not known which country could charge for the emissions over the oceans and airspace.

The Minister was completely upfront and forthcoming and realized he would be very unpopular with his energy price increases. There was no mention of the problem we experienced when trying to arrange a previous meeting and this meeting was carried out in an honest and friendly manner.

Hon Tony Ryall MP Minister of Health

Prior to meeting with the Minister of Health a booklet was delivered to me from the Minister's Office explaining the Ministerial Review of Health. The Minister explained the makeup of the Review Committee and informed us he did not want a high powered review such as would be carried out by KPMG. He believed the strategy for personnel was not too bad but they could do better to relieve congestion in hospitals.

We mentioned that we are aware that some are self diagnosing on the internet and he replied that doctors could make more use of emailing. We asked about the report on health and he replied it was as written and not sanitized in any way.

In the matter of closure of smaller rest homes, we informed him that the amount required to keep them open would be about the same amount as keeping two prisoners incarcerated. He said there was enough money in health but it needed to be utilized correctly.

Submission to the Health Report would be as feed back rather than Select Committees. Finally, he stated that DHBs should be encouraged to share services rather than all purchase them for themselves.

Incidentally, Minister Ryall was to be temporarily filling the position of Acting Prime Minister while other ministers were meeting in Australia.

Hon Simon Power MP Minister of Justice

It is always a pleasure to meet with this Minister and he always makes us welcome.

We asked him if it would be possible to form a database for Wills as often Wills are hard to find and in some cases appear to be lost in lawyers files. He said he would enquire into this problem and advise us what could be done.

We then asked about his election promises on Gangs, Parole, and Policing Tools etc and were informed that all were working satisfactorily and under good progress. The legislation for Illegal Street Racers was also progressing satisfactorily as was the legislation for demerit points.

In conclusion, I wish to thank the team for their efforts during this round of meetings. In an effort to cram as much as possible into the available time, we had long days beginning at 8-30am and going on until as late as 6-45pm with not a cream cake in sight.

The Prime Minister was not available this round but, in the main, we were well received. Almost all we met told us they place a high value on meeting with Grey Power and it is worth noting that although in the past it has taken approximately two months to arrange the meeting programme and juggle meetings around to suit, but this time it was all done within two weeks.

After the previous visit we wondered how we would be received by the ministers we were critical of, particularly when our concerns were also raised in the House. I can honestly say there were no problems whatsoever. We were received very graciously and it was a credit to both concerned.

Les Howard
Leader Lobby Team
Grey Power Federation Inc

