

16 December 2009

Question 5

Hon ANNETTE KING (Deputy Leader-Labour) to the Prime Minister: Does he stand by his comment: "This Government is not prepared to turn its back on our most vulnerable citizens"?

Hon BILL ENGLISH (Acting Prime Minister) : Yes, and we have made sure this year that we do not.

Hon Annette King: Does the Government still consider the National Council of Women to be an organisation that represents the views of a large cross-section of women in New Zealand, including vulnerable women?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: The National Council of Women is a longstanding and respected organisation.

Hon Annette King: What was his response to a recent letter to him from the National Council of Women, which stated that the new accident compensation sexual abuse guidelines are discriminatory under the UN conventions, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and has he given any commitment to investigate the council's claims?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: I am simply not familiar with the letter or any reply that the Prime Minister may have given.

Hon Annette King: In light of that answer, will he respond to the National Council of Women's request that he implement temporary special measures, as provided for under the UN conventions, before 10 January 2010, when all the existing accident compensation claimants will be transferred to the new guidelines, which have been condemned by clinicians throughout New Zealand; if not, will he now endorse those guidelines so the public and the National Council of Women know where the Prime Minister of New Zealand stands on this issue?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: I am sure the Prime Minister would be happy to discuss that issue, along with any other issues, with the National Council of Women. As I understand it, the guidelines that have been prepared by the Accident Compensation Corporation are consistent with the legislation passed by this House and were prepared by clinicians.

Hon Annette King: I seek leave to table the letter from the National Council of Women to the Prime Minister, dated 14 December.

Mr SPEAKER: Leave is sought to table that document. Is there any objection?
There is no objection.

Document, by leave, laid on the Table of the House.

Te Ururoa Flavell: What is he doing to address the findings of the recent OECD report, which showed that nearly one-third of New Zealanders on below-average incomes had missed out on health care because they could not afford it?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: I would be interested in looking at that report, but I would be surprised if it was not contradicted by evidence from New Zealand, which I understand generally shows people are getting access to health care.

Te Ururoa Flavell: Is he aware that the third Vulnerability Report showed that there is a hugely disproportionate impact for some sectors of our communities, and in particular the 14 percent unemployment rate for Maori is over three times higher than the 4.5 percent rate for Pakeha? What specific strategies are being devised to address the long-term inequities that have contributed to poverty and social injustice within our society?

Hon BILL ENGLISH: Yes, the Government is fully aware that the impact of the recession is disproportionate on some groups of people. That is why it is absolutely vital that we get on and create an economy where those people get the opportunities they need to overcome their disadvantage and to get out of the low-income trap. I am pleased to say that we have been able to work with the member's party to back measures that will achieve that.