



State of the Nation 2017

Andrew LITTLE
Leader of the Opposition



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EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

Andrew Little, Leader of the Opposition

Auckland, 29 January 2017

Welcome to this historic day - the day when we start this important year, united in our resolve to change the government.

We are driven by one simple premise: That we can make this great country a better place for all New Zealanders.

It was Chinese New Year yesterday, so I looked up my horoscope. It said I should expect "favourable fortune, especially in my career."

As for my rival, his horoscope says that in September his "luck will decline in every aspect."

So, I'm looking forward to this year!

Our life's journey to this hall has been different for each and every one of us.

Every person's path is unique. We've all had triumphs and challenges; good times and tough ones.

It's those experiences that help define our lives.

I want to share two experiences that help define my life, and talk about what that means for my vision for New Zealand.

I've had plenty of challenges in my life; most of them are fights I've chosen.

As a lawyer, as a union leader, I've fought for justice for hard-working New Zealanders in the highest courts in the land and in the biggest workplaces across the country.

I've fought for a young woman in her first job standing on her own against a giant multi-national, and for hundreds of workers just looking for a fair deal.

But there's one fight in my life that stands out.

And it wasn't one that I chose.

It was my battle with prostate cancer.

I was diagnosed at the age of 43.

The only reason the doctor caught it was my wife, Leigh, had a hunch. If Leigh hadn't said something, who knows what might have happened.

So, one thing I've learned: it helps to be married to a former nurse!

While I waited to see whether the treatment was successful, uncertainty hung over me and my family.

I know many of your families have faced that same uncertainty.

I remember sitting at my kitchen table, thinking about my family, about the future, about my wife, Leigh, and my son, Cam.

It made me think about seizing opportunities; about making the best of this life.

My battle with cancer colours everything I see, even today.

It's not just a perspective on life; it's a stronger determination to strive for a system that is genuinely fair for everyone.

That's why I think it's criminal for people in our country to die from treatable cancer because the government refuses them the latest medicines.

I am very proud to have stood alongside Leisa Renwick and so many other New Zealanders who fought for the most effective cancer drugs. What a powerful win that was last year.

I'm also proud to stand with the 45,000 New Zealanders a year who go to the doctor, are told they need to see a specialist, but are sent away without even being seen because of budget cuts.

I've been in their shoes. I've sat awake at 3am wondering whether my body would ever heal.

Ignoring those 45,000 families' suffering in the name of bean-counting; it's just not right. That's not right.

New Zealanders deserve treatment, they deserve compassion, they deserve a health system that puts them first.

And with a government I lead, that's what we'll have.

My son Cam turns 16 this year. We spent five days on the Otago Rail Trail together over the summer.

We discovered the sheer beauty of that part of the country, and he discovered what it's like to go most of the day without wi-fi!

Every weekend I can, I get along to watch Cam and his mates at Saturday rugby, often embracing the gentle Wellington southerly.

They're smart kids. They're creative. Determined. Courageous.

You see it in the way they do their schoolwork.

For their generation, there are no limits.

They're going to do great things with their lives.

In a few short years, Cam and his generation will chart their direction for our country.

They own New Zealand's future but, right now, there's a good chance they will never own their own home.

That's the harsh reality facing those kids.

I know that a home to call your own is the bedrock of a good family life. It's about security and certainty. It makes strong and safe communities.

I want my son and his friends to have every opportunity I had and more. I think every parent feels the same way.

That's why I'm so determined to fix this housing crisis.

These parts of my life are what drives me in my vision for New Zealand.

That it's every generation's job to make sure their children have more opportunities than they had.

Opportunities to create; to learn; to earn; and to succeed.

Opportunities to make their place, to push boundaries, to do new things, to craft a stake in our shared future.

That means always looking over the horizon, looking to solve long-term problems like falling home ownership, low productivity, or climate change.

And it means braving the big decisions rather than hiding in the small ones.

It also means anybody who's climbed the ladder of opportunity has to keep it there for those who follow.

That's the Kiwi way.

New Zealand at its best is a country where we help each other to climb that ladder; where we look out for each other.

That means giving a damn every time.

Let me give you a really specific example of giving a damn every time. Pike River.

These families have suffered the ultimate loss. Something that should never have happened.

They deserve support. They deserve answers. They deserve justice.

I'm inspired by their courage, and I've been honoured to stand with them from Day One.

And I'm telling you this: I'll stand with them until they get justice.

Looking around the world right now - President Trump in the US, and the Far Right in Europe - holding on to a positive, inclusive vision is more important than ever.

The places that used to light the world with their progressive thinking - their lights shine more dimly now.

Let us never loosen our hold on what makes us who we are.

We can set the standard for cooperation, for tolerance, for a government that governs with compassion.

We can show there's a better path than isolation and bigotry.

It's our turn to shine and to lead the way; to be New Zealand at its best.

New Zealand can be a beacon to the world.

This is a country for all of us, for everyone who lives here.

We want a government that creates opportunity; that ensures our freedom; that lets us all have a fair share. A government prepared to play its part.

We can build a better New Zealand. But only if we build it together and include everyone.

To do that, it takes leadership.

We got a new Prime Minister last year. But we don't have a leader.

Since taking the reins, Bill English has failed his first tests of leadership.

He should be at Waitangi next weekend, representing all the people of New Zealand on our national day. But he won't be.

He should be here in Mt Albert, making the case for his government in the by-election. But he isn't.

He should have fired the failed housing Minister, his friend Nick Smith. But he didn't.

Bill English is a competent bean counter. But he's showing he's not a leader.

I think progressive values are what define and unite us as a country.

Looking out for the future, and also for those in need.

Braving the big decisions, and giving a damn every time.

Those are New Zealanders' values.

That's what New Zealanders want from their leaders.

And it's those values that carried Labour and the Left to so many wins last year.

We won across the board in the local elections. Labour- and Green-backed candidates won the mayoralties of our three largest cities.

We fought with brave New Zealanders to win funding for modern cancer medicine.

We helped force the government to ban zero hour contracts.

We won a smashing victory in Mount Roskill. And you know why? Because our priorities are New Zealand's priorities.

Now, we're campaigning in Mount Albert. Isn't it great! Jacinda Ardern and Julie Anne Genter are both out in this community. They're showing there's a positive alternative government waiting.

And you know what else we won? We won majority support in Parliament for 26 weeks paid parental leave. You know why it's not the law now? Bill English personally vetoed it.

It just reminds you - achievements in opposition aren't enough.

If we really want to make change for the better, we have to change the government.

It's game on in this election. Our campaign starts here, today, with our joint State of the Nation event.

And this year's election really matters. Every day National governs, the Kiwi Dream slips further away for more and more people.

Bill English has to take responsibility.

He cut the budgets for health and education.

He's ignored the housing crisis and sold our state houses.

The buck stops with him.

Here's the truth: National is out of ideas and out of touch. They've got nothing new to offer.

Bill English said it this week. He said: "we've reached the limits of what government can do."

That can only mean one thing.

Every year that National remains in office, the dream of home ownership slips away for thousands more young couples.

Every year National remains in office, 45,000 more people who need treatment won't get it.

Every year National remains in office, our schools will slide further down the world rankings.

It's not good enough. Not for our kids. Not for our country.

The question voters will be asking in the booth is: who has the answers in housing, health, and education?

They'll be asking who's going to fix the housing crisis.

They'll be asking who'll make sure New Zealanders can get the health care they need.

They'll be asking who'll make sure every child, in every corner of New Zealand, can get a world-class education at their local school.

We've got a plan in all these areas.

Everyone knows that what National's been doing hasn't worked.

But there is a better way.

On housing, under Kiwibuild, we'll build 100,000 affordable houses for families to buy.

We'll make sure every rental home is warm, dry, and healthy.

And we'll crack down on speculators who use our homes as gambling chips.

If we vote to change the government this year, then a decade from now home ownership will be on the rise in this country. Young couples will again be able to afford the Kiwi dream of owning their own place.

We've solved housing crises before. Labour's built homes before. We've done it before. We'll do it again.

On health, we'll reverse Bill English's \$1.7 billion of health cuts.

If we vote to change the government this year, then a decade from now every New Zealander will be able to afford a GP visit. Everyone who needs specialist treatment will actually get it. And Kiwis will have the most effective medicines.

You know, Labour built the public health system in this country. We fixed it after National tried to tear it down in the 1990s. And we'll fix it again.

On education, we'll make sure that schools get the funding they need so they don't have to beg parents for donations. And we'll deliver three years free post-school education and training.

If we vote to change the government this year, then a decade from now children all across the country will get a world-class education. Young people will be able to get the skills they need without crippling study debt. And the next generation will be prepared to face the future of work in a rapidly changing world.

But if we vote for more of the same, we'll be setting our kids up to fail in the new economy.

Labour has a proud history in education. We introduced free secondary school. We fixed National's student loans debacle. Now, we'll fix the schools, again.

We can afford all this.

I know you have to create wealth before you can share it.

We'll grow the economy and back our businesses, just like we did last time. And we'll pay down Bill English's record government debt.

My government will be fiscally responsible.

I'm going to run a tight ship. No more Saudi sheep scams, I promise you that.

We will run surpluses, just like last time.

We've balanced the books before, and we'll do it again.

Here's the thing: getting everyone a fair shot at the Kiwi dream, setting ourselves up for success, isn't a "cost." It's an investment.

That's the difference between long-term thinking and short-term thinking.

We will plan for our children's future, not just the next election.

Housing, health, education – these are the building blocks of a prosperous society. They are what create opportunity.

Everything we'll do in government is about building a better New Zealand: a country that is the envy of the world, where everyone has their shot at the Kiwi Dream.

I'm really proud the Greens are here today.

Both Labour and the Greens believe that politics is about building a better future for everyone.

Like me, Metiria and James believe all our children deserve good housing, a world-class education, and the best start in life.

Like them, I know we must protect our environment if we are to pass on a world worth having to our children.

We know that New Zealand's future must be built on good, sustainable jobs that pay a fair wage.

Together, Labour and the Greens are committed to building that better New Zealand.

We're ready to win.

We're ready to govern.

We're ready to build a better New Zealand.

Today, we are ready to lead the next government of New Zealand.

But a movement like ours needs much more than some politicians on a stage.

Ours is a community movement. It's powered by people like you.

Mums and Dads.

Students and teachers.

Workers and families.

You and me.

Our movement wins when we bring thousands of committed people with us.

I wouldn't want it any other way.

New Zealanders have a clear choice at this election.

We can choose a tired government with no new ideas.

Or we can choose a new, positive vision for a better New Zealand.

This isn't going to be an easy fight. It's going to be close. It's going to be tough.

But as I've already told you, I've faced tough fights before.

And this is one fight we simply have to win.

We have to win so more young couples can own their own home.

We have to win so everyone can get the healthcare they need.

We have to win so all our children can get a world-class education.

Here's my message to New Zealanders this year:

If you want better housing, better health, better schools;

If you share our vision for New Zealand, do this - join our movement to change the government.

Thank you.