

Speech to Deaf Society of Canterbury Inc. at their A.G.M.,
by the Hon. Ruth Dyson, M.P.
3rd May 2009

Thank you for the invitation to speak with you today and thank you for the privilege of being your patron.

I want to congratulate your office holders, both outgoing and incoming. It is a very important leadership role and your office holders do a lot of work behind the scenes to keep the Club going. I understand that your membership numbers have gone up over the last year and are now over 100. Congratulations! It is good to see so many young people joining too.

Christchurch will be hosting the national deaf games at Labour weekend and this is a really important chance to show off our City. Please make sure that you let all the hearing people in our City know what is happening so that everyone can work together to make this fantastic event a real success.

I want to talk about three things today:

- Our achievements for deaf over the last decade
- The election
- The new government.

As New Zealand's first Minister for Disability Issues, I was very proud to be your advocate. We made a lot of good progress on many issues – better support for people wanting to get a paid job, including changes to the Invalid's benefit stand down provisions. We changed the law about people working in Sheltered Workshops, so that now people who are working have to get paid a proper wage, instead of working for 30 hours a week and just getting a benefit. We introduced the NZ Relay service which is now being expanded, and of course, we made New Zealand Sign Language our 3rd official language. When we passed that law, we knew that we would have to build the entitlement for interpreters gradually, because we don't have enough interpreters to cover ever Deaf person in every part of their life. Our government consulted Deaf people around the country, and we got a clear message that the first entitlement for interpreters should be in the Justice system. We heard terrible stories of Deaf people being arrested, being charged with an offence, leaving the police station and turning up to Court without having any idea of what they were charged with, how to get a lawyer, or what the process was, at all. That is not a Justice system for Deaf people.

We have to watch now that the proper resources are put in place by the new Government to expand the provision of interpreters, as the law outlines.

The next thing I want to talk about is the Election. Our government also made a lot of efforts in ensuring that Deaf people understood the processes for enrolling to vote and for voting. We had DVDs made in NZ Sign Language and held many meetings around the country to explain what people needed to

do in order to be able to vote. I hope that this helped! How many people here actually voted – wow – lots! That is really great news and I can tell from your responses that you also thought the DVDs were good. That sort of support needs to be given at every election.

The last point that I want to talk about is the new Government. The Government is a National/Act/Maori Party coalition. The Minister for Disability Issues is Paula Bennett and her Associate Minister is Tariana Turia. Unfortunately, the Minister has delegated nearly all of the Disability Issues work to Tariana Turia, who isn't in the Cabinet. So we no longer have the primary Minister with the responsibility for the portfolio sitting in Cabinet.

I am now Labour's Health Spokesperson. Our Disability Issues Spokesperson is Lynne Pillay. She is from West Auckland and is a very tiny woman with a HUGE amount of energy! She will be a great advocate for you within Parliament. I am really happy to continue to be your local link with Parliament – to hear your views and ideas, and to promote these to Lynne and in Parliament. In Opposition, we can introduce legislation, but we don't get given very much time by the Government to do that. We can raise issues in questions to Ministers and we can raise issues at Select Committee.

So now it is time to hear from you. What are the key issues of concern for you and what issues would you like me to raise in Parliament on your behalf?

Thank you again for the invitation to be here today.

Questions:

1. Paula: Cost of hearing aids and the criteria for some people getting them free (through Enable, which is Health funded) and how limited that is compared to people getting them through ACC.

Ruth replied that the criteria for getting free health funded hearing aids is that the person needs the hearing aids to keep their job or that they are the primary caregiver for children. Paula replied that she met this criteria but still had to pay a third – Ruth will follow up on this.

2. Paula: Asked about Vodafone and their contract for so much talk time txts and 3G. There is nothing available for people who don't use talk time and she can't swap her talk time for txts!

Ruth replied that she will write to the telecommunications companies asking about whether they will look at a txt/3G only contract.

3. Question about ensuring that at least live broadcast and urgent/breaking news have captioning. Deaf people miss out on the most important information because it is not captioned.

Ruth agreed to write to TVNZ with regard to this issue.

4. Question about having Freeview in rest home, where man has been told that if he wants Freeview (which has captions) he will have to get it himself and watch it in his room. He really wants to watch TV in the evenings in the company of the other people, not on his own in his room.

Ruth agreed to contact this particular rest home.

5. Question about the Disability Cabinet Committee – has it been set up? Who is on it? What are they doing?

Ruth has no information on this and will find out and let us know.

6. Question about the constant interruptions by TVNZ broadcasters during the ANZAC Cove programme on ANZAC Day. Their interruptions were very disrespectful of the soldiers.

Ruth agreed to write to TVNZ about this.

7. Paul commented that it is really important that signing rather than just captioning is promoted on Television. A comment was made about Mark Berry signing on What Now – very good!
8. A question about the progress of having a NZSL interpreter course at CPIT.

Ruth replied that CPIT has been very helpful in working with AUT to ensure that better access to NZSL interpreter training is available, particularly to South Islanders. AUT has had difficulty in filling all the places on its course, so CPIT does not want to be in competition with them. It is better to have the two providers working together so that they both succeed rather than competing where one or both might fall over because of lack of students.

Ruth will get an update on this from CPIT and let us know.

End of this session!