

= John Key =

John Phillip Key (born 9 August 1961) is the 38th Prime Minister of New Zealand , in office since 2008 . He has led the New Zealand National Party since 2006 .

Born in Auckland before moving to Christchurch when he was a child , Key attended the University of Canterbury and graduated in 1981 with a bachelor of commerce . He began a career in the foreign exchange market in New Zealand before moving overseas to work for Merrill Lynch , in which he became head of global foreign exchange in 1995 , a position he would hold for six years . In 1999 he was appointed a member of the Foreign Exchange Committee of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York until leaving in 2001 .

Key entered the New Zealand Parliament representing the Auckland electorate of Helensville as one of the few new National members of parliament in the election of 2002 following National 's significant defeat of that year . He has held the seat since then . In 2004 , he was appointed Finance Spokesman for National and eventually succeeded Don Brash as the National Party leader in 2006 . After two years as Leader of the Opposition , Key led his party to victory at the November 2008 general election , and repeated this feat at both the November 2011 general election and September 2014 general election .

As Prime Minister , Key leads the Fifth National Government of New Zealand which entered government at the beginning of the late @-@ 2000s recession in 2008 . In his first term , Key 's government implemented a GST rise and personal tax cuts . In February 2011 , a major earthquake in Christchurch , the nation 's second largest city , significantly affected the national economy and the government formed the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority in response . In its second term , Key 's government announced a policy of partial privatisation of five state @-@ owned enterprises ; while the policy was enacted , voters in a citizens @-@ initiated referendum on the issue were 2 to 1 opposed to the policy . In foreign policy , Key announced the withdrawal of New Zealand Defence Force personnel from their deployment in the war in Afghanistan , signed the Wellington Declaration with the United States and pushed for more nations to join the Trans @-@ Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership .

= = Personal life = =

Key was born in Auckland , New Zealand , to George Key (1914 ? 1969) and Ruth Key (née Lazar ; 1922 ? 2000) , on 9 August 1961 . His father was an English immigrant and a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and World War II . Key and his two sisters were raised in a state house in the Christchurch suburb of Bryndwr , by his mother , an Austrian Jewish immigrant .

He attended Aorangi School , and then Burnside High School from 1975 to 1979 . Then he attended the University of Canterbury and earned a Bachelor of Commerce degree in accounting in 1981 . He has attended management studies courses at Harvard University .

Key met his wife Bronagh when they were both students at Burnside High School . They married in 1984 . She also has a BCom degree , and worked as a personnel consultant before becoming a full @-@ time mother . They have two children , Stephie and Max . Max is the new night @-@ time radio host for George FM , and is also a singer .

On 25 July 2008 , Key was added to the New Zealand National Business Review (NBR) Rich List for the first time . The list details the wealthiest New Zealand individuals and family groups . Key had an estimated wealth of NZ \$ 50 million . Key is the wealthiest New Zealand Member of Parliament .

= = Before politics = =

Key 's first job was in 1982 , as an auditor at McCulloch Menzies , and he then moved to be a project manager at Christchurch @-@ based clothing manufacturer Lane Walker Rudkin for two years . Key began working as a foreign exchange dealer at Elders Finance in Wellington , and rose to the position of head foreign exchange trader two years later , then moved to Auckland @-@ based Bankers Trust in 1988 .

In 1995 , he joined Merrill Lynch as head of Asian foreign exchange in Singapore . That same year he was promoted to Merrill 's global head of foreign exchange , based in London , where he may have earned around US \$ 2 @. @ 25 million a year including bonuses , which is about NZ \$ 5 million at 2001 exchange rates . Some co @- @ workers called him " the smiling assassin " for maintaining his usual cheerfulness while sacking dozens (some say hundreds) of staff after heavy losses from the 1998 Russian financial crisis . He was a member of the Foreign Exchange Committee of the New York Federal Reserve Bank from 1999 to 2001 .

In 1998 , on learning of his interest in pursuing a political career , the National Party president John Slater began working actively to recruit him . Former party leader Jenny Shipley describes him as one of the people she " deliberately sought out and put my head on the line ? either privately or publicly ? to get them in there " .

= = Member of Parliament = =

Auckland 's population growth , as evidenced in the 2001 census , led to the formation for the 2002 General Election of a new electorate called Helensville , which covered the north @- @ western corner of the Auckland urban area . Key beat long @- @ serving National MP Brian Neeson (whose own Waitakere seat had moved on paper to being a Labour seat through the boundary changes) for the National Party Helensville selection . At the 2002 elections Key won the seat with a majority of 1 @, @ 705 , ahead of Labour 's Gary Russell , with Neeson , now standing as an independent , coming third . Key won re @- @ election with ease at the 2005 election garnering 63 % of votes cast in Helensville , and increased his majority again in 2008 , gaining 73 % of the electorate vote .

= = Finance spokesman = =

In 2004 the National Party Parliamentary leader Don Brash promoted Key to the Opposition front benches and appointed him the party spokesman for finance . In late 2006 Brash resigned as leader , citing damaging speculation over his future as the reason . His resignation followed controversies over an extramarital affair , and over leaked internal National Party documents later published in the book The Hollow Men .

= = Leader of the Opposition = =

In his maiden speech as National Party leader on 28 November 2006 , Key talked of an " underclass " that had been " allowed to develop " in New Zealand , a theme which received a large amount of media coverage . Key followed up on this speech in February 2007 by committing his party to a programme which would provide food in the poorest schools in New Zealand .

He relented on his stance in opposition to Sue Bradford 's Child Discipline Bill , which sought to remove " reasonable force " as a defence for parents charged with prima facie assault of their children . Many parents saw this bill as an attempt to ban smacking outright . Key and Prime Minister Helen Clark agreed a compromise ? giving police the discretion to overlook smacking they regarded as " inconsequential " .

In August 2007 Key came in for criticism when he changed his position regarding the Therapeutic Products and Medicine Bill :

" John Key had finally slipped up . National 's leader had told the Herald on Tuesday he would have signed up to a New Zealand First @- @ initiated compromise on the stalled Therapeutic Products and Medicines Bill had he seen it ? and was still willing to sign up ? only to change his mind yesterday after his remarks appeared in print . "

Also in August 2007 , Labour 's Trevor Mallard hinted in Parliament that Labour would try to link Key to the 1987 " H @- @ Fee " scandal , which involved Key 's former employer Elders Merchant Finance and a payment to Equiticorp Chief Executive Allan Hawkins . Hawkins and Elders executive Ken Jarrett were later jailed for fraud . Key forestalled the accusation by declaring that he had left Elders months before the event , that he had no knowledge of the deal , and that his interview with

the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) during the investigation into the affair could only have helped to convict the people involved . Then @-@ SFO director Charles Sturt publicly supported Key 's statement .

Labour MPs criticised Key for not releasing specific policy information at their annual conference . Key responded that National would set its own policy agenda and that there was adequate time before the next election for voters to digest National Party policy proposals .

= = = Prime Minister = = =

Key became Prime Minister following the general election on 8 November 2008 which signalled an end to the Labour @-@ led government of nine years under Helen Clark . The National Party , promoting a policy of " change " , won 45 % of the party vote and 59 of the 122 seats in Parliament (including a two @-@ seat overhang) , a substantial margin over the Labour Party , which won 43 seats .

Key was sworn in as Prime Minister and Minister of Tourism and also appointed as a member of the Executive Council on 19 November 2008 with his new cabinet . His first international outing as Prime Minister was the 20th APEC meeting in Peru the following day .

Arriving at the Ngapuhi Te Tii Waitangi Marae the day before Waitangi Day 2009 , Key was briefly shoved and grabbed by two protesters before diplomatic protection officers pulled them off . He told reporters he was " quite shocked " but continued onto the marae and spoke , while police took the two men away and charged them with assault .

Key has also been tied with the National Cycleway Project since its conception at the national Job Summit in early 2009 . He proposed it , and as Minister for Tourism , was instrumental in getting NZ \$ 50 million approved for initial construction work .

In January 2009 , after addressing Chinese New Year celebrations at the Greenlane ASB Showgrounds , Key tripped after coming down a small set of stairs in front of cameras leaving him with a broken right arm and " embarrassed " .

= = = Controversies = = =

During his first term in office , National remained high in the polls and one commentator described support for John Key as " stratospheric " . In 2011 he was nicknamed " Teflon John " , as nothing damaging to his reputation seemed to " stick " to him . Coming up to the election in 2011 , the gloss began to come off . In October that year , Key was caught up in a controversy over the replacement of 34 three @-@ year @-@ old Government BMW limousines with new ones at a time of economic restraint . Initially , Key denied any knowledge of the plan , although reports later surfaced showing that his office was aware of the deal . Key was accused of hypocrisy ; he eventually apologised , calling it a ' sloppy ' deal , effectively placing most of the blame on his chief of staff .

That same month , Key made a statement in which he claimed that Standard and Poor 's had said that " if there was a change of Government , that downgrade would be much more likely " . S & P contradicted the claim , bringing Key 's credibility into question . National won the election , but New Zealand 's credit rating was subsequently downgraded anyway ? by two different agencies ? Standard and Poor 's and Fitch Group .

The real turning @-@ point in the public 's perception of Mr Key began with the teapot tapes . Just before the election in November 2011 , a recording was made of a conversation between John Key and ACT Party candidate John Banks that they considered private ? despite the fact that the meeting took place in a cafe and the media were invited to attend . Mr Key made a complaint to the police and compared the incident to illegal hacking in the News of the World scandal in Britain . He refused to answer media questions about what was said and the incident dominated media discussion in the days before the election . The unreleased recording allegedly concerns the leadership of ACT and disparaging remarks about elderly New Zealand First supporters .

The event causing perhaps the most embarrassment to John Key was the arrest of Kim Dotcom and the subsequent revelations that the New Zealand Government Communications Security

Bureau (GCSB) had illegally spied on Dotcom . As Prime Minister , John Key is directly responsible for the GCSB , which is not allowed to spy on New Zealand citizens ? and Dotcom had been granted permanent residency . Three days later , the Prime Minister John Key apologised for the illegal spying . " I apologize to Mr Dotcom . I apologize to New Zealanders because every New Zealander ? is entitled to be protected from the law when it comes to the GCSB , and we failed to provide that appropriate protection for him . " It subsequently came to light that deputy Prime Minister Bill English had been asked to sign a " ministerial certificate " suppressing details of the GCSB 's involvement in the case while Mr Key was overseas ? the only time this had been done in the last ten years .

In November 2012 , Key told students at St Hilda 's Collegiate in Dunedin that football star David Beckham was " thick as batshit " . The comments were picked up by UK papers The Daily Mirror and The Sun . On the same day , there was controversy over Key 's comments to a radio host that his shirt was " gay " . " You 're munted mate , you 're never gonna make it , you ? ve got that gay red top on there " , he told host Jamie Mackay on RadioSport 's Farming Show . The following day , Lord of the Rings actor Sir Ian McKellen said in a blog entry that Key should " watch his language " .

The potential fallout from Dotcom 's arrest continued in December 2012 when the High Court ordered the GCSB to " confirm all entities " to which it gave information opening the door for Dotcom to sue for damages ? against the spy agency and the police . Later that month , John Key 's rating as preferred PM dropped to 39 % ? the first time in his four years as prime minister that his rating had slipped below 40 % .

In March 2013 it emerged that Key has known Ian Fletcher , head of the GCSB , since they were at school , but he denied that the pair were friends . But in early April it was revealed that Key had personally picked Fletcher for the role at the GCSB , encouraging Fletcher to apply for the role . Despite Key 's office claiming Fletcher was " the best candidate for the job " , Fletcher was in fact the only candidate interviewed . Key said he hadn 't originally mentioned the phone call because he " forgot " . Political commentator Bryce Edwards called it the " most appalling political management since he became Prime Minister back in 2008 " . Key was critical of reporting on the GSCB saga , calling journalists " knuckleheads " in a radio interview .

In April 2013 whilst visiting Chinese president Xi Jinping in Beijing , Key made headlines by suggesting New Zealand would back any United States or Australian military action against North Korea . The following day he backtracked , saying the chance of New Zealand troops entering North Korea was " so far off the planet " .

In May 2014 Key justified the use of New Zealand intelligence that resulted in innocent civilians falling to American targeted killings .

In April 2015 a waitress claimed and Key acknowledged that he had pulled her ponytail multiple times over several months ; when Key learnt she had taken offence , he apologised . International media have reported the incident as " ponytail @-@ gate " .

= = = UN Security Council bid = = =

Key launched New Zealand 's campaign for a Security Council seat at the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2009 . He met briefly with US President Barack Obama and former US President Bill Clinton . While in New York , Key appeared on the Late Show with David Letterman . He read out the Top Ten list , ' Top Ten Reasons You Should Visit New Zealand ' .

Key continued New Zealand 's push for a spot on the Security Council while in New York in 2013 . There he accused rival candidates Spain and Turkey of using aid money to buy votes from small African countries , and said New Zealand would not be spending its way onto the Council . While in New York , Key suddenly fell ill , but recovered in time for meetings with representatives from other countries ahead of the General Assembly .

= = = Intelligence reform = = =

On 6 October 2014 , John Key created a new ministerial portfolio called the Minister of National Security and Intelligence . The Minister of National Security and Intelligence will be responsible for setting national security and intelligence policy and legislation , and will also head a newly established Cabinet National Security Committee . The Prime Minister will assume the new portfolio while the Attorney General Christopher Finlayson will assume the portfolios of Minister Responsible for the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) and Minister in Charge of the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service (NZSIS) , which have traditionally been held by the Prime Minister .

= = Political views = =

Key 's views are largely aligned with his own party 's view . However he also notes that his differences from his predecessor are more of style and focus rather than view . Key has in the past noted others ' concern at the pace of asset sales , but argued that the arguments against selling assets in the 1980s were largely irrational . In a 2002 interview he said " some form of orientation towards privatisation " in health , education and superannuation , such as giving firms tax breaks for employer super schemes , made sense . After leading the National party to victory in the 2011 election , Key rejected that the National Party lacks a mandate to partially sell off state @-@ owned assets , he acknowledged that some New Zealanders were anxious about the mixed ownership model . " But I think we got a mandate . "

Key has a mixed voting record on social issues : he voted against the bill creating civil unions , claiming that this represented his constituents ' views but he supports them personally . He was part of a large block of MPs voting to defeat a bill that defined marriage as being between a man and a woman . Key has also stated that he does not oppose gay adoption . He voted for the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013 .

In 2008 Key voted for an ill @-@ fated attempt to raise the legal drinking age from 18 back to 20 but subsequently ignored a Law Commission recommendation to increase levies on alcohol . He claimed there was ' no appetite ' for such a move . A ' suppressed ' report on public attitudes to alcohol law reform eventually came to light indicating that in 2010 , when he made this claim , 56 % of New Zealanders supported a price increase .

Key says that he believes that global warming is a real phenomenon , and that the Government needs to implement measures to reduce human contribution to global warming . Key has committed the National Party to working towards reducing greenhouse emissions in New Zealand by 50 % within the next fifty years . Commentators note that as recently as 2005 , Key made statements indicating that he was sceptical of the effects and impact of climate change .

Critics note that Key has changed his views on the Iraq war since becoming leader of the opposition . In 2003 , as an opposition MP , Key emphasised National 's position of supporting New Zealand 's traditional allies , the United States and Australia . Key came under fire in the New Zealand Parliament in August 2007 , when the Government claimed that had Key been Prime Minister at the time , he would have sent troops to Iraq .

Like his predecessor Helen Clark , Key views a New Zealand republic as " inevitable " , although probably not for another decade . " If Australia becomes a republic there is no question it will set off quite an intense debate on this side of the Tasman , " he said , " We would have to have a referendum if we wanted to move towards it . " Key later stated that he is a monarchist , and that a New Zealand republic would " Not [happen] under my watch " . Key is a supporter of changing the Flag of New Zealand , and during the 2014 general election campaign promised a referendum on the issue . Following the election he stated he hoped the referendum would be completed in 2015 .

= = Religious views = =

Key attends church frequently with his children , but is an agnostic . He has stated that he does not believe in an afterlife , and sees religion as " doing the right thing " . Key 's wife , Bronagh (née Dougan) Key , is the daughter of Northern Irish emigrants of mixed religious descent . Key is the

third prime minister or premier of New Zealand (after Julius Vogel and Francis Bell) with Jewish ancestry .