

Womens Choice Election Forum



Cinnamon Whitlock (Māori Party), Erica Stanford (National Party); Dr Judy McGregor, (MC) Carmel Sepuloni (Labour Party), Jan Logie (Green Party), Tracey Lee Repia (Mana Party) and Tracey Martin (New Zealand First).

Our main political parties and their women's equality policies were challenged at a public forum at the University Of Auckland on Monday 7th August.

The event was organised by a partnership of the National Council of Women of New Zealand (Auckland Branch), Auckland Women's Centre, AUSA Women's Rights Officers, the Hand Mirror Blog and the Auckland Women's Studies Association (Auckland Branch).

"It's up to women," MC Judy McGregor told a packed hall at the University of Auckland as she kicked off the Women's Choice Election Forum.

Quoting the words of former American First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Judy said that representatives of six political parties would tell the audience why they should vote for them and support their parties.

Speaking first, National Party candidate Erica Stanford described herself as a feminist and said women had come a long way, but there was still so much to fight for. She said the achievements of the National-led Government included extending Paid Parental Leave, the \$2 billion pay equity settlement, an overhaul of family violence laws, a bill implementing a process for pay equity, and a sharp increase in achievement of NCEA Level 2.

She said that, as she campaigned, she was constantly asked how she would cope with having two small children and being an MP.

"I hope my daughter lives in a world where caring for children is seen as a shared responsibility between parents."

Labour MP Carmel Sepuloni pointed to the fact that the election might bring into Parliament two new female MPs with babies less than two months old. Despite the gains made by women, she said we still faced a persistent poverty gap. This particularly affected single mothers, 56 per cent of whom lived in poverty and who were also more likely to be homeless.

"The Labour Party is committed to women and to ensuring we have policies that address the challenges women face."

Māori Party candidate Cinnamon Whitlock, of Ngapuhi, Ngati-Kahu ki Whangaroa and Te Rarawa, said she was proud of what her party had achieved over the past nine years.

"It's been an effective government [partner] empowering whanau and building tino rangatiratanga."

She said she understood the struggles of working parents and it was important to provide more support for working mothers. Homelessness and housing were challenges.

Green MP Jan Logie described her party as "consciously feminist" and said feminism was deeply embedded in the Greens. The fact that seven out of the top ten list slots were held by women meant that there was less discussion about rugby and more talk about policy around the caucus table.



Maru Sittiti, Holly Ainea, Carmel Sepuloni, Marina Elisara, Latayvia Tualasea-Tautai and Liz Lotoa after the forum.

She said the Greens had held the Government to account for gutting the Family Court, reducing sexual violence services, and reducing targets for female board appointments. The Greens had put forward

solutions such as the inquiry into specialist sexual violence services funding; and bills for gender pay transparency and domestic violence victims' leave.

New Zealand First MP Tracey Martin revealed she set herself ten key performance indicators when she became an MP.

"One of these KPIs is to be a brave woman because you have to be a brave woman to keep these issues before your party at all times."

Although New Zealand First was not known for its women's policy, it had now established a domestic violence sub-committee which focused on Paid Parental Leave for fathers and healthy relationship programmes for boys.

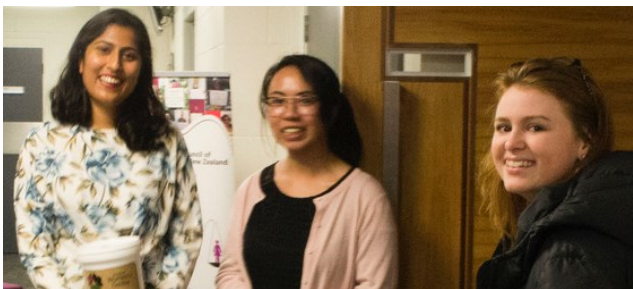
"I'm passionate about making change. There's no point in being there unless you are passionate and put yourself forward to make a change."

Mana Party candidate Tracey-lee Repia, of Ngapuhi, Ngati Porou and Uenuku nga Iwi, paid homage to the men present at the forum and said she hoped they supported women.

"The most important war we are fighting right now is the war on poverty... Poverty and the prejudice that go with it. Those go hand in hand."

Growing up in a Māori family, she said she understood that the most important thing was equality. When Māori came to Aotearoa, there had been no patriarchal system. Everyone was equal.

The statements from the party representatives were followed by five questions from the floor on pre-arranged issues. These were equal pay; action to address the gendered causes of domestic violence; the right to access abortions; the under-representation of women in STEM and at the tops of organisations; and insecurity of housing.



AUSA two Women's Rights Officers, Melissa Castelino and Noelle Dumo and Alana Misselbrook kindly collecting donations at the door for AWC.

National's Employment (Pay Equity and Equal Pay) Bill was heavily criticised for its merit requirements, comparator provisions, extinguishing of back pay and transitional clauses.

The sole voice in support of the bill was Erica, who defended her party's position and said New Zealand would have one of the best pay equity laws in the world when the bill passed.

Also put on the spot over the Government's record on domestic violence, Erica said that National took the

issue very seriously but she did not believe the Government should adopt a "social engineering" approach of going into schools and businesses and telling people what to think.

Carmel drew the loudest cheers of the night when she said she did not want to rely on funding for locks and alarms.

"I'll disagree [with Erica]. I think the Government's got a major role to play here."



Carmel criticised the slashing of funding for services over the past nine years and pledged that Labour would adequately fund crisis intervention for victims and perpetrators, as well as setting targets to reduce family violence.

Cinnamon said that the Māori Party believed there should be more investment in communities, with early intervention and prevention being the way to go. Tough conversations were needed about what people saw in homes and schools.

Tracey-lee said poverty was the true enemy. Systems needed to be changed and prejudice against Māori had to be addressed.

Jan described poverty as "gendered and colonised" and said the Greens took a holistic approach. The party advocated a new role for the Minister for Women of monitoring and reporting on the depiction of women in the media. The Greens would abolish the discriminatory sanctions in section 70A of the Social Security Act.

"We need to be looking at sexism and gender biases in our policy and legislation."

The last question was from a woman in a wheelchair at the back of the lecture theatre. She asked about policies for wahine with access needs.

Tracey responded that many people with disabilities were highly educated but found it difficult to obtain jobs. She had just released New Zealand First's inclusive education policy, which called for the Government to be far more proactive in supporting businesses to employ disabled people.

Tracey noted that the questioner would not be able to get into Parliament as there was no wheelchair access to the Debating Chamber. "The place itself needs to change."

**Please vote on 23 September.
It's your chance to tell politicians
what future you want for Aotearoa.**