

Minister's visit delights party faithful

BY **ROBBIE KAY**

TWO weeks out from the General Election, the National Party's Taranaki-King Country political machine played a trump card in the North King Country last week.

When candidate Barbara Kuriger, and 'woman of the week' Minister of Social Development Paula Bennett took their seats at the top table to thunderous applause, electorate chairman and Korakonui farmer Leveson Gower knew his team had a winning hand.

"Once we announced the minister was coming, tickets sold very quickly," said Mr Gower.

More than 280 people each paid \$50 to have dinner with, and be entertained by, Ms Bennett at The Big Apple in Hangatiki, in support of the electorate's new candidate.

Ms Bennett did not disappoint, mixing just the right amount of her 'outrageous', straight-up and self-effacing 'Westie' ex-single mum humour with an impressive array of National stats.

She had the party's bluer-than-blue 'Team Key' dinner guests eating out of her hands.

Just two days before, the minister had laid flowers at Ashburton's Work and Income office in memory of two women shot dead and their colleague seriously injured.

Several people at Thursday's event said the minister showed great character in her handling of the tragedy, then continuing on her pre-election schedule with her typical flair.

Mrs Kuriger said: "The room was buzzing with anticipation before the minister's arrival and people loved meeting her.

"The North King Country gave her a wonderfully warm welcome."

Before addressing the crowd, Ms Bennett said she felt overwhelmed by the large number of people who had come out to hear her speak.

"What a neat bunch of down-to-earth people who tell it like it is," she said.

She described Mrs Kuriger as "one dynamic woman" who would bring a real rural drive to Caucus.

"Barbara is fresh, articulate, energetic and focused, and I'm sure her enthusiasm will make a real differ-

ence," she said.

Speaking on welfare reform, Ms Bennett said the country needs politicians who won't stand by and accept intergenerational welfare-dependence is as good as it gets.

"Having babies young, then complaining you can't feed your kids, is not as good as it gets," she said

"This is a land of opportunity, and I prove that [as a one-time single mother].

"People need a government that believes in their ability to make the most of those opportunities."

She said good results are coming from helping people with low expectations change their perception of themselves, what they believe they can do and what they aspire to.

WELFARE COSTS

Her review of the welfare system showed the lifetime cost of everyone on welfare is \$76 billion – 70% of which is spent on people who went on a benefit as teenagers.

"It was time to reset the clock, have higher expectations of people and remove barriers stopping them giving it a go," said Ms Bennett.

"They are worth more than a lifetime on welfare, and I've changed the system so a teenager can no longer sit back and get a benefit.

"If they're engaged in education or training, they can get bills paid, they get some money on a card for food, but they have to be on a budgeting course and, if they're a parent, on a parenting course. And we give them a mentor to keep them on that path."

She said the result is the lowest number of solo parents on benefits since 1988 and the lowest number of teen mums since the 1960s.

After two years there's been a 54% reduction in the number of teens going on benefits and, in the past four years, the number of teen mums has dropped by 40%.

CANDIDATE SPEAKS

Mrs Kuriger also impressed the audience.

Though new to politics, the Taranaki dairy farmer has served on many regional and community boards and trusts during the past 20 years.

"As your candidate, I have a deep understanding of how our small



TRUE BLUE: National Party Taranaki-King Country candidate Barbara Kuriger (left), Minister of Social Development Paula Bennett and Waitomo mayor Brian Hanna enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere at the party dinner at Hangatiki on Thursday night.

towns tick and am committed to provide strong representation for our community," she said.

"My commitment is to exporters, tourism, businesses, infrastructure, skills training and innovation – because when the economy thrives, the communities' needs such as health, education and law and order can be met.

"We have opportunity when it comes to regional growth and development, and it involves more


productivity in a sustainable way.

"I'll advocate for policies which support a stronger economy, a growing primary sector, and sustainable management of our environment."

Mrs Kuriger said National would continue the roll out of the Rural Broadband Initiative and invest more than \$212 million in regional roads to help companies in Taranaki-King Country take their businesses to the nation and the world.










GOOD VALUE: Cabinet minister Paula Bennett chatted with many of those who each paid \$50 to have dinner with, and be entertained by, her. Ms Bennett did not disappoint.



PRE-ENROLMENT INFORMATION EVENING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Wednesday, September 17, 2014
School Library from 5.30pm–7pm

Te Kuiti High School, Hospital Road, Te Kuiti
P 07 878 6292 E principal@tkhs.school.nz

If you are unable to attend this evening, you are most welcome to make an appointment with a member of the senior management team.