**Hon. Kelvin Davis – Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference, August 2019**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Ngā ingoa, ko au te Pou Whakahaerere o Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga. Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou katoa. Kia orana.

It is lovely to be back here today. But before I go on and do my formal job, I just want to clear up something about the centre of New Zealand, because there was some discussion about that yesterday, and I think some of you got it wrong.

But I'd like to tell you that first thing in the morning, but-- I'm Ngāti Pakeha. Born in Uawa-- used to be called Tolaga Bay. So for those of you from Ngāti Porou area, we know we're the centre of the universes.

I want to thank everybody from yesterday. Because it was truly inspiring to come to an event where so much of what I heard resonated with what we have heard as a Ministry from New Zealanders over the last 18 months or so.

Many of you will be aware that over the last little while, we have engaged in summits, fono, wānanga, online surveys and so forth. And we've engaged with more than 43,000 New Zealanders. And what they have repeatedly told us is that they expect and are looking forward to a system that attends to the well-being of their mokopuna, their tamariki, of ākonga.

And by well-being, they talk about belonging. They talk about commitment and understanding to identity, language, and culture. And so much of what I heard yesterday absolutely went to that issue.

If I could summarise the 43,000 voices we have heard, I would steal some words from Dr. Mere Berryman. When she describes an education system that is communicating to and touching all of our young people, she talks about the need for manaakitanga, the caring of the whole child, caring of the whole person; whanaungatanga, knowing where those children and those young people come from.

Ako-- we heard a lot about ako yesterday-- learning for teaching and teaching for learning. And mahi tahi a strong and united commitment to doing the right thing and in the right direction. Those are her four words. And I think if we can embody those concepts in our system and in our hearts and our minds, we will fundamentally change the system.

And the other thing that I want to thank you for yesterday was your call to action. There is in this room a very strong sense of moral purpose, a social purpose, and an economic purpose for making change. But there's also, that's underpinned by research, evidence data, and perhaps most importantly, student and whanau voice. And that has further underpinned by a relentlessness, not only that we can do this, but we must do this.

And call to action is a very good way for me to introduce the Minister this morning. Minister Davis, as you know, holds many portfolios. As Associate Education portfolio, he has the privilege and the pleasure of listening to lots of policy analysts and lots of policy advisors and receiving multiple papers. And you can imagine how those ministers feel.

And he's one of those studied ministers. And you can tell he's listening really intently. And he's nodding and he's looking, and he just-- this is just listening. And then he says, ah, yeah.

So what's that going to do for Timoti at Kaikohe Intermediate? That's his question. So what difference is this policy going to make? What difference is this action going to make? And how are we going to know? So it is my pleasure to introduce you, Minister, to speak to the group today.

Tēnā koe, Iona. Tēnā tātou katoa. Tātou kua huihui nei i raro i te tuanui o tēnei whare. Kua rongo ake ahau, nā te kaha o te karakia inanahi rā, kei te haere tonu tōna mana. E pai ana tērā. Nā reira, harikoa ana au te tatū ki konei hei kōrero ki a koutou. Kei te mihi hoki ki a koutou mō ngā mahi e mahingia ana e tātou katoa i roto i te ao mātauranga. Nā reira, huri rāuna, tēnā tātou.

Kia ora, everyone. And welcome to day two of our Ōritetanga Learner Success Conference. For visitors to our country, Ōritetanga is an important word. 179 years ago, the very first New Zealanders signed our country's founding document. They named it Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi, because they met at Waitangi in the Bay of Islands, not far from the Kāretu valley where my people Ngāti Manu are from.

And there's a couple of other Ngāti Manus in the house. Kia ora, Robert Henare. Kia ora, Kate Wynyard. Kate, in fact, was-- I taught her when she was in form two when I was a teacher. And so I'm not surprised how well she's doing.

My tūpuna, our tūpuna, mine Roberts’, and Kate. And sorry, someone else had their hand up there. [MAORI] he was my tūpuna. He was my great-great-great-great-grandfather. His name is the third signatory down on Tiriti o Waitangi.

Didn't sign it on the 6th of February. He signed it on about the 16th, I think, of February. And then convinced his good mates, Te Tirarau and Kawiti to sign it as well. And because they did not want their names to be below other rangatira, they put it at the top. Well, good little anecdote there. I just thought I'd share it.

Anyway, the Treaty’s third article promised Māori New Zealanders the same rights as all other New Zealanders. It promised equity, or as we call it in te reo Māori, Ōritetanga. So this week's meeting is about Ōritetanga for all New Zealanders, not just some New Zealanders, not just the same New Zealanders, but Ōritetanga for all New Zealanders.

So I grew up in a small town, barely 20 minutes’ drive from Waitangi called Kawakawa. Right now, more than 90 percent of the town's high school students are Māori teenagers who whakapapa to their local iwi. More than 80 percent of all households there earn less than $70,000 a year. In fact, almost 30 percent of all households earn less than $30,000 a year.

Life is not easy in Kawakawa. But there are some really amazing people there. The local college has won national vocational education awards. But we can support them more.

My vision of Ōritetanga for Kawakawa and all other communities like it, is for the young people there to look at the major infrastructure projects taking place across the region, and to aspire to be designing those projects, not just digging them; to be aspiring to manage tourist resorts over at Paihia and own them, not just to clean them; and to be supported by our vocational education system every step of the way.

This is what Ōritetanga Learner Success is about. Because over generations, New Zealand's education system has consistently failed to serve Māori learners. And I can say that hand on my heart, because I was an educator for 20 years before I entered politics.

So one in three Māori young people leave school with zero qualifications. There are also many Māori school leavers who head off with NCEA level 3, and even University Entrance. But even after that, they don't appear anywhere else on our tertiary education system.

They're not in university. They're not in wānanga. They're not in polytechnics. And they're not in apprenticeships. And often, as the Minister of Corrections, that's where I see them, sadly.

We think many are probably heading straight to work, as our economy is strong. But they'll be the first to suffer if the economy slows. They need a trade or a tertiary qualification to future-proof them and their whanau.

With the changing nature of work, the significant role of automation and technology, we cannot afford to let this continue. That is why we are working on making the system work better for learners.

We are replacing a competition-based vocational education system with one based on collaboration. We are recognising the unique challenges learners face, and will wrap support around them, so they are not facing these challenges on their own.

When you're the first in your entire family to sign up for tertiary study, your social capital will be far less than someone who has generations of family members with degrees and qualifications. Our reforms will create Workforce Development Councils. They will ensure a stronger connection between what students learn and what jobs are needed.

Regional Leadership Groups will ensure local community’s needs are met. And we're also launching New Zealand's first Māori-Crown national tertiary education group to Te Taumata Aronui, recognising iwi and Māori as key partners now and into the future.

Iwi and Māori will always be part of the New Zealand economy, and they always have been. They are some of the few participants in education and labour market discussions that are thinking intergenerationally, and how the system works as a whole. This is the Māori -Crown partnership we want to manage through this group.

What is important for us to remember is that any people-- sorry-- is that if any people can say that learning defines who we are, it is Polynesian people. The ancestors of Māori and Pacific New Zealanders were the world's first ocean-going navigators, designing and crafting long-range, ocean-going vessels thousands of years before other humans even dared. They looked to the stars and the winds, and used astro-navigation to guide entire civilisations across the world's biggest ocean.

Our tupuna learned by doing, and over many generations discovered and settled a third of the surface of the planet. They learned as they went. They innovated as they learnt.

The late Sir Hekenukumai Busby, Aotearoa’s greatest master navigator in modern times, was asked once why he was willing to use modern tools to cut the profile of a waka. And he turned around and said, if Māori had these tools in the old days, they would use them, too.

Audacious, courageous, ingenious, but constantly learning, working out how to do things better, faster, more efficiently-- this is our legacy. Education excellence isn't something for our peoples to just strive for. It is something for us to return to.

But our families can't just change the future on their own. We know our education system has not served us well. In so many ways, it has failed our whanau. That is why we are making major vocational education reforms to place our people and those who need our support the most right at the very centre.

Automation is changing the world of work, and we need our families to be prepared for the future. We are talking about a reskilling revolution, and beginning by unifying our vocational sector. Our reforms are about empowering our communities and whanau, strengthening and safeguarding polytechnics and apprenticeship systems, addressing a longstanding skills shortage, and creating better opportunities.

We're focused on making vocational education more responsible to regional and to iwi needs. Now's a great time to enrol at polytech or apply for an apprenticeship. Employers are crying out for skilled workers. The jobs are there.

By unifying our regional campuses, we are opening up the potential for more learning opportunities. The future goal is to utilise the potential of our country's entire network of polytechnics to serve students right across Aotearoa.

Importantly, our-- excuse me-- our commitment to regional New Zealand and our ahi kā families will be passed into law. In coming months, we will introduce legislation giving present and future generations a guarantee that successive Governments will preserve a strong network of regional campuses and delivery.

Many of our whānau members head to study later in life. So our system needs to also target second-chance learners and adult students. Those of us from the regions know how hard it is to keep our people working and living at home. The urban drift isn't new, and now it isn't just restricted to Aotearoa as we see thousands of our relations head overseas for work and opportunities.

And yet, across New Zealand, regional economies are booming and growing, as well as tradies, we need more technicians. We need more teachers. We need more trained and skilled farm workers, processors, fitters, and turners.

We have a building boom, as well as a nationwide skills shortage, and our vocational training system has not been able to keep up. For Māori New Zealanders, our $50 billion taniwha economy is roaring. But shareholders want our own young people educated, skilled, and able to take up the leadership roles. The paradox is that too often rangatahi have to leave home if they want to get the skills needed to work in their tribe's kiwi fruit, dairy, or honey business.

And the industry training and polytechnics systems we are changing have failed to keep up with the pace of iwi development. The existing funding system doesn't enable polytechnics to provide small, short-term programs for iwi to train up their own people to run their own assets. We see this right across the country. It is a block to iwi development, and its a block to New Zealand's regional development.

The world has changed since Māori first began heading for the cities. Automation has transformed the jobs our people compete for. We need to future-proof our learners, so they are ready, skilled, and prepared.

As our iwi businesses grow and diversify, we need to ensure our young people have the opportunities to train in the disciplines needed so that they can run them. I recently heard the story of a student who grew up going to hui with his elders as a youngster, and an enduring memory was how all the business experts running the businesses were the only people who weren't members of his tribe. So this needs to change. It needs to change for our next generation, and our reforms are about making that change real.

Succession planning starts with making the system work, and upskilling our young people for the future. So today's speakers will share with us insights about how policy, funding, and leadership need to support the goal of Ōritetanga for all New Zealanders.

And I would like to recognise our manuhiri from Georgia, Professor Tim Renick. He spoke yesterday, and Dr. Tristian-- Tristan, sorry-- Denley who will address you this morning.

And in closing, I'd like to remember a young Māori boy whose people also came from Kawakawa. His name was Bob Henare. He was fascinated by trains since he was small. Bob went on to become one of the first Māori New Zealanders to graduate with an engineering degree. He went on to become our country's chief civil engineer, and the first Māori person to head a state owned enterprise.

This little boy from Ngā Puhi and Ngāti Hine ended up overseeing the electrification of the entire North Island main trunk line-- trunk rail line. He helped design Auckland Harbour Bridge. His story is one of Ōritetanga.

In closing, I'd like to quote Sir James Henare, Bob's uncle, and-- Bob's your uncle-- Bob's uncle, and iconic leader from our Tai Tokerau region. So Sir James Henare, and you probably all know this, Ko tawhiti kē tō tātou haerenga mai kia kore e haere tonu, kua tino nui rawa ō mahi kia kore e mahi nui tonu. You have come too far not to go further. You have done too much not to do more. Nō reira, e tātou mā, huri rāuna i te whare, harikoa ana te tūtaki i a koutou. Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tenā koutou, tenā tātou katoa.

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