



Read our CEO, Jonny Wilkinson's regular column in

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"A different Light"

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Ardern gallops in to save election

Just when I thought the general election was going to be fantastically boring, just when I was really starting to fret about the public turnout to the Tiaho Trust "Meet the Candidates" event, just when I thought New Zealand politics was becoming painfully predictable, My Little Pony gallops past the post with seven weeks to go.

Yes, Jacinda Ardern, MP for Mt Albert, has been elected unopposed as the new leader of the Labour Party.



Kelvin Davis, MP for Te Tai Tokerau, has been boosted to the position of deputy leader. (By the way, thank you Judith Collins for the little pony epitaph which just fits Ardern's unique blend of horsey goodness.)

I met Jacinda years ago at Waitangi. It was a high tea event for the Governor-General during the Waitangi Day celebrations and she held my wine glass for me while I siphoned the contents through a straw. I found her very biddable at the time.

Thank you Judith Collins for the little pony epitaph which just fits Ardern's unique blend of horsey goodness.

Now, when I think of the standing candidates in Northland, we actually have some real heavy hitters.

That is going to make the election in our neck of the woods particularly compelling to be engaged with. We have Winston Peters, New Zealand First leader, standing in the Far North, Shane Jones making a comeback from a hiatus of flouncing with the fisheries in the Islands, Kelvin Davis fast becoming the silver fox of Northland politics, not to mention the doctor, the lawyer and the organic candlestick maker.

If all the standing candidates we have invited to our Meet the Candidates event at Forum North (August 18 at 1pm) show up the disabled community of Northland will have a chance to hear what these players have to say about disability issues in the region and what they will do to address them.

Now, on a completely different note, and speaking of Waitangi, I was at the Bay of Islands Copthorne Hotel again just the other week.

Some of you may remember me bleating about the inaccessibility of the Copthorne in my column in May?

Well, I'm very happy to declare the Copthorne Hotel has remedied the issue by building a practical and aesthetically pleasing ramp from the main restaurant area down to the bar and pool complex/courtyard beyond.

Big ups to the hotel and Tai Tokerau Maori Trust Board!

I wanted to take a photo of me happily traversing the new accessibility friendly feature but alas my scooter wasn't up to it.

Sally and I had made a pilgrimage from Waitangi to Paihia. Me on my mobility scooter, Sally on foot.

After killing time for what seemed like hours in a café (drinking merlot and eating crab dip), Sally arrived back from satisfying her need for an elongated shopping spree and announced she was going to have an hour long massage.

Enough was enough: I decided to head back to the hotel solo. With dark clouds amassing and thunder rolling nearby, I set off with a vaguely disconcerted feeling about the longevity of my scooter's battery life.

The inevitable happened. The scooter started petering out on the way back. Right at the end of the return home, on the Waitangi Bridge, in the middle of a torrential downpour the battery totally gave up, leaving me stranded, dripping wet, feeling depraved and, at that moment in time, isolated.

I hope that on August 18 that our now rather spectacular line-up of standing candidates haven't petered out with their campaigning and that they have something powerful left in the tank to inspire us.

So let's have a great turnout of electors interested in disability issues and hold these guys to account - 'cos you don't want to see the disabled community left out in the rain. I tell you being depraved and isolated ain't pretty. Giddy Up!

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability: A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei-based disability advocacy organisation.