

Tribute to Rob McLeod
New Zealand Business Roundtable Annual Retreat 2011
Dr Roderick Deane

Everyone here this evening knows Rob McLeod. Yet while many of us have been privileged to be his friend over many years, I suspect few people appreciate the amazing depth and breadth of his career, his personal interests, and of most importance his outstanding leadership in many spheres.

We know him as Rob McLeod, CEO of Australia's "Accounting Firm of the Year", and previously as CEO of Ernst and Young in New Zealand, and before that Managing Partner of Arthur Andersons. He is one of New Zealand's leading tax practitioners, highly expert not just as an adviser to clients but also as a formative influence on New Zealand's tax system through Chairmanship of the McLeod Tax Review in 2001 and a wide array of important subsequent reviews.

I know about the award EY won in Australia since when we were at the Barber of Seville opera at the Sydney Opera House a few nights ago, who should pop up but Rob with a splendid full page photo of him in the programme.

But do you know that Rob has been a member of the Waitangi Fisheries Commission, a Director of Telecom, Sky City, ANZ National Bank, Sealord, Tainui Group Holdings, Aotearoa Fisheries, Gulliver Travel Group, to name just some, and he has sat on Government task forces or advisory groups ranging from defence to tertiary education to infrastructure to capital markets to Maori economic development. He is a trusted adviser to various Maori groups and trusts and to some of NZ's wealthiest families. He is the Lead Negotiator for Ngati Porou in its treaty settlement.

Beyond that he loves NZ and owns a large chunk of the spectacularly beautiful seashore at Kennedy Bay. Rob is a keen fisherman, something of a technology guru, and he has over 8,000 entries for his family whakapapa or genealogy on his PC going back many hundreds of years.

Rob is of course part Maori, at precisely 43.75 % (62.5 % for his Father, 25 % for his Mother, add them together and divide by 2), in keeping with the fine tradition of other leading members of the NZBR such as Dean Bracewell and our former Chairman Sir Ralph Norris, so we decided tonight to surround him at our table with some of his Maori brethren, including Sir Gil's wife Joy, Lady Simpson, who is one sixteenth Maori, as is my wife Gillian, Shane Jones who can only claim 25 % Maori heritage and his wife Ngareta, who does much better than that I am sure.

All of this suited him unusually well to be the Chairman of the NZ Business Roundtable for 8 years, 2002 to 2010, longer than any of his predecessors.

We have been uniquely fortunate to have Rob in that hugely important leadership role, where he easily encompassed both the Maori and Pakeha worlds, the Labour and National political camps, the corporate and government sectors.

In the role of Chairman, Rob brought to bear high intelligence, a great grasp of economics, well tuned and very experienced commercial instincts, a strong liberal persuasion and a distaste of undue regulatory interventions, an ability to get along with all manner of people, an impressive network of

friends and colleagues, and innovative and compelling leadership skills. He knows how to listen and he is a powerful advocate.

Rob McLeod is a gifted man of many parts.

Some of my warmest memories of Rob and Joanne are many walks along the beach at Kennedy Bay, our visits to the beautifully carved Marae at the Bay, eating crayfish together with their extended family, visiting their family and friends, listening to Rob play the piano and sing with his great friend Sir Howard Morrison, and visiting Te Ahu Ahu (or Mercury) Island together.

I know Rob would like me to extend this tribute also to his family who are of great importance in his life. Joanne is here tonight and I would like to thank her too for allowing us to use Rob in the frontline and for all the wonderful support she and the three boys provide for him. Joanne is one of the world's very special people and a wonderful friend to many of us here. I should mention that their son Kent last year was runner-up in the World Schools Robotics Championship, so it is reassuring to know the genes continue down the line in such good shape. It is a pity Kent, Lee and Adam could not be here tonight to hear these tributes to the Father.

So Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a real privilege to be able publicly and very warmly to thank Rob for leading the NZ Business Roundtable through thick and thin, through good times and demanding times, to have always done that with real strength, integrity and commitment to what is best for NZ, and to have made such a vital contribution across many spheres to improved economic policy and a better country for all of us.

Thank you Rob.

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Roger Kerr

It's hard to follow Shane and Roderick, but I wouldn't want this occasion to pass without paying both a personal and public tribute to Rob.

As Roderick has said, Rob holds the record for years in the chair, but he was also at our helm during a period which was somewhat less than conducive to uptake of our ideas.

To my mind Rob typifies what Thomas Paine described in 1776 as a "winter soldier".

Shortly after the Declaration of Independence and the start of the Revolutionary War, Paine wrote: *These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country. But he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.*

Rob, you deserve huge credit for keeping your head above the parapets when others ducked for cover, keeping our membership in good heart and, as Roderick said, traversing the political spectrum, Maoridom and the public and private sectors.

From my point of view, Rob was the ideal leader and 'face' for our times: courageous, highly articulate and intelligent, an intellectual, and a man of candour, humour, and great personal warmth.

As you know, Rob has a serious understanding of and interest in economics, and one of the most enjoyable aspects of his tenure for me personally was the intellectual rigour and insight he brought to any discussion.

Where we had issues, we were able to work through them, and cemented what I hope will be a lifelong friendship.

While it was sometimes hard to find humour in some of the challenges we faced, Rob always managed to, and his analogies about the Roundtable were always highly amusing.

I recall US economist William Easterly once said economics is all about incentives. I know Rob shares that view and has a great store of parables and riddles to illustrate the point. I recall he got one of our Dunes Public Policy forums off to a great start with a tale of David Friedman's (son of Milton Friedman) that goes like this:

Two Bedouins roll out of a bar one afternoon and set off on their camels through the desert. One of them starts complaining about how slow their camel is. The other responds that theirs is slower still – the slowest in Arabia. They get into an argument and finally make a bet on which camel is the slower. The oasis is three miles off and they agree that the person whose camel gets to the oasis last wins the bet.

You can see what happens. One of the Bedouins goes slowly, the other goes more slowly, then the first one goes more slowly still. An hour later there are the two Bedouins are sitting stock still on their camels in the middle of the blazing hot desert.

At this point, a wise man comes by and asks them why they are sitting in the hot sun when the oasis is only two miles off. They get off their camels to explain the situation. The wise man whispers two words and the Bedouins leap back on the camels and race for the oasis. The riddle is: what are the two words?

The answer to the riddle is, of course, 'switch camels' – a great example of how, if you change the rules of the game and so the incentives, can eliminate the problem of market failure.

Catherine and I had the great pleasure of seeing Rob receive the award from Auckland University of Maori Business leader of the year, surrounded by his family, who I know are very special to Rob. And I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Joanne for her very

friendly and staunch support of our events and for tolerating the additional drain on Rob's time.

In closing, I would just like to make the point that the role of chairman of the Business Roundtable is not a paid one. And for someone of Rob's calibre, especially during the times he did not have a lot of back office support and held several heavyweight directorships -- and later, back at EY, with a huge client workload along many government task forces,-- it was a big ask.

So Rob, it was a real privilege to work with you, and I thank you most sincerely for your time, your great contribution to our work, your personal guidance and support, and your friendship.

Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses in a toast to a real winter soldier, Rob McLeod.