

VINNIE WYLIE

My time at Youth Parliament 2007

Parliament is a place very few people understand. The public are often quick to judge MPs and very quick to criticise. Part of this criticism comes from a lack of understanding. This is what I relished most about my time at Youth Parliament 2007 – understanding. Understanding select committees and their functions, understanding rules and protocols in the chamber and simply understanding the maze that is Parliament.

I thought I knew what a select committee was but I was wrong. Youth Parliament exposed me to the rigours of the select committee process. I discovered how frustrating it can be for many MPs who find so much time and effort spent reading, analysing and debating submissions – all to file a report to the house which consists of recommendations that may or may not be taken on board by the government. All this time and effort condensed down to a mere three minute spiel.

What I have come to appreciate in my time at Youth Parliament 2007 is that Parliament is a place of work. Endless hours of research, debate and discussion for what often seems like no reward. I appreciated the rare chance of being able to talk one on one and in groups with New Zealand's major decision makers and discovering what got them into politics, what issues they're most passionate about and why. From behind the television screen you are limited as to what you actually see of Parliament and its workings. You may hear what Duncan Garner or Guyon Espiner think about an issue but very rarely do you get to hear about Section 59 for example or tax cuts at length, unedited from a Helen Clark or a John Key. So yes, absolutely, one thing I loved about Youth Parliament 2007 was being given the unique opportunity to talk about – and debate – the issues of the moment with those that actually make the laws and have the power to enforce change. Its one thing to sway your mum or dad as to why perhaps Kiwisaver is a good concept but it's quite something else to be able to voice that opinion to the Minister of Finance himself and know that the next time he sits down in cabinet he may still have that argument in the back of his mind. A pipe dream perhaps but hey, it's possible.

Youth Parliament 2007 also taught me something that Parliament is a place for people who want to make a difference. Everyone has opinions but only a select few ever make the effort to put their dreams and beliefs into action. Sitting in the chamber I appreciated the importance of the issues at hand: New Zealand's response to the threat of Climate Change for one. MPs are debating *real* laws and changes to Aotearoa that will make a *real* difference. Decades on we still talk of how Richard Seddon broke up the great estates; of how we gave Women the vote before any other; of how Michael Joseph Savage created the Welfare State for the disadvantaged and of how New Zealand dug its toes in against popular opinion and declared itself Nuclear Free. These are changes that still resonate in 2007 and Youth Parliament showed me the processes necessary to go about making these changes.

I loved knowing that when I and my peers spoke in the house MPs were listening. Our MPs were listening to the youth of New Zealand. I loved debating the issues in select committees and in the house that I know are the very issues being raised at Question Time and in Cabinet. I loved having

the opportunity to argue with MPs about issues close my heart– they may not have always agreed but they did listen. I loved having the chance to see Parliament from the inside out as opposed to the outside in. I saw it in a different light and my time at Youth Parliament has given me a greater understanding of how and why things happen. I also learnt to be more vocal – if you don't make your voice heard no one will. It's about taking initiative.

Youth Parliament reaffirmed my desire to be active politically in New Zealand but more importantly it showed me that you didn't have to be an MP to contribute. I'm already a member of a political party but now I am enthused about becoming more deeply involved. I want to write a submission to a select committee and campaign actively in my local electorate and community. I know now that the time is indeed now. I can make a contribution to New Zealand and Youth Parliament has shown me how to do that. It's time to put the words into action. (785 words)

New Zealand Business and Parliament Trust

2007 Youth Parliament Essay Competition

Vinnie Wylie