Stand Up Otago: Together we’re stronger! I’ve had some fun spreading the message via an aeroplane banner, and in support of local events like these.

Come and hear Hon. David Cunliffe, and meet the whole Labour caucus.

WHERE  Toitu | Otago Settlers Museum
WHEN    5:30pm Monday 7 October

RSVP would be helpful for catering purposes
Labour party members elect a new leader

I look forward to seeing David Cunliffe as Labour Prime Minister in 2014. He has my support 100%. I’ll explain why.

The recently concluded leadership race was fought rigorously, vigorously and transparently. Everyone involved in the process signed up to it because it was a fair and robust process. No-one can question the outcome.

We know David Cunliffe fought the strongest campaign – not least because he won. And he won handsomely.

Having reflected on the local meeting I attended at King’s and Queen’s High School auditorium, I have a couple of lasting impressions, for those not close to the party who might fail to understand how transformative this process has been.

First, it was evident to those gathered the trio worked well together on stage. They travelled together and lived in each other’s pockets for two weeks. As they swapped notes and joked on stage about who got to deliver which punchline, it was evident that the three of them were cementing the kinds of bonds necessary to take the party forward in a united fashion.

Second, Party members arrived in a serious mood; it was clear people arriving carried a burden of responsibility in their decision-making. This contrasted starkly with their demeanour upon departure. More than a few members privately confided relief afterwards – they were impressed by the talent on hand and now felt a bad choice could not be made.

It is no secret that I supported Grant Robertson in the contest. But now that contest is over. There is a more important one ahead. Labour needs to beat John Key. For the sake of all New Zealanders.
New Labour Caucus unified behind David Cunliffe

David Cunliffe promised, and has delivered, a new-look caucus line-up. My portfolios have changed. I have retained the Small Business spokesperson role, have regained the role as Revenue spokesperson, and have also been made associate spokesperson for Finance and Health. I look forward to working closely with David Parker in Finance, and former Health Minister Annette King in Health.

Dunedin North Electorate Christmas Party

It’s nearly Christmas-time. I’d like to invite you all to come to the Leith Bowling Club on November 24 for the annual Dunedin North Christmas barbeque from 4pm.

Northern school bus service all but eradicated under National

School bus services in the Blueskin Bay area have taken another blow, with a reduction in availability of paid services for those who’ve already lost access to a previously universal free service.

However, the schools that are being negatively impacted by this are vowing to not stop fighting.

Both Otago Boys’ High School and Otago Girls’ High School intend to continue fighting the Ministry’s changes.

Otago Girls’ principal Linda Miller says: “My goal is for our students to have equitable access to school transport i.e. the same access that the integrated schools enjoy. The current regime is discriminatory, valuing faith-based schools over state schools. This is inherently unfair.”

The changes have even impacted on a handful of families with children who are pupils at Balmacewen Intermediate School.

Principal Andrew Hunter says the school is working to help the affected families.

“Five or six families face an unacceptable increase in the cost of getting children to the school of their choice.

“To be landed with this halfway through the year has been quite stressful,” he said.

Natural justice would dictate that at very least, those currently enrolled will be supported with the same service throughout their schooling.

For no or minimal savings, the Government is reducing school choices. It is picking winners and losers on the basis of the colour of their school uniform.

Government needs to rethink Invermay decision

In a decision announced in the last week of September, the Crown Research Institute has said its ‘current plan’ is to shift 82 jobs from a highly functional agriculture productivity hub centred in and around Dunedin, to a non-existent one in Lincoln.

Leaked internal documents clearly illustrate that it is in the national interest to grow businesses around Invermay, not kill them off. This is not just a story about Dunedin – it is a story about NZ’s future agricultural production.

They’ve either not read the case for keeping Invermay intact, haven’t understood it, or aren’t interested in outcomes for the country as a whole. New Zealand will (literally) be the poorer if this decision is allowed to stand.

In AgResearch’s last corporate Statement of Intent, Bill English as shareholding Minister signed off on a new footprint for AgResearch that clearly foreshadowed the subsequent announcement on Dunedin job cuts.

On the face of it, either Bill English was happy to sacrifice rural productivity in the South for other Cabinet wins, or he was simply outmanoeuvred by Steven Joyce.

Not only would a highly productive local hub of students, researchers and successful companies be destroyed, but the costs of building a new one (north of the $17 million to build the current facility, which was built to state-of-the-art specifications just five years ago) will be borne (all over again!) by the taxpayer. The proposed shift to Lincoln represents a phenomenal waste of taxpayer money.

Whatever the case, I would be first in line to congratulate the Government if it had a serious rethink.
Health Centre losing up to $1500 a month

Servants Health Centre in Princes Street caters to some of the neediest people in Dunedin.

The centre was recently in the news, as it could not continue beyond the next few years if current funding arrangements didn’t change.

The practice runs on the smell of an oily rag. The centre does not have enough income to cover modest administrative overheads, rent, heating and ongoing clinical costs.

Doctors and nurses at the centre are all volunteers. So they can’t take salary cuts.

The doctors and nurses at Servants typically work elsewhere and donate half a day per week to the centre.

Nor is Servants focused on the issues of the worried well. Instead it is focused on the most needy, marginalised people - aged between 15 and 24, likely to be out of work, often with mental health issues and living in poverty. These are the patients that can’t afford to attend other centres, and without Servants would not otherwise access primary care.

The question must be asked: what is the Government doing to support services like Servants Health Centre that practise holistic care and meet the needs of lower socio-economic groups who can’t pay for care?

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Free Dunedin GP service Servants Health Centre is running a $1000 to $1500 monthly deficit. This is unsustainable.

The doctors and nurses at Servants typically work elsewhere and donate half a day per week to the centre.

The practice as a whole has 500 patients on the books. The real need is much greater.

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