

POLITICS (/NEWS/POLITICAL)

Former Labour Finance Minister Grant Robertson to retire from politics in March

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Photo: RNZ / Angus Dreaver

Labour has confirmed former Finance Minister Grant Robertson will retire from Parliament next month.

He is expected to take up the position of Vice Chancellor of the University of Otago, and will be replaced as the party's Finance spokesperson by Barbara Edmonds.

In a statement, Robertson said he was extremely grateful for the privilege of being an MP for the last 15 years, and to be a minister had been an "enormous honour".

"The chance to make a positive difference in the lives of New Zealanders in this way is not afforded to many people. I have given absolutely everything I have had to these roles, but now is the right time for me to move on to a new set of opportunities and challenges," he said.

He said he had been fortunate to serve alongside Jacinda Ardern and Chris Hipkins as prime ministers and had a huge admiration for how they performed their roles.

"I know I leave a Labour caucus in good heart, with strong leadership and a clear focus on the issues that matter to New Zealanders."

He said the role of Vice Chancellor at the University of Otago was "very special".

"The University gave me such a fantastic start in my life and career, and the opportunity to give back is an exciting prospect."

Leader Chris Hipkins earlier fuelled speculation about Robertson's retirement, refusing to confirm him in the Finance role despite repeated questioning.

Heading into the morning's caucus meeting, Hipkins had confirmed there would be "some portfolio changes coming this week ... there'll be some changes".

Asked who he would like as his finance spokesperson at the next election, he said "you're just going to have to wait a bit longer".

However, he did say Deborah Russell would remain as the Revenue Spokesperson right through until the election, but "I am not going to make any announcements on behalf of anybody else".

The reshuffle comes after Kelvin Davis and Rino Tirikatene announced late last year they would be bowing out of politics, allowing both Shanan Halbert and Tracey McLellan to return to Parliament this year.

Robertson had indicated after the election he would stick around to help transition the caucus from government to opposition, but said he was only committing to Parliament on a month-by-month basis.

He stood down from his Wellington Central seat at the last election, making any decision to leave much easier as it would not prompt a by-election.

It also follows a 1News-Verian poll which saw Labour as a party gain slightly, but Hipkins' personal popularity took a 10-point tumble on the preferred prime minister ratings.

Hipkins has played down that drop, saying it was to be expected.

"I fully expected that my preferred prime minister rating would go down, I'm not the prime minister now, I'm not on the TV news every night doing things as you are, as prime minister," he said.

"If you look at every opposition leader initially after an election they won't be rating where the prime minister is.