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# 'Bob the builder' thanks Brethren

5:00AM Sunday August 03, 2008

Retiring National MP Bob "the builder" Clarkson has gone out the way he came in – delivering his trademark straight-talking to the party's annual conference.

Clarkson yesterday admitted he had received help from the Exclusive Brethren in his battle to wrest the Tauranga seat from New Zealand First leader Winston Peters at the 2005 election.

Association with the Brethren, which waged an initially covert \$1.3 million campaign against Labour, damaged National in the final weeks of the election campaign and the party has tried to distance itself from the sect since.

But that didn't stop Clarkson bringing the skeleton out of the closet. In thanking National's five retiring MPs, president Judy Kirk said the party was proud of Clarkson for defeating Peters.

Clarkson replied: "I'd be a bit remiss if I didn't say some of the help in Tauranga, I'll upset Judy in saying it, we got help from 150 Brethrens."

The announcement was greeted by nervous laughter. National has said it will not accept help from the church at this year's election.

Others retiring are Rakaia MP Brian Connell and list MPs Clem Simich, Mark Blumsky and Katherine Rich.

– NZPA

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