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## Clarkson reanimates Exclusive Brethren ghosts

**NZPA**

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Bob Clarkson

Retiring National MP Bob "the builder" Clarkson has gone out the way he came in -- delivering a dose of his trade-mark straight talking to the party's annual conference.

Mr Clarkson today admitted he had received the help of 150 Exclusive Brethren members in his epic battle to wrest the Tauranga seat from New Zealand First leader Winston Peters at the 2005 election.

Association with the brethren, who waged an initially covert \$1.3 million campaign against Labour, damaged National in the final weeks of the election campaign and the party has done everything in its power to distance itself from the sect ever since.

But that didn't stop Mr Clarkson, who has won a reputation for straight talking in his time in Parliament, to bring their skeleton out of the closet.

In thanking National's five retiring MPs today president Judy Kirk said the party would always be proud of Mr Clarkson for defeating Mr Peters.

In reply Mr Clarkson said he had received help from the brethren in getting there.

"I'd be a little bit amiss if I didn't say some of the help in Tauranga -- I'll upset Judy in saying it -- we got help from 150 brethren."

The announcement was greeted by slightly stunned and nervous laughter.

Many National MPs have admitted they were approached by the brethren with offers of help in their electorate campaigns. Some have said they refused their help, while others have said it was unwittingly accepted.

National has said it will not accept help from the church at this year's election.

National's other retiring MPs are Rakaia MP Brian Connell and list MPs Clem Simich, Mark Blumsky and Katherine Rich.

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