

UNITED FUTURE ACHIEVEMENTS to 14 June 2005

Stability

- By April 2004, United Future's confidence and supply agreement with Labour had already outlasted the ill-fated National-NZ First coalition 1996-1998.
- By 29 March 2005, United Future's confidence and supply agreement with Labour had outlasted the Labour-Alliance government that was supported by the Greens (1999-2002).

Families

- Secured \$28 million of funding over four years and the passage of legislation to establish the Families Commission, which will ensure that all government legislation will be tested for its impact on families (*as per the supply and confidence agreement*).
- Ensured that Family Support payments and family tax credits are indexed to the cost of living from 1 April 2004.
- Secured another \$230,000 over the next two years to extend the social workers in schools programme (2004 Budget).
- Convinced the government to take the first steps towards improvements in family income assistance as part of the 2003 Budget, comprising \$59 million over four years.
- Contributed to the extension of the government's Working for Families 2004 budget package to middle-income families, and the creation of a gap between working families and those on a welfare benefit through the in-work payment; over \$1.1 billion per annum when fully implemented.
- Secured a \$47 million boost for early intervention programmes aimed at children and families in greatest need, including Family Start, and parenting education and support (2005 Budget).
- Successfully lobbied for study awards for NGO staff studying towards social work degrees, to help overcome shortages of social workers (2005 Budget).
- Ensured that the paid parental leave scheme will be extended from 1 April 2006 to provide for 14 weeks income replacement to women who have been self-employed for at least six months immediately preceding the birth or adoption of a child. An estimated 2173 self-employed people will take paid parental leave each year, at a cost of \$8 million (2005 Budget).
- Ensured that the government is increasing funding for the Orphans'/Unsupported Child's Benefit by \$8 million, as part of the Working for Families package (2005 Budget).
- Helped family members, such as grandparents, facing legal costs with regard to assuming guardianship of children by supporting changes to legal aid eligibility income thresholds to increase the number of New Zealanders who are potentially eligible for legal aid to 1.2 million, up from the current 765,000 (2005 Budget).
- Secured \$6.2 million over the next four years to run nationwide education programmes through the Family Court to help separating parents reduce conflict and the stress that separation can cause for their children (2005 Budget).

Law and Order

- Ensured that the long-delayed Victims' Rights Bill, welcomed by victims' rights support groups throughout the country, could be passed (*as per the supply and confidence agreement*).
- Lobbied for an increase in funding for Victim Support, which subsequently received an additional \$2 million in the 2003 budget to establish a new district structure.
- Convinced the Government to amend censorship legislation to clarify and re-establish the censors' ability to classify lurid images of young children through the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Amendment Bill.
- Amended the Consumer Credit Bill to increase the maximum prison sentence handed down to convicted perpetrators of property buy-back schemes from 3 months to 12 months.

- Ensured the passage of the long-awaited Boy Racer legislation under urgency after it had been held-up through a lack of parliamentary support.
- Secured \$4.4 million over the next four years for restorative justice initiatives, in an effort to support successful programmes that reduce future demand for spending on police and corrections services (2004 Budget).
- Secured another \$1.5 million in funding for victims' support groups (2004 Budget).
- Strengthened the provisions of legislation that compels convicted criminals to provide DNA samples, through the addition of a whole range of offences to capture those on the trajectory of violent criminality (e.g. sexual offences, firearm offences, willful damage).
- Convinced the Government to bring about legislation making sex offences gender-neutral, following several high profile cases of older women taking advantage of young boys.
- Convinced the Government to introduce a new offence of 'grooming' for paedophiles who target children for sexual activity, punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment.
- Successfully lobbied for increased funding of the Police of \$73.6 million to provide an estimated additional 245 positions in the 2005-06 year, taking Police numbers to over 10,000 for the first time (including non-sworn staff) (2005 Budget).
- Secured a further boost to Police youth services capability, allowing Police to introduce more youth aid staff and provide better supervision of youth service operations (2005 Budget).
- Secured an extra \$4.4 million over four years to boost services for former inmates reintegrating into the community (2005 Budget).

Education

- Initiated a select committee inquiry into the implementation of the NCEA qualifications system.
- Lobbied successfully for more money for schools and NZQA to implement NCEA, to overcome the deficiencies identified by the select committee inquiry (2003 Budget).
- Secured another \$66 million over the next four years for schools' operations grants (2004 Budget).
- Successfully lobbied for an increase in the parental income thresholds for student allowances, thereby widening eligibility for allowances for an estimated 36,000 students. The ultimate impact of this measure will be to reduce reliance on the student loan scheme and the long-term burden that creates.
- Successfully lobbied for foundation work to begin on a voluntary savings scheme for tertiary education (2005 Budget).
- Secured a bonding scheme that provides 500 scholarships for tertiary students each year in return for a period of work in New Zealand after graduation as long as the duration of their scholarship (2005 Budget).
- Secured \$6 million to expand Modern Apprenticeships – providing an additional 500 Modern Apprenticeship places, bringing the total number to 9000 by December 2006 (2005 Budget).
- Secured \$7 million to fund foundation learning in the workplace, specifically for literacy and numeracy.
- Secured additional funding of \$22 million per school year from 1 January 2006 to increase schools' operational funding by 2.4 percent. Four Year Total \$77.776m.

Drugs

- Ensured that the Government has not moved to change the legal status of cannabis, despite the obvious agenda of many Government MPs to do so (*as per the supply and confidence agreement*).

- Secured a further \$39 million over the next four years to fight the methamphetamine scourge (2004 Budget).
- Locked in the current legal status of cannabis (and other drugs) by amending the current law so that they can only be loosened by Parliament after full scrutiny, rather than simply by ministerial sign-off.

Health

- Convinced the Government to launch a probe into the recent deaths of patients on waiting lists at Wellington Hospital at a time when the private Wakefield Hospital had spare capacity.
- Successfully lobbied for a Ministry of Health study into the effects of spraying for the painted apple moth for those who live in the spray zones.
- Secured \$250 million extra over the next four years for mental health, to ensure that the government maintains its commitment to the Mental Health Commission's blueprint (2004 Budget).
- Secured additional funding for the further roll-out of the Blueprint for Mental Health to 2008-09, at a cost of \$22 million a year (a total increase of \$222 million over the next four years) (2005 Budget).
- Secured an additional \$70 million over the next four years to fund priority health research and to strengthen the health research workforce (2005 Budget).

Transport

- Worked closely with the government to ensure that the Land Transport Management legislation provides local communities with the option to bypass Transfund and seek alternative funding for major projects that will help to unclog congestion (*as per the supply and confidence agreement*).
- Ensured that the Land Transport Management legislation required Transit New Zealand to take economic efficiency into account when deciding on roading projects.
- Ensured that a greater proportion of the revenue collected nationally from the petrol excise tax will be distributed on a regional basis. The entire five cents per litre of new petrol excise tax has been secured for the National Land Transport Fund, with none being diverted into the crown accounts.
- From day one, called on the government to make major investment in roading infrastructure, resulting in Transfund's announcement in 2004 of the largest increase in funding for over a decade.
- Successfully advocated the use of 'infrastructure bonds' to fund new roading and other infrastructure investments.

Environment

- Enabled the government to pass much needed amendments to the Resource Management Act that had previously been stalled for over three years. Amongst other changes, United Future ensured that meaningless terms like "spiritual", "cultural landscapes", and "ancestral landscapes" were deleted from the proposed legislation so they couldn't result in further uncertainty and delay for resource consent applicants.
- Secured agreement from the government for a process of ongoing review of the Resource Management Act, including the introduction of further amendments this to term to address concerns with the Act.

Treaty of Waitangi and the Constitution

- Argued successfully for more resources for the Treaty settlements process to reflect the desire by all New Zealanders to see these claims resolved expeditiously and fairly. As a result, the Office of Treaty Settlements and the Waitangi Tribunal received additional funding in the 2003 Budget directed specifically at means by which the claims process can be accelerated.
- Worked to convince the Government that the full legal and beneficial ownership of the seabed and foreshore should be vested in the "people of New Zealand" via a public domain title, instead of the original proposal that ownership would not be vested in anyone.
- Initiated a commission of inquiry into the status of the New Zealand constitution, including the place of the Treaty of Waitangi.

Business and the Economy

- Successfully proposed the independent annual review of Air New Zealand Ltd by the Finance & Expenditure Committee.
- Tidied up the clumsy and expensive board structure originally proposed for Television New Zealand and its subsidiary companies, by recommending that TVNZ and THL be separate stand alone Crown companies, rather than the original cumbersome arrangement of an over-arching board of directors, with additional boards for each company.
- Successfully lobbied the government to reduce the costs passed on to exporters resulting from tighter border security legislation.
- Ensured clearance for the export of manuka and kanuka manufactured products, such as fuel for smoking and barbecuing meat.
- Ensured that building societies and credit unions are able to use banking trademarks.

Superannuation and Savings

- Convinced the government to reduce the withholding tax amount on employers' contributions to super funds from 33% to 21% for employees earning under \$38,000, and 15% for employees earning under \$9500. This will help prevent over-taxation on employer-based super schemes and further encourage long-term savings.
- Ensured that the KiwiSaver workplace savings scheme will enable participants to make withdrawals for the purpose of purchasing a first home (2005 Budget).
- Ensured that earnings on superannuation funds (including the KiwiSaver workplace savings scheme), will be taxed at the marginal rate of the member, rather than the current flat rate of 33 cents, to remove a major disincentive to saving (2005 Budget).

Local Government

- Ensured that new dog control laws do not create compliance costs that are too onerous on dog owners, while supporting increased public safety measures. Changes were also made to ensure local authorities will be accountable for their enforcement of dog control.
- Ensured that the fiscal impact of the Government's decision to give local authorities the power of general competence will be reviewed by the Local Government Commission, after the Act has been in force for five years with the option of a review after three.

Energy

- Secured a doubling of EECA funding for homeowners to take up solar energy in their homes and to encourage other home energy efficiency improvements (2004 Budget).
- Persuaded the government to increase the maximum amount of non-renewable generation investment by electricity lines companies from 25 megawatts to 50 megawatts.
- Successfully called for an audit of the proposed Project Aqua on the Waitaki River following the cancellation of the project by Meridian.

Gambling

- Amended gambling legislation to ensure that the Government's ability to levy the gaming industry would be transparent and accountable to those paying, and that an independent Gambling Commission to oversee gaming law was established.

Charities and Voluntary Sector

- Initiated the government's decision to match donations to flood relief efforts in the lower North Island resulting from the February 2004 floods on a dollar-for-dollar basis.
- Ensured that the matching of donations was repeated in light of flooding in the Bay of Plenty in July 2004.

- Ensured that the matching of donations was repeated in light of the Boxing Day Tsunami in Southern Asia
- Worked closely with government to rewrite the Charities Bill to ensure that the Charities Commission will have autonomy, that compliance costs for charities will be minimised and that an education and support role are added to the Commission's functions.

Justice

- Successfully amended the Retirement Villages Bill (by SOP) to increase the ability of Statutory Supervisors to protect the interests of residents.
- Successfully lobbied for the removal of the reference to lesbian partners as 'fathers' in the Care of Children Bill.
- Successfully lobbied for the inclusion in the Care of Children Bill of a provision stating that it is in the best interests of a child to have regular ongoing contact with both parents.

Senior Citizens

- Secured an additional \$70.9 million boost in funding for residential care for older New Zealanders. This should enable workers, providers and the contracting DHBs more scope to improve pay, conditions and training and the overall quality of services (2005 Budget).
- Secured an additional \$18.7 million in funding for the provision of home based support, enabling improvements in quality and working conditions (2005 Budget).
- Successfully lobbied for an additional \$3 million over the next four years will bolster programmes to prevent elder abuse and neglect (2005 Budget).

Housing

- Ensured that a portion of the \$22.6 million package to establish the new Department of Building and Housing will be allocated to research into the habitation and housing patterns in New Zealand (2005 Budget).
- Secured a further \$0.6 million to implement a rating scheme for homes and an incentive programme to encourage people to improve the energy efficiency of their home and to install cleaner heating (2005 Budget).

Social Development

- Ensured that \$27.7 million will be invested over the next four years to help more Sickness and Invalid's beneficiaries move into work (2005 Budget).

Finance

- Successfully lobbied for the income tax brackets to be adjusted for inflation (2005 Budget).
- Secured the abolition of capital gains tax on domestic share investments through managed funds (2005 Budget).
- Successfully promoted rates relief, resulting in the introduction of a rates rebate scheme for 150,000 superannuitant households (2005 Budget).

Property Rights

- Insisting that the Overseas Investment Bill be modified to remove the bald statement "no compensation will be payable" in relation to marginal strips created on private property next to rivers and lakes when the land is being sold to non-residents.
- The introduction of a bill to add property rights to the NZ Bill of Rights Act as a Member's bill and its referral to select committee for further consideration.