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HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES. It is a privilege for me to exercise the prerogative of Her Majesty and open the 44th Parliament.

New Zealand voters have decided that in future Parliaments shall be elected on the basis of Mixed Member Proportional representation. My Government will promote the related revisions of procedure and in general prepare New Zealand for future elections under the new system.

My Government celebrates the election by the House of the first Maori to hold the office of Speaker, and the election of the first member of Pacific Island descent to the Parliament.

When I opened the second session of the previous Parliament in January 1991, the House was summoned on the occasion of the Gulf War. New Zealand today remains committed to playing its part in maintaining international peace and security. New Zealand peacekeepers are at present in eight countries worldwide.

My Government sees the next three years as a crucial period. We must build on the progress of the last 10 years to secure the nation's future in the 21st century as a highly skilled, prosperous, small trading nation.

The initiatives my Government will undertake will all contribute to the broad priorities held to be central to our nation's future.

These are: continuing to sustain and accelerate economic growth, improving education and skills achievement, caring for families in

need, protecting and enhancing our environment and continuing to define our place in the world.

My Government will work to develop international relationships to support broader political, economic and security objectives. Particular emphasis will be given in the coming year to New Zealand's membership of the United Nations Security Council and to the implementation of the GATT Uruguay Round outcome.

My Government welcomes the successful conclusion of the GATT round as a means to more trade, more investment and more jobs. All New Zealanders will benefit from the stronger growth that will flow. My Government will give impetus to a review of legislation relating to trade remedies and the protection of intellectual property.

Through the Asia 2000 Programme, and active participation in the APEC process, my Government will further this country's relations with the fast-growing economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS, my Government intends to preserve and build on the gains of the sound policies which have achieved rising investment and employment. The underpinnings of improved economic and employment performance, including the Reserve Bank Act and the Employment Contracts Act, will be retained.

Close attention will be paid to Government spending and stable macroeconomic policies will be pursued.

A progressive internationally-competitive economy, with a modern labour market, will provide for strong growth. This, coupled with an increasingly skilled workforce, remains the most effective means of creating sustainable employment opportunities.

My Government rates employment as its number one priority and will establish an Employment Task Force which will fully examine options with special emphasis on people experiencing long term and recurrent periods of unemployment. The Task Force will not only look at immediate issues but look also at the employment needs of the 21st century. My Government welcomes the support of the four political parties represented in the Parliament for the work of the Task Force.

My Government, in creating the portfolio of Information Technology, has recognised the pivotal role this will play in a fast changing competitive marketplace. My Government is committed to encouraging innovation, and therefore will increase public investment in science, research and technology. This will ensure New Zealanders have requisite skills and knowledge, and apply them effectively.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS, the many events of Suffrage Centennial Year have highlighted New Zealand's leadership in women's suffrage. My Government is to designate the 19th of September as Women's Suffrage Day to maintain awareness year by year.

In 1994 my Government, in recognition of the importance of the family and acknowledging the stress which some families face today, will promote activities supporting the International Year of the Family.

My Government will consolidate the reforms of the health system, and obtain gains in the effectiveness of services delivered. The health regulatory environment will be reviewed. The Bill to provide for a Health and Disability Services Commissioner will be progressed, and a Medical Practitioners Bill introduced.

Benefit policies will be reviewed to minimise hindrances to beneficiaries transferring from welfare to employment and otherwise obtaining self-reliance.

My Government will fully implement the tripartite Accord on Retirement Income Policy. As agreed in the Accord, a package of measures will be developed to improve the quality of information available to New Zealanders planning for their retirement.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS, legislation will be introduced to rewrite and reorganise the much-amended Income Tax Act. My Government's taxation reform programme will also see the introduction of legislation to complete the company law reform process, to introduce binding advance rulings and to address remaining international tax issues.

My Government sees education as a vital investment in the future of our people. Further impetus will be given to the workplace learning programme called Skill New Zealand, to the parents as first teachers programme, to the development of early childhood and school curricula, and to the National Qualifications Framework. Difficult issues will be worked through constructively with the education sector, in pursuit of the goal that New Zealand is a highly skilled nation by 2010.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS, my Government will work sensibly to conserve New Zealand's natural resources and ensure their management on a sustainable basis. Preserving our environmental advantages contributes to the physical wellbeing of our citizens, provides benefits to producers and marketers of products from farms, forests and fisheries, and contributes to our growing inbound tourism.

New Zealand will continue to promote and support action on global environmental issues. At home, legislation will be promoted

to reform the law to manage hazardous substances and new organisms, and to contain risks associated with them.

New Zealanders have a right to safe and secure communities, where they feel and are secure from unlawful and irresponsible actions of other citizens. My Government is committed to implementing a national crime prevention strategy. This will emphasise the prevention of criminal and antisocial actions, while recognising the importance of active policies to relieve stress in families.

My Government will integrate energy and environmental policy as a priority. Energy sector reforms will be continued. The challenge is to ensure the continuing availability of efficient energy services, at the lowest cost to the economy as a whole, while seeking sustainability in development.

My Government will continue to use established processes to address legitimate historic grievances and will continue to deal with disparities in current outcomes for Maori. It will promote Bills to modernise the law relating to Maori trust boards and Maori reserved lands.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS, my Government will press to conclude discussions preceding the introduction of a Bill to bring remaining commercially-fished species into the Quota Management System. The legislation will assure sustainable management of the fisheries and enable delivery of quota to the Treaty of Waitangi Fisheries Commission in terms of the 1992 settlement of Maori commercial fishing claims.

My Government will continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the transportation system to assist the nation's competitiveness. It will also seek to progress the ship safety and marine pollution provisions of the Transport Law Reform Bill as a high priority.

My Government will introduce legislation to recognise the Auditor-General as an Officer of Parliament, to disband the Audit Department, and to appoint the Auditor-General for a fixed term of 7 years, all as recommended by a committee of this House.

Other measures will be laid before you.

HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, I therefore commend all these matters to you and I pray that Divine Guidance will attend your considerations.

