

Are the winds of change upon us?

Benjamin Franklin famously said, "When you're finished changing, you're finished."

The government is poised to deliver its eighth Budget and potentially lay the groundwork for a fourth term.

So is now the time for change?

Successive budgets have offered little in the way of surprise or stimulus, largely due to the influence of the Fiscal Responsibility Act 1994. Of course, fiscal responsibility and transparency are important.

But for governments, the balance between what you keep the same and what you change is and must be an art, not a science.

If the time for change is now, where does a third-term government start?

Socially, New Zealand is still grappling with two constituencies – the wealthy and the poor.

Prime Minister John Key has indicated he wants to leave a legacy of addressing poverty, and both he and

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cabinet minister Judith Collins have signalled their intent to address how guns are getting into the hands of serial, violent criminals and gangs.

And there's an emerging demographic movement; Asian and Polynesian communities are expanding, while the overall population is ageing. Has the government done what it needs to create a future for all of them?

Economically, the official cash rate is at an all-time low of 2.25% and, since mid-2014, four central banks in Europe have moved their interest rates into negative territory.

Continued investment in infrastructure has created jobs. But is that enough to stimulate the economy?

Encouraging trends in many commodity prices, including dairy, haven't occurred for quite some time. Determining whether changes need to be made to stimulate the economy is an area worth revisiting.

Politically, both the Labour Party's

free tertiary education policy and universal income provide a paradigm shift. Whether you like these policies or not, it clearly places these issues high on the political agenda (and policy-makers' watch-lists).

Technological change is being embraced by the government as a way of being able to do more with less: as evidenced by ACC's recently announced \$450 million transformation programme and continuing interest in Inland Revenue's \$1.5 billion transformation that, interestingly, has an IT component that will only be a third of that cost.

Both of these initiatives are taking place against a backdrop of successfully completing the nationwide roll out of ultra-fast broadband. But there is also a need to ensure technological change is safe. After all, cyber-attacks are rapidly and collectively becoming a multi-billion dollar problem for businesses worldwide.

Environmentally, New Zealand has historically had a competitive advantage in its ability to grow grass to fuel a thriving dairy industry and create other exports. Is that still enough?

And there's a further challenge. Making sure government budget initiatives and their impact are communicated really effectively is crucial, so that all New Zealanders are aware of and informed about how these decisions trickle down to their everyday lives, and influence the success of business and the economy.

The budget and its supporting documents provide the government with an opportunity to adopt integrated reporting (IR) principles following many other organisations locally and abroad.

IR principles focusing on better quality information about performance with less emphasis on the bottom line make the perfect platform to tell New Zealand how the government is performing and what it plans to do.

Budget 2016 is not just a matter of deciding what to change but also how to tell the story of change.

Above all, the government must keep it simple, concise and clear in telling us how we're doing.

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