



TOP SECRET INVITATION LIST WIDENS BUSINESS- GOVERNMENT CHASM

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BY AIMEE MCCLINCHY

The South Island business community fears it has little representation at the government's upcoming business forum.

It is the latest group to add its voice to complaints the occasion will not put across typical business views by excluding those critical of government policies.

But those who are invited - including some corporate heavyweights - say they hold high hopes for the talkfest.

Those The National Business Review spoke to have identified both a national strategy and R&D at the top of their agendas.

The invitation list of about 80 business heads has so far been kept secret by Prime Minister **Helen Clark**.

It does include some Business Roundtable members - such as Ports of Auckland chief executive Geoff Vazey, previously outspoken on the government's labour law but now keeping shtoom - as well as frank lobbyists such as Trevor Eagle of Eagle Technology, accountants, bankers, exporters and manufacturers.

But the uninvited "B Team" - including the majority of the Business Roundtable, chairman Ralph Norris and executive director Roger Kerr, business association heads and an apparent paucity of businesspeople south of Christchurch - has raised the ire of others.

The Tuesday, October 24 event, to be hosted by law firm Buddle Finlay in Auckland, is expected to be an informal chat rather than a speechmaking day.

Attendees have been told they will break into discussion groups with Ms Clark and ministers such as Jim Anderton, Michael Cullen, Steve Maharey, Phil Goff and Paul Swain.

The buzz words of the day will be the "new economy," taxes, and policy issues such as export assistance and tax write-offs for research and development.

In the South Island, concern is mounting at the apparent lack of representation. Sir Gil Simpson is on the invitee list - although his office will not confirm his attendance - and the Prime Minister's office said 10 other southerners would be going.

But both the Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce and the Otago chamber know of no invitees past Christchurch. Their concern builds on regional disquiet after no one south of Christchurch was appointed to the government's science advisory board or Industry New Zealand.

"I think they have forgotten we exist or that there is a South Island," Otago chamber chief executive John Christie said.

Canterbury Employers' chief executive Peter Townsend said he intended to hold a South Island meeting to discuss the forum's outcomes and report to the government.

EMA Northern chief executive Alasdair Thompson resorted to applying under the Official Information Act for the list of names but was refused. He and other association heads cannot understand their exclusion.

"The PM has repeatedly threatened to sideline or punish people and business organisations who have spoken out against certain government policies. She is out of order," Mr Thompson said.

Those not invited say the real test will come after the forum, when and if any policy changes are made.

Sky chairman and attendee Nate Smith wants to discuss the falling dollar and its impact on multinational companies such as his own.

Eagle Technology founder Trevor Eagle wants to see a national strategy of "where we are going" formed. He also wants to discuss research and development policies and the possibilities of introducing venture capital schemes such as the Israeli model.

X-Sol founder John Blackham said he thought R&D tax issues could be a red herring.

The A-List

John Hood, vice-chancellor, University of Auckland (forum chairman)

Barrie Saunders, former PR advisor to Business Roundtable

Bob Fenwick, Planhorse Solutions, Exporters Institute president

Bridget Wickham, Great New Zealand Business Venture

Chris Davis, Feltex

Chris Liddell, Carter Holt Harvey

Geoff Lawrie, Microsoft NZ

Geoff Vazey, Ports of Auckland

Gilbert Ullrich, Ullrich Aluminium

John Judge, **Ernst & Young**

John Robb, Unitec

John Rohan, Vodafone

Michael Andrews, Fletcher Challenge

Michael Barnett, Auckland Chamber of Commerce

Mike Robson, INL

Murray Horn, ANZ

Murray Jackson, Genesis Power

Richard Tweedie, Todd Energy

Rob McLeod, Arthur Andersen

Scott Perkins, Deutsche Bank

Sir Gil Simpson, Aoraki Corporation

Stephen Tindall, The Warehouse

Theresa Gatting, Telecom

The Uninvited

Ralph Norris, ASB Bank, Business Roundtable

Douglas Myers, Lion Nathan

Howard Paterson, Southern Capital

Jenny Morel, Morel & Co, No. 8 Ventures

John Ball, Soft Tech and NZ Software Association chairman

Mal Thompson, Renaissance

Nicholas Bain, CEO, Intellectual Property Foundation (NZInc)

John Christie, CEO, Otago Chamber of Commerce

Peter Townsend, CEO, Canterbury Employers' Chamber of Commerce

John Ball, founder Soft Tech, High Tech Council member and NZ Software Association president

Jim Collier, CEO, Restaurant Brands

Susan Staley, Tower director and former president, Otago Chamber of Commerce

John Hagen, chairman, Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu

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