



PRIME MINISTER

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E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, you sent off the letters to the States about the housing summit. Are you in a position to let us know what you told them?

PM: Importantly, we've indicated to the States that over the next five years we've identified some 2000 hectares of Commonwealth owned land that we'll make available for housing. That's the equivalent of the best part of some 30,000 blocks or the equivalent of some 15 to 18 new suburbs and then a similar sort of amount in the some ten years, five to ten years after that period of release of those 2000 hectares. So that's a significant contribution that we've identified and we've also sent them a paper which sets out the state of activity in the housing industry. So I think on the basis of what we've provided we now have the opportunity for a sensible constructive discussion between ourselves and the States and I certainly want to make the point that we're not in the business of political point scoring, we don't want fights about this. We really want to do what we can together to tackle what is a fairly serious issue in the community.

JOURNALIST: There's speculation about an early election again. Can you tell us your current thinking on the date?

PM: No change. Let me repeat - I'm getting tired of it but I repeat - it will be some time between the latter part of this year and the middle of next year.

JOURNALIST: Does that rule out September and October Prime Minister?

PM: I suppose September/October would be reasonably identified as being within the latter part of this year. I'm not being coy about this, that's what I've said and that's what I mean.

JOURNALIST: So September would be the earliest?

PM: It's very hard to see it being before that.

JOURNALIST: What will you be telling Caucus this afternoon? What's your message to your ...?

PM: Obviously Peter you wouldn't be expecting me to give you all the detail of what I'm going to but essentially I can say this, that I'll be pointing out to them that we're now virtually on the eve of the completion of six years of government. By the time we go to the election it will be in the order of seven years of government, seven years of us compared with seven years of the conservatives immediately preceding that. It will be a good basis for comparison to go to the electorate. We have the task, the major task remains, the running of the economy. It's a difficult task but fortunately it's the task of running a strong and booming economy and at the same time as we have to ensure that that doesn't overheat to an unacceptable degree we'll be continuing in this year with the task of improving the living standards of Australians in general through the processes of getting an effective wages/taxes outcome. Also at both ends of the spectrum, the age spectrum that is, we will be doing things of importance for the aged and for the young. Now I emphasise that these things are not being done for the sake of an election, they represent the continuum of policies and processes that have been underway for several years. But they will be impacting in 1989, it's appropriate that they should do because that's the natural time of outcome of the processes that have been underway during the life of this government. So in total we, I believe, have reason for confidence but not complacency.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, is a treaty with Aborigines still on the Government's agenda?

PM: It's on the agenda but I remind you of what I've said, and that is that I hope that it may be possible to achieve that within the life of this Parliament but at all times I've said I'm not going to concertina processes in an unrealistic way. It's essential if that sort of outcome is going to be effective in the long term that both the Aboriginal community and the non-Aboriginal community have the opportunity of a full deliberation, consideration of the issues involved. We'll continue to work on that.

JOURNALIST: Is the question of the judges' salaries more difficult now than when the recommendations were made last year, and when will Cabinet consider them?

PM: It was always going to be a reasonably difficult one because you had the two issues. One, the intrinsic issue of what you need to pay the judiciary but secondly, associated with that, our consideration of it takes place in the context of us still needing the community as a whole to exercise restraint in their wages claim. So we'll be dealing with that in a way which I think will meet both the requirements because there is no doubt there is a need for an increase in salaries for members of the judiciary but it's got to be handled in a way which does not give any basis for exaggerated claims outside that area.

JOURNALIST: Does that mean they can't look forward to the full recommended increases of the Remuneration Tribunal?

PM: We'll work this out precisely in the near future. What I'm saying is that I'm not going to be saying on television or a news conference just what the precise sort of outcome is within the limits of the Remuneration Tribunal report. It's not the appropriate place to do it.

JOURNALIST: Is election speculation damaging the perception of your Government at the moment?

PM: No.

JOURNALIST: In terms of the next election Prime Minister, how useful is it to ensure on the Labor Party's part that John Howard remain Leader of the Opposition?

PM: I don't mind who I have to fight as Leader of the Opposition. I've gotten used to John Howard but what are they going to do, are they going to recycle Andrew or are they going to bring in John Elliot, Peter Shack? I mean none of them really are going to inspire great confidence in the electorate. One would be a recycled leader, the others obviously not up to it, so if it's John Howard then that's ok. But basically I noticed that while John Howard has been entering into speculation about what may happen on this side of politics I'm not going to return the compliment really. I just suggest to John that I think he'd have his hands pretty full in making sure that he watches his own flanks. The interesting thing is that it's only on the conservative side of politics where the problems of leadership exist.

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