



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
DOORSTOP, STAFFORD STATE SCHOOL, STAFFORD, BRISBANE
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PM: Just a couple of words to say that I was very pleased to be with the Premier, at Stafford, where we saw, at first hand, Queensland in its successful efforts to develop Asian language studies and, particularly, language and the facility of language, through the Queensland school system and now extending that as a result of decisions taken at COAG at Queensland's initiative, to extend Asian language teaching across Australia. And, I had the pleasure of announcing a \$48 million program in the Budget to begin this exercise. But, I wanted to congratulate the Premier on the initiative at COAG and I think what we have seen here today is an illustration of the competency of Australia, the facility of Australian kids mastering at least one substantial primary Asian language.

WG: Could I just say that we now have about 100,000 students in Queensland schools learning an Asian language and I think this is going to be tremendously valuable to their education, but also to the Queensland economy in the years ahead. I think it is also important in terms of the development of our national identity and future generations seeing themselves as part of a multicultural country in the Asia-Pacific and not a European colony on the other side of the world. Queensland is very pleased with the progress of our program to date. We did propose at COAG the development of a national strategy and the working group chaired by Kevin Rudd, the Director of our office of Cabinet, has come up with a report that has been endorsed and it has been a cooperative effort between the Federal Government and State Governments. And, from a Queensland point of view, we are committed to the Asian languages program, but we are absolutely delighted to see in the Federal Budget a substantial funding commitment towards taking this program national. Among other things it will mean a lot more teachers coming into the system, and the

teachers are absolutely vital. And, it will mean, we believe, in a couple of years time we will have Asian languages right down through the high schools, down to as far as grade three. And, it is at that young age, as you saw today, that these kids have such a tremendous facility to learn and to understand a foreign language.

J: Prime Minister, what has been decided by Federal Cabinet regarding the republic, and talking about the republic through the Government?

PM: Well I noticed a report today in the Sydney Morning Herald, which was more zealous than it should have been, obviously, someone has provided to a journalist some details of proposals put to the Cabinet, but not adopted by the Cabinet, about general development of understanding about the Constitution. Now, the Cabinet will return to this question at some point, no doubt. Because I think that one of the things which the Republican Advisory Committee revealed in its report was the dearth of understanding, particularly in schools, of our constitutional arrangements. I mean the Premier and I were just saying coming in the car that we often are concerned about children losing their enthusiasm for public processes and for politics and for Government, and being disillusioned by it. And one can understand this when there is not even a primary understanding of the nature of the Constitution and the role of the Commonwealth and the federal system. But the Cabinet didn't decide at this point to develop or activate or move on, or pick up the recommendations of this particular report, and therefore, whoever has given information out didn't say, because they probably didn't know, that the Cabinet decided not to act upon it, certainly at this stage.

J: Is there anything for the monarchists to fear? I see that New South Wales has said that if a kit does come out they won't accept it.

PM: Who said that, by the way?

J: The New South Wales

PM: Well this is the sort of knee-jerk response, which is pretty pathetic in Australia. I find that surprising because basically the Premier of New South Wales believes in the republican case. But that is not the point of any such proposal. The point of such a proposal is not to put a yes for no case about the republic, but rather it is just to fill in some of the gaps which are not easily understood in our constitution, because they are not explicitly referred to. For instance, the Cabinet is not referred to in the constitution in a way which would give anyone to understand, other than the Executive Council for instance, that the Cabinet is the power, the principal power in the Executive. The reference in the constitution is to the Executive Council, I mean all these sorts of things, which I think, a proper understanding of the constitution would reveal.

J: Prime Minister that we might help out with troops in Rwanda, can you tell us whether the Government is considering that? There is a considerable down side, isn't there?

PM: Well, we are considering and I think we have generally responded positively to proposals by the United Nations in these sorts of exercises, in this case looking at the provision of aid and facilities to these people. But at this stage I don't think the UN have quite developed their proposals, and hence we are not in a position to say whether we would be part of any operation or not. But our general policy has been one of sympathy with these kinds of exercises and we have committed people to them in the past.

J: Some Defence leaders, today, said that they would prefer a peace plan in place first before you considered

PM: Well, I mean, peace plans can't be hatched up when everyone thinks they should be. We have seen this in various places around the world, but still you have got a very big humanitarian problem there to be dealt with, and the UN is obviously thinking about it.

J: Have you got anything to say on John Hewson's drop again in approval, and on the re-emergence of Fightback?

PM: Well Fightback he said was dead and buried two weekends ago at the retreat, and now we find that it isn't really at all. That as I have been saying the philosophical attachment of the Liberal Party to some of the brutal nostrums of Fightback is basically alive and well. And Mr Reith is ... telling us so, flushing Dr Hewson out who confirmed his view. So, the Liberals just never seem to learn. That is, in saying that they are abandoning it and seeking a more, if you like, inclusive complexion on their policies, they then go back to endorse all of the things that, of course, Mr Downer said on the weekend that there wasn't going to be any tax rises, only outlays cuts. So, presumably, they would be the same outlays cuts which they had in Fightback. And they were the very things that made it very clear that Fightback was the antithesis of inclusion. It was about basically straightening up the poor, straightening up the disadvantaged. So, at least we know where the Liberal Party stands. It still stands four square behind the philosophy of the package which was rejected at the last election.

J: So, Fightback is live and well, rather than dead and buried?

PM: Well, it is obviously part and parcel of their mainstream philosophy. They haven't been able to move away from this hard edged economic rationalism which they have adopted, and Dr Hewson's attacks upon multiculturalism last year, on school teachers and renters, and all these other categories of people was, I think, only giving you evidence of the view that Fightback held, and basically is still with them.

J: Prime Minister, the latest Morgan Poll has Labor ahead and Hewson at an all time low, will you maintain your lead until the next election?

PM: Well that is what I would most certainly like to do. There is no point in coming second in this business.

J: does it have you towards an early election?

PM: I answered that weeks ago, that question.

J: Premier, have you reached a decision yet on the Daintree package?

WG: As I said the other day, we are regarding the offer in the Federal Budget as a very generous offer, and one that we propose to take advantage of. We weren't aware of the full details of the funding and we are still talking to the Federal Minister, or rather our Minister will now be talking to the Federal Minister, and seeking to work out a cooperative program to implement that, and to put the whole of the rain forest back into the rain forest.

J: Do you still think it is likely that you will have go for four or five years, rather than three?

WG: Well that is one of the things that I have got our Environment Minister, I have asked her to talk to the Federal Minister about. She has been away and only got back this weekend, and I spoke to her this morning and she will now pursue that. As I said to you last week our Budget was locked up last Monday, but we regard the offer as too good and too generous to walk away from. So, one way or another we are going to find a way to access it.

PM: Can I just say that I am very pleased with the Premiers response to that. I think it is a great collaborative thing that we are doing here, and I think again, it shows how the Federal Government of Australia and the State Government of Queensland, Labor Governments, can work together to do some of these things. When this area was declared a heritage area and there were substantial exclusions, one is this area called the so-called hole in the heart. And to be able to bring that area back to pristine, a pristine forest, which will be difficult, but which is possible, it is best to be begun with an acquisition program to see that the damage doesn't continue and development in the area doesn't proceed. So, let me say, I think for one of the great areas of Australia, of its heritage, of its national estate, the Daintree Rain Forest and Queensland's management of it, I think, and for the Queensland, and indeed, Australian tourist industry I think this is a really good thing to be doing, I am very pleased about it.

J: The Premier said that you had fallen in love with the Daintree, is that a fair assessment?

PM: Well I think very few countries will have the joy of preserving areas like these. I think anybody who has actually been across to Daintree falls in love with it. The notion of this forest extending from the high reaches of the mountains to the beach and repairing that damage which has been done, preserving for ever this important ecosystem for Australians is a tremendously good thing to be doing.

J: Do you think business fully understands the value of a clean environment that we have in Australia relative to the rest of the world?

PM: Well certainly the tourist industry does. And I think to see tourism grow they need these primary assets to grow on.

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