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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
ADDRESS AT THE PEARCE RAAF BASE, PERTH, 17 FEBRUARY 1995**

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I would like to say how much I have enjoyed coming here and having a look at the base. I have had a long interest in the development of the Australian Airforce and from my first years in Parliament 25 years ago I used to go to the Commonwealth aircraft factories and the Government aircraft factories in Melbourne when we were still putting together the Mirage and the Macchi and I have taken an interest in the defence procurement issues over the years and I am always, I suppose, keen to see the new types of equipment and listen to what people have to say about them, about their capability and about which particular aircraft they like and why. Even though we can look at a technical specification of what they can do there is always that pilot feel that you can only get by talking to people who fly them and use them.

Here in Perth, this is a major base in Australia for flying training and it is another one of those things which, I think, impacts well upon the economy of Western Australian. That is, the fact that we have a substantial defence presence here in Western Australia, both maritime and the presence here at Pearce and this is good for the economy and given the fact we have now transcontinental east coast and west coast defence bases and bases across the north of Australia, we can see the sophistication of the Australian Defence Force and its capabilities becoming evident to anybody that takes even a cursory interest.

I am particularly delighted to see our friends here from Singapore with the Singapore Flying Training School. We are delighted to be able to be hosts to Singapore in the area of flying training and, I think, this has to be a forerunner of further defence co-operation between us and that we can in the future see with not simply the amenity of this field and the facilities here for Singapore, not just getting them to work right, but getting the relationships working completely and fully and co-operatively between the members of our airforce and your own. This means, I think, we can then take those next steps because we are both members of the Five Power Defence Arrangements, we have a lot in common - we do joint exercises together -

Now this year we are celebrating - remembering - the 50th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War. VP Day - Victory in the Pacific, and of course in Europe it is VE Day - Victory in Europe: 1945 - 1995, half a century later. But it is not only a celebration of the democracies over fascism, it is a celebration of the combined community values and effort of that period of the War. We are celebrating the fact that as a nation we did something together, and they're celebrating in Europe that as nations they did things together. So, it is the action of communities together that bring the memorable social phases, and the memorable social changes. So that is why we say we move forward together - we have values and considerations of one another, as a group, as a community - and it is these cultural values which mark out the quality of our social democracy.

So that goes to things like giving young people a chance to a full education, opportunity, inclusion. So university for instance - and we just had Mr Flannagan tell us about Murdoch. When I was a young man, Universities were there for basically an elite - a small elite. Now, as result of the policies of this Government, it's more generally available - but I will come to that in a moment. And it is those opportunities, and the other thing about our social democracy is to say that in all of these things like access and equity - access and fairness to health, to education, to aged-care, to support for the young - that we have a community which has something nice about it - something sweet about it - that isn't about only giving the values to the values to the smart ones, or the rich ones and leaving the poor ones - or the disadvantaged ones - behind. In other words, again the sense of inclusion, the sense of community. Now, that's what we have a unique chance to do, and one of the reasons we can do it is because in this country we have strong rates of employment. In Western Australia, in the last year, we have had 5% employment growth. If we compare that, say, to any European state, they would be having 1%. So you have got this huge growth and employment coming from the recovery which the Federal Government has sought to induce. And in the economy in this state - this year it grew 10%. Now, you may say "well, is that a lot?". Well I say to you that it's a real lot. Because of we kept it up for 10 years, we would on 10 years replicate that which has taken 150-200 years to produce. So, if you look at Western Australia over a century and a half, it has taken us that long to get this big, but in one year we have got 10% bigger. So if we did it for 10 years, we would actually reproduce the whole thing in terms of wealth in 10 years. That phenomenal growth, and phenomenal opportunity and phenomenal employment is the thing which gives us egalitarian - values. Because you can't believe that you have a right to that sort of society without everybody having a right to a job.

So, we have this great chance - I can't think of any time when any young group of West Australians would have ever faced a period as exciting as this, or with opportunities like this. We're now - for the first time in our history - closest to the fastest growing markets of the world, that's in the Asia Pacific near us. When I was your age the markets we sold to were Western Europe and North America. We were a long way from the markets of the world. Now, the markets have shifted, and two-thirds of all we produce goes to Asia, and is right on our doorstep. So, all of you have that opportunity which I didn't

have, or most of us up on this stage didn't have, and as well as that, you have got the opportunities of education to go out into a clever country and take clever opportunities here and abroad. Ten years ago, only 3 young people in 10 completed secondary school. That was an appalling statistic for any country that prided itself as being a smart country with good opportunities - only three in ten completed secondary school. This year, it is 8 in 10, which has been a revolution in Australian education, and 40% of those young people are streaming their way into University. Forty per cent did also in 1983, but it was 40% of 3 in 10, not 40% of 8 in 10. This Government has put - around the country - the equivalent of 16 Universities, the size of the major city universities, to take up the extra intake. And now we're reforming vocational education - or TAFE - through the Australian National Training Authority - because the numbers speak for themselves. If 40% are going to university, what were the other 60% doing - what were the majority doing? Well only a small proportion were being trained. But if we can train young Australians, and give them the chance through university, or through TAFE, then you could participate more fully in this country, and you can go out into the world and do it too. Now, none of that was available - some of that was available to me - but not all of that was because we never had these markets in this proximity to Asia, in terms of our trade, at that time.

The other great change that makes this possibility, I think, the excitement of a social democracy of quality, is the participation of young women in education - the high participation of young women in education. And it is a matter of great pleasure to me that in this year more young women have gone to universities than young men. Because always, it was young men who had that title, by a long margin. It is a measure of how far we have come. And the notion used to be, in families, that the boys or the young men were the ones who had to be the breadwinners, and where the opportunities and the effort and the family effort was given, but not so young women, or the girls. Now, there is something intrinsically unfair about that - blatantly unfair. Why shouldn't the life opportunities and the excitement that this country can offer be equally available to women as to men, to young women as to young men. So, this huge participation in secondary schools from young women, and now them going into university is a measure of our social democracy. It is a measure of our fairness - it's an essential fairness. It is a measure of the opportunities we must extend to our community as a whole.

So, if you look at where we have come - 10 years ago this was basically a country locked up by what are called tariffs - protection for manufacturing. Western Australia was a mining and agricultural state - we sold minerals because the Japanese needed it for steel. Had they not needed it for steel, we wouldn't have sold minerals. We would have basically been relying on agriculture with a few services in the city. The employment opportunities would have been vastly limited - the chances of a full participation in education would have been simply a dream. But now you can see that because this Government has opened Australia up - taken away the tariff barriers, opened up the financial markets - we now have in Western Australia sophisticated manufacturing - yesterday I was at a business that makes alloy steel for the Pratt and Whitney Jet Engine company for Boeing 747s. Could you imagine that there 10 years ago? Or making world-classed aluminium

ferries for the world? It just wouldn't have happened 10 years ago. Or a sophisticated tourist industry, with high quality tourism services? All of these things have come because Australia has opened up and we are richer and smarter and better for it. But we can't drive this sort of change without an educated, trained population. And you know I gave some numbers for Germany the other day - in Germany, for instance - which is a highly developed country - the information base of manufacturing lasts 5 years and then it is obsolete. And in information technology it lasts 2 years and then it is obsolete. So every 5 years, or 2 years, you have got to turn it over. This will be the same in Australia, which means that training will be the essence - training and education - will be the essence of your life opportunities, as technological change speeds up. But we are ready, and we have got the effort and the commitment - and the financial commitment - to give you that education, and that change.

But one of the other thing I think it is important for you to know is this: I have always felt somewhat sad for young people who try and get their tertiary entrance examination, and then find they miss and they lose out on a tertiary education. Or worse, they have no vocational education. What we have in place now, with the Australian National Training Authority and vocational education or TAFE, is that you can go off to TAFE and do a course, and get accredited units to return to the mainstream of a university campus. In other words, it's not sudden death - it's not a case of missing the TEE and missing out for life - you can actually stream your way back as a mature student a couple of years later. You can say "look, I didn't do as well as I should have done with the Western Australian Certificate of Education, I haven't got my TEE, but what I'll do is I'll get into TAFE, and I'll get those marks, and I'll get that accreditation, and I'll go back to university". Or, alternatively, you will say "look, in TAFE there are better courses for my place in the workforce than there are for me in university, so I am going to get a Diploma from a TAFE college". Now what we're trying to do - the Federal Government - is to keep the resources up to the university system and - with the states - to TAFE, so that you have got that chance. It is one thing us saying to you stay in secondary school, complete Year 12, but then after that we haven't got enough places for you. What we have had to do is build not only your participation in school, but the places for you. Now all that is there, and we have seen this great change ahead of us where you can participate...where you can go straight into university or to TAFE, or to TAFE and work your way back to university, or to open-learning and learn at home - and those of you who have got a PC - and given the fact that as we extend the fibre-optic cable network we are going to have PCs in many Australian homes - you will be able to do the open-learning course at home. And that won't be for people just in remote areas, but actually for people in cities as well. So the educational opportunities are going to be profound, and then if you can get a link to somewhere like Murdoch University or the Maritime Industries, or the Navy, where you have got a particular focus - as you have here in Rockingham on the Maritime Industry, and work associated with it - and study and learning associated with it, then you have got another string to your bow - another life opportunity.

So, let me recap on all that. What do we face? We face a high growth, high opportunity country with low inflation. You have got opportunities in school and in post-school education that no generation before you ever had. You have got proximity to the fastest growing markets in the world, you have got the chance of learning another language in school, you have got a chance of using that language in Indonesia or Malaysia or Hong Kong or in China or in Japan or in any of these countries around us, and you can do it in the context of knowing that when you leave school, that huge employment growth that is just coming through is going to give you a fairly good chance of finding an interesting job. And doing it in the context of a society that cares about itself and has mutual commitments to one another - where we actually say "if you're sick, we will look after you, if you're aged, we look after you, if you're from a low-income family, we give you income support. If you're a young person, we encourage you to stay in school, if you drop out, we give you training and work opportunities. If you are long-term unemployed, we pick you up and give you a job subsidy and we get you back into work". In other words, policies that produce a society that has a kindness about it, and a sense of decency about it.

I think one of the great challenges for Australia is to infuse our young people with that sense of excitement - to let you believe that the future is as exciting as I think it is. And to stay that we won't let any of our young people down, and we won't let them drop out of the system. Because a country that doesn't love its children has no soul at all. So, this is the future we are speaking of for you - one which is about you, because the rest of us - most of us - we've had our corner of the action already, and there is already someone ready to pension us off, particularly in public life. Mind you, we resist it and fight it, but the fact is the wave that matters is you, and that's why your faith in Australia, and its ideals, become central to the sort of life you will have in the future. It is my pleasant duty here today to not simply talk to you, and have a chance to meet you, but to also underline this link you have with the Maritime Industries and with the Navy, and just to remind you of what a great opportunity that is.

Now, Richard Flannagan asked me to unveil a plaque to make this point, and remember this event, and that for me, of course, is going to be a great pleasure, and which I'll do in a moment. But before I do, let me say the greatest pleasure here today for me is to talk to you - because I always look forward to every opportunity to talk to young people, because you have got an open mind, you're hard thinkers, you're hard assessors - you are not interested in nonsense and fairy floss, you want some real facts and some argument, and you're listening and you're hoping, and what more could any national leader want? Thank you very much indeed, and I will now unveil the plaque.

ends.