



10

# PRIME MINISTER

## TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP DOORSTOP, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA, 26 MARCH 1995

PM: I just thought I would give you a few words on the election and take a couple of questions. It was obvious the election in the ACT was a disappointing result for the Government. I think that the community has wanted to give the Government a message that it wants to be clear that it's considering its concerns and worrying about its needs - I think that message is well and truly received. The important thing is for people to understand, though they may feel that the Government has not been closely focussing on their basic needs, it will be important for the Government to communicate that it has been, that it is no accident that we have a strong growth, high employment economy out there, but we are in this sort of twilight land debate as if it is not happening. It is happening, the Government is now sitting down to do its Budget, and it will do a serious job as it has done on all the other Budgets before. And the aim of that will be to preserve the recovery. There has been this line that we have had 5 minutes of sunshine - we have had 36 months of growth. Three years of growth, and over half a million jobs. And glib poll lines sent out to people reinforcing their fears is unfair, and I think one of the important things to say to Australians is the recovery, the chances of recovery being entirely sustainable, are high, and the Government will be doing things in the Budget to maintain that sustainability. But, the public want the Government to do better, in terms of these economic and fundamental things, and better we will do.

Now, can I just say though, I think the poll does not reflect well on John Howard - to be associated with this sort of push-polling technique, and Michael Baume running around releasing peoples' tax returns is an un-Australian way to behave. And, can I just make this other point: when there is a real election on - as there was in NSW - that goes down to the wire on the big issues, the Green vote has been important. There has been a perception that the Government hasn't had control of this forestry debate - though I think about 60% of green preferences will come back to the Government. I just make these two points about the Greens - one, we will be, over five years, phasing out woodchips, and

two, doing everything to protect native forests. But, they should understand that John Howard has just nominated as his Shadow Minister somebody who does not believe in International Treaties, so the Gordon below Franklin would have been flooded, there would have been no reserves in the wilderness areas of North Queensland, and the things that they hold dear would not be satisfied under those sorts of policies. But, it is important, not just for the Labor Party but for the nation, to get these Green issues right because global warming is here with us whether we like it or not, this will be an important international issue from here on in, and we have a unique opportunity here to preserve our Australian environment, and I want to do that.

Can I just say about NSW, I think that Bob Carr has done tremendously well in NSW. He has got a better than even chance of forming a Government, and I will be looking forward to doing as much as I can with him and his colleagues.

J: Prime Minister, there may have been 36 months of recovery, but the people of Canberra seem to be mighty ungrateful - do you think that says something about the fundamentals of economic policy, or simply your ability to get the message out?

PM: We have gone...the facts are that the economy is growing at around 5%, and there was the largest fall in unemployment last year than any year on record. We have got 600,000 jobs - that was the principle matter the Government gave commitments on in the election - on that we have delivered, in very full measure. Now, interest rates have basically spooked people, they think that in some way we are heading for the sort of 1980s interest rate changes - we are not. We are not. What we are heading for is the sustainable economic recovery. And the doomsayers who have switched straight off jobs and unemployment, straight onto interest rates and the current account, have got to be held accountable for at least misleading the public about the value and quality of the recovery we have had. Now, you have got to remember this about the ACT, too - there has just been a local election here, there has been a substantial swing against the Labor Party here, the property market here is flat - they are a bit out of sorts. There is a bit of that in it, but whether it is or not, the message is clear there in the ACT election, and I am taking that message on board.

J: Do you take any personal responsibility for this, given that...

PM: I am the Prime Minister, and what Prime Minister's do is they take responsibility for things, and I take it for any loss we suffer. I hope to be also taking it for the next election when we win.

J: Graham Richardson said you have got to take a big *mea culpa* on this election?

- PM: Laurie Oakes addressing Graham as Mr Richardson, as a paid employee and a surrogate - I mean he had the Federal Secretary of the Labor Party on there, but a paid employee of Mr Packer trying to represent himself as the Labor Party - sorry, he had the Federal Secretary of the Liberal Party and a paid employee of Mr Packer trying to represent himself as the Labor Party - I mean, a lot of credibility went down he drain this morning on that performance.
- J: ...(inaudible)...
- PM: Look, Graham has taken his thirty pieces of silver - let him have them, but don't give advice to me.
- J: Do you think the message, though, in the Canberra election...(inaudible)...about your personal style, Mr Keating - do you think there are any lessons you should take from that?
- PM: I think we all take lessons as we go through public life and life's experiences, but remember this - look at the social changes of the last few weeks: seven-zero on the Native Title, Mabo, the Land Fund. They are great social and cultural victories for this country. We are now putting together a Budget, and the Budget will be a good Budget, but - as always - a well thought out Budget. And it is these matters of substance - in the last year since the election we have had APEC threading together the Pacific Rim - these are the matters of substance and the extent that style and the way the Government is working affects the perceptions of the substance, that is an important matter for us.
- J: There is a line now coming out of NSW that you personally - your image - cost the Labor Party 2-3% of the vote?
- PM: We have got a majority of Federal Seats in NSW, and I just say this about NSW - the view being taken that the...the problem that the NSW Labor Party had with Mr Fahey's incumbency, Mr Fahey was expropriating the growth and jobs delivered to him by this Federal Labor Government. But, by the Federal Labor Party not being involved in the campaign, it meant that Mr Fahey was able to claim that, and in being able to claim it, I think, that's the difference in the campaign.
- J: ...(inaudible)...change your style of leadership, Mr Keating?
- PM: I have never sought to be an outrageously popular Prime Minister, but I have sought to be a very good Prime Minister. I have sought to do, and push through, all the policy changes that people lushed out on in the last 30 years. The people that passed the parcel in Federal politics on opening the country up, of giving us an identity of our own, of giving us a place in Asia, of making us an innovative, high-tech, educated society - they are the issues that are important. And, I will go

for the substance rather than the shadow every day of the week when it comes to those things.

J: With the Budget, are you going to reconsider the Government's general frame of the Budget now - to put more emphasis on the...(inaudible)....?

PM: The Government has a mature process running on the Budget, it has from the start, and we are still in the Budget round now. And, all this I think will confirm our view that we have got to do an exemplary job of it, as I hope we have done in the past. One more question.

J: Do you think Federal Labor should have taken a greater role in the NSW campaign?

PM: When you are fighting an incumbent Government, you have got the problem of incumbency. The incumbency in this case attached to it was jobs and growth - that was delivered by the Labor Party - not the divisible Labor Party, the one Labor Party. So, a campaign that ends up being essentially a marginal strategy, suffers from one fact - and that is, you can't claw that basic commitment of the public of understanding that the growth and jobs in NSW came from Labor. There is not one major private sector project in NSW that the Fahey Government can lay claim to - the only thing it can lay claim to are railways, or public sector construction jobs - there is not one major private project in NSW. The growth that is there - the growth that is coming through the general economy, and the employment - is coming off the policies not of the Fahey Government, but of this Government. I thought that was an important point.

ends.