



PRIME MINISTER

9/96

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON PJ KEATING MP

WILL MR HOWARD AND HIS SENIOR SHADOW MINISTERS DEBATE THEIR LABOR COUNTERPARTS?

Yesterday, I challenged Mr Howard to two head-to-head debates, and to other debates which will give electors a chance to judge in more detail both the policy differences and the leadership differences between Labor and the Coalition.

Mr Howard agreed to the head-to-head debates, but he appeared to balk at the idea of debates which would pit himself and the Coalition's three most senior shadow ministers against their counterparts in the Government - namely, himself, Mr Fischer, Mr Costello and Mr Downer against myself, Mr Beazley, Mr Willis and Senator Evans.

There can be no good reason to refuse these debates. Yesterday, Mr Howard suggested debates between junior ministers instead. If this is really what he is offering it is a lame excuse for not exposing to public scrutiny the people who would be most powerful in a Howard government.

I renew the challenge to Mr Howard:

Will the man who would be Prime Minister, and the man who would be Deputy Prime Minister, and the man who would be Treasurer, and the man who would be Minister for Foreign Affairs in a Coalition, publicly debate the future of Australia with the people who presently fill these roles in the Labor Government?

CANBERRA
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