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PRAISE FOR DRIVE TO HELP HANDICAPPED

Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Sir Robert Menzies

The Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, has sent a special message commending the one-week "Employ the Handicapped" campaign which starts today.

The Prime Minister said :

"In a rapidly developing country like Australia with a need to use all its manpower, it is particularly shortsighted to pass over tens of thousands of physically handicapped men and women who could, if given an opportunity, make a definite contribution to the welfare of the community.

Charity does not enter the picture when I speak of employing the handicapped. Thousands of handicapped Australians prove daily that without special privileges they can hold full-time jobs.

Last year the Commonwealth Employment Service found jobs for 10,300 physically handicapped people, while from 1948 to 1964 the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service prepared for full-time employment more than 17,000 allegedly 'hopeless invalids'.

The community gained many millions of pounds annually through placing these Australians in gainful employment, rather than keeping them on pensions from the public purse.

Yet there remain at least 300,000 Australians who still receive repatriation or social service benefits for disabilities. Of these some 125,000 suffer permanent disabilities and are regarded as unemployable for life.

I reject this view. I am convinced that we cannot afford to waste the abilities of our citizens simply because they are not physically perfect.

This week the Junior Chambers of Commerce will promote the employment of physically handicapped Australians through their 'Employ the Handicapped' campaign. I commend this contribution to economic welfare and social progress."

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CANBERRA,

5th July, 1964.