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TELEVISION INTERVIEW GIVEN BY THE PRIME
MINISTER, MR. JOHN GORTON, OVER ABC
TELEVISION NETWORK

Interviewer: Mr. George Wilson

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Q. Mr. Prime Minister, there has been a lot of rattling and roaring about this Naval Base at Cockburn Sound. Even Mr. Calwell, the former Opposition Leader has said the Labor Party would have built it ten years ago. Is the building of this Naval Base a real election issue or a part of the defence mechanism of this country?

PM. It's part of the defence mechanism of this country, but it wouldn't have been ten years ago. We have now reached a stage where our fleet is growing, and we have also reached a stage where the British are withdrawing from the Indian Ocean, and it is therefore time to begin to construct a base in Western Australia. It will take some years to complete it but, clearly, in the new situation in which we find ourselves, in the growth to which we can look forward, this will be a necessity and therefore this will be started. We set up consultants, Maunsell & Partners, a couple of years ago to advise us on this, and the report has been with Navy and Defence and the recommendation is that this should happen. We agree with the recommendation. I don't know whether it is an election issue because I haven't heard any indication from the Labor Party that they would build such a base. They have spoken of "maritime facilities".

Q. Well, so much for the Naval Base. Can we talk about Vietnam?

PM. Sure.

Q. According to your policy speech you are now prepared to admit for the first time that if America continues to withdraw troops from Vietnam, then Australia also will phase down its involvement?

PM. I don't know that I would phrase it that way: "I am prepared to admit for the first time", but quite clearly - and I have stated this - if there were to be a continuing programme of United States withdrawal, if they were to have a plan that there would be so many troops getting out in such and such a time, and others at another

time and so on, and that were to be implemented, then we wouldn't stay there until last. We would expect to be phased in to such a withdrawal plan and at a stage which would be the subject of discussion between us. But we wouldn't unilaterally withdraw just by ourselves and leave the United States and South Vietnamese in the lurch. We would, if such an eventuality as I have spoken of occurred - and I don't think it will, but if it did, if there were such contingency plans - then we would expect to be phased into them, and indeed, we would see that we were phased into them.

Q. These taxation reforms in your policy speech - has the Federal Treasurer, Mr. McMahon, been a party to discussion about taxation reforms?

PM. Oh, yes, he has been. . . . in fact he has been speaking about them quite frequently around the country, about the need for trying to do something about the inequities which have developed in the taxation law. One of the first things I did when I became Prime Minister was to ask him to look into this and ask the Treasury to look into this. It is a very very complex matter.

Q. We will come back to your record as a government in a moment, if we may. But you are virtually offering a dollar a week to the lower and middle income wage-earners during the life of the next Parliament, providing, of course, your Government gets back in.

PM. Oh, I don't think you can work it out that way. I wouldn't work it out that way.

Q. Well, in your policy speech you have said you are prepared to give \$200 million back to Australians in taxation concessions, on a year by year basis, admittedly, during the life of that next Parliament. Well, with a workforce of 2 million people in Australia, perhaps in this category of lower to middle income group earners, this is going to work out between \$1 and \$2 a head.

PM. No, this would only work out that way if everybody were earning the same income and everybody got the same tax rebates and so on, and they don't. Rates are different for different classes of income and the whole matter would be far too complex to try and say it would be a dollar a week for everybody. It would be relief for everybody. But at this stage, and until studies are completed, you. . . . I would like to agree with what you suggest, but I am afraid I couldn't.

Q. Any taxation concessions that come, they would not be until the Government brought down its next Budget?

PM. They would be starting in the next Budget, yes.

Q. I see. Right. Is the Government really offering substantial benefits for pensioners? After all, the Labor Party, with its policy speech a couple of weeks back, offered a dollar a week rise to pensioners.

PM. We have given - it is not a matter of promising - we have given very substantial assistance to pensioners of all kinds. Indeed in the last two Budgets, which is just a little over a year, the base rate pension has been raised by a total of \$2. This we have already done - and this is old age pensions I am talking of. And we have paid particular attention to widows with children and to the handicapped. We have given a whole range of very, very significant benefits and we have brought in the tapered means test which is an incentive to thrift, so that people just don't get cut out of a pension altogether because they have got some kind of superannuation income. So this we have already done. What we think is that what we have done will be accepted by the Australian people as an earnest of what we propose to do as soon as it is responsible to do so. We want to see that the benefits they get are real benefits and not illusory.

Q. And you have singled out organisations, such as the Meals on Wheels organisation, to give Government aid to?

PM. Well, we think this is a very, very good, voluntary organisation, and that its expansion would be of benefit to people they serve and to the organisations themselves.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, country viewers who saw your policy speech on television, will be interested to know that you are going to find \$100 million over five years to help water some of Australia's distant farms. Would you like to expand on this one?

PM. Yes, it's not merely finding water for.....it's not merely conserving water in dams. The money is to be made available for conservation of water, yes, but also for flood prevention and mitigation, which is quite an important matter in various parts of Australia. And it is also to be available for surveying our underground water resources, so that we may have a much better idea of where artesian water is and what quantity we have got and what opportunities for development it will give to us. Water is one of the major factors limiting the growth of Australia and this is why we have made a significant attack on it.

Q. The name of Chips Rafferty is probably one that is known to perhaps every person that is watching this telecast this evening.

PM. It's known to me, yes.

Q. Chips Rafferty has been urging the Government for several years to try and find some sort of subsidy for the production of Australian films and Australian television. Now I understand that you would like to do something about this?

PM. Well, we would like to do something about it and we are going to do something about it. We are proposing to set up a corporation which will invest in films with a significant Australian content, made in Australia, or lend money to the producers of such films. It will have an initial capital of \$1 million and it will have that capital replenished so that at the beginning of each year it would still have \$1 million. And the profits which we hope it will make, and the returns we hope it will get from its successful films would then be paid to it in the hope that it would be able to be self-supporting after a while.

Q. Well, let's ask you a curly one for the last one. You have talked about an 8.7 per cent growth in the economy. You have talked about a record number of houses being built by your Government. You have talked about more migrants. . . . more this and more that. Well, do you want to go to the public on your record, or do you want to go to the public on what you propose to do for the benefit of Australia?

PM. I think we would like to do three things. We would like to go to the public on our record, on our record of achievements which is really quite great; on the preservation of the present state of the economy, the preservation of the present prosperity; the avoidance of inflation; the continuance of growth and immigration - and all those things of which you spoke. In other words - on our record, on the results our record has achieved, and also on the new proposals which we are making for the future and which we are sure we can keep without inflation, or without increasing taxation. The new proposals - you've mentioned some of them - the relief in income tax, for example, bringing Australia into the atomic age, paying particular attention to the children's needs and needy families, continuing on those paths, but retaining the present full employment and state of economy we have got.

Q. Thank you very much for answering these questions tonight, Mr. Prime Minister.
