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PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. This past week has been an important week for Australia. It has been a week where Australians have focused on two separate but fundamentally important issues.

The issue with the most immediate impact - and the one that has taken the newspaper headlines - has been the strike by the air traffic controllers. The Government made a stand that I believe was supported by millions of Australians. We made a conscious decision to put the interests of this community before the self interest of a small and elite group. We made responsible decisions. We made decisions in the national interest.

I am pleased that the air controllers have finally agreed to go back to work, so their case can be heard by the highest arbitral tribunal in the land. The Government will support the decision of this tribunal. I hope the men will be unequivocal in the support of the umpire's decision.

The other issue of fundamental and basic importance to the good government of our country is the referendum proposals to reform our constitution. It has not made dramatic headlines - but in many ways this is understandable because the issues before the people are not dramatic issues. They are simply aimed at tidying up the constitution to meet the needs of Australia at this moment.

This past week I have visited Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart, Launceston, Adelaide and Perth, explaining the benefits of the four proposals. I have been greatly encouraged by the response so far. I have no doubt that all four proposals will pass in every state. I am confident that they will receive overwhelming support.

Some people have suggested that either or each of Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia would reject the proposal that the Senate and the House of Representatives elections be held at the same time. I am convinced that the basic logic and common sense behind this proposal will make sure it is passed in these three states, as well as in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. I believe our arguments - arguments put by every member of the House of Representatives and the great majority of Senators - are getting through to those people who want to decide the merit of each proposal with an open mind.

/Our arguments

Our arguments are being accepted - and they are being accepted because of their fairness, logic and plain Australian common sense. I believe that men and women are applying what I call the 'common sense test' to each question. Is it common sense to allow people in the A.C.T. and Northern Territory to be counted in any referendum vote? Is it common sense for judges to retire at 70 years of age? Is it common sense to hold elections for the House of Representatives and Senate on the same day? Is it common sense to replace a Senator with a Senator from the same party? Surely the answer in each case is a clear 'yes'.

It is significant that since we began on the 'yes' campaign, support for each of the four questions has steadily risen. This support will continue as the arguments continue to be put before the community. So far, I and other Parliamentarians putting our case have spent many hours on radio and television programmes talking directly to men and women who have shown a real concern for constitutional reform. Their concern and their wish for reform in this important area has been demonstrated by the seriousness of their questioning. This concern is most heartening and refreshing because constitutional reform is essential if we want to maintain the real role of our democratic institutions.

If by some chance these proposals are rejected by the community, I believe the future of our constitutional conventions will be in jeopardy. These proposals were overwhelmingly supported by all political parties - at all levels of Government - at the last constitutional convention. Those proposals are the same proposals as we are now putting to Australians. It is for that reason that I am a little disappointed in the attitude of a couple of Premiers to the simultaneous election proposal. There was no dissent on this proposal at the convention. In fact, statements of support were issued.

This coming week, following a Cabinet meeting in Melbourne that will attend to normal Government business, we will continue to put our views plainly and directly. I have no doubt that Australians will see our arguments for what they are - and that is plain common sense.
