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PRIME MINISTER

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ELECTORATE TALK

At the end of the decade and as we stand at the doorway to the next, Australians are entitled to feel every confidence about the prospects ahead. We have emerged from the 70s with conditions right for sustained growth in the 1980s. The 70s were not without their difficulties. We went through a few turbulent years.

In the early part of the decade the economy was placed under stresses which it was unable to bear. But through all the setbacks the essential strength and conviction of the Australian people prevailed. The durability and adaptability of our institutions was reasserted. In many ways, the 70s was a watershed decade in the history of this nation. The hard lessons learned from it were telling ones.

It was brought home to all Australians that raging inflation attacked and weakened the very fabric of our society; that wage explosions led to unemployment; that governments could not go on spending and tossing money around like chaff. The great lesson was that responsible government had to learn to say "no".

Responsible government should control its spending so it doesn't have to resort to the printing press. The 70s too saw many of our traditional values and attitudes come into question. There was growing disenchantment with our education system. There was an awareness that education should be more closely related to the labour market, and that greater emphasis be placed on technical skills. Our young people asserted themselves and played a more creative and constructive role than we have seen in the past.

Family life in Australia changed. We saw an increasing participation by women in the workforce, and a marked decline in Australia's birth-rate. The family, however, remains central to our way of life. Family obligations and responsibilities are as important as ever they were. Indeed, at a time when a number of young people are finding it difficult to make the transition from school to work, the family has a greater responsibility and a greater role.

In welfare, it became clear in the early 70s that failure to manage the economy effectively had serious long-term effects on the poor, the sick, the aged, the underprivileged, and the unemployed. On the credit side, the 70s also saw an increased consciousness of the need for our aboriginal people to take their rightful place in Australian society.

There was too, a new awareness of our heritage and of our history, and the value to us of the many people from overseas who made Australia their home. Their cultures and their traditions have enhanced Australian society. A new balance developed in our society between the need to conserve, and the need to change.

The 70s saw us grow and mature as a nation. We cemented our place in the world as an independent, middle-ranking power with good relations with many countries in the developed and in the developing world. Over the past four years your Government has pursued a sound, forward-looking economic policy which has restored confidence and has put in place a strong and efficient base from which growth in the 80s can take off.

There is now nothing we as a nation cannot achieve if we play our cards right. We have created the economic environment for a great program of national development which will underpin that growth. Without sustained economic growth, Australia can never build the kind of nation we all want for our children, and theirs. Without growth we can't create more jobs; we can't meet our welfare requirements; we can't support generously the arts, culture and sports. Without growth we can't as a nation provide the way of life which maximises personal freedom, individualism, opportunity and self-advancement.

With a continuation of our policies and programs, I am confident that we can march boldly into the 1980s, and get on with the business of building a great nation.

It is up to Australians, working together, and having confidence in themselves and in each other, to make the most of this country for ourselves and for our children.