

PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE, MELBOURNE

Question

Prime Minister, it is the morning after the night before. How do you feel?

Prime Minister

Relaxed. I am glad that the fight is over, that the election is over, because that now enables us to get on with the business of Government, and put our plans into action.

Question

What are the first priorities?

Prime Minister

I will be having discussions with my own Department either tonight or tomorrow morning, because there is some legislation that I would like to get through in a short session before Christmas - probably about two weeks; the training allowance, to encourage people to undertake training rather than to be unemployed - that ought to be operating as soon as possible.

Question

Does it concern you that the majority of Australians did not vote for your Party.

Prime Minister

What counts are the numbers you get in the Parliament, and we had very strong support for the Liberal Party and for the National Party combined. The voting system works and it is a very fair one. We have the numbers in the Parliament.

Question

Are you concerned that your Government's actions may be frustrated by the Democrats in the Senate?

Prime Minister

I think that is jumping too far ahead, because in Queensland I think we will have three Government Senators. There is a chance of that in New South Wales, South Australia, and also in Western Australia. So it is much too early to assume that the Democrats would have the balance of power in the Senate.

Question

If they did hold the balance of power ...

Prime Minister

I do not need hypothetical circumstances before I come to them.

Question

What other legislation apart from the training legislation ...

Prime Minister

Well, I will be going through all the policy commitments to have a look at what ought to be done. That will enable the drafting to be undertaken.

Question

Would you have any others in mind at this stage that you can pinpoint; any other aspects of legislation that you ...

Prime Minister

That really is the one thing that is forefront in my mind; but we are obviously not going to meet for a couple of weeks just for that piece of legislation. There will be other legislation which we would want to be able to get through; depreciation allowances for primary producers is probably one, but I am going to go through the whole list either this evening or tomorrow morning, and see what could desirably go through before Christmas and what alternatively can be delayed to an Autumn session.

Question

Prime Minister, any drought legislation - that depreciation allowance would help with the ...

Prime Minister

Well, it would in a marginal way, but the drought assistance is an on-going one. We have made very substantial advances available to the States to assist in that. Over the last three or four weeks the re-stocking and carry-on loans have been extended. This is what we have been urging on the States, and especially on NSW for some time. We made the advances against our commitment under the formula, available to the States so that there would be no justification for delaying or withholding payments any more. In some cases I think they have been delayed.

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Question

Did you expect to do as well as you have done.

Prime Minister

I believe so, yes. This election - and at a little later time I will have something more to say about it - concentrated much too much on the polls in the media. That is not what the election was about.

Question

But it has gone right against the polls.

Prime Minister

It has gone against the polls. That ought to be a warning. Not all polls - there was one published on Friday that was fairly near the mark. But, it has gone against the others and I always believed it would, because I felt the polls were misjudging the mood of the Australian electorate. There is a warning in that because too much discussion about the polls - that hides the issues and it is in fact the issues that are important. The issues are much more important than whether I or Mr. Hayden deliver a speech well or deliver it badly. That might have an impact on some people, but what is going to affect people's lives and the prosperity and well-being of Australia is in fact the actual issues. They received remarkably little coverage once the policy speeches themselves were out of the way.

Question

...the lessons that you have learnt from this election campaign, and losing, apparently, half your majority.

Prime Minister

Well, the numbers have stood up very well in nearly every State other than Victoria. There were some particular reasons in Queensland which there are no need to go into now. But there was a very clear message there. But that is a Queensland message. We are going to have to look into the situation in Victoria very closely indeed. But apart from Victoria the numbers have stood up very well. The other message that people need to understand is that the real movement in votes in this election is from Democrat to Labor, Australian Democrat to Labor. The Australian Democrats have in fact polled rather badly, much worse than I am sure they would have wanted. In most areas the actual Liberal vote has stood up pretty well. But obviously in the aftermath of an election you examine all of these things as a matter of routine and see what lessons you ought to draw out of it for the future.

Question

While your Party has won sir, do you think you have won as a leader?

Prime Minister

Apart from Sir Robert Menzies, I think I am the only person who has carried this Party to three successive victories at the polls.

Question

On the other hand, do you think Mr. Hayden, because he picked up seats, is also a winner as a leader?

Prime Minister

The Australian Labor Party has lost the election.

Question

What do you think of their performance?

Prime Minister

They have put up a redoubtable fight.

Question

Could I ask you on issue - that of taxation - Eric Risstrom from the Australian Taxpayers' Association today said he had information that the Government would now introduce a value added tax. Do you have any comment on that?

Prime Minister

Well if he has, Mr. Risstrom has information that I do not have. I have said I have nothing to add to what John Howard had said on the subject about 18 months ago.

Question

Will you not introduce a value added tax at any stage?

Prime Minister

I have nothing to add to what John Howard said.

Question

Prime Minister, you referred to your results in Victoria. Do you think the Victorian machine needs overhauling?

Prime Minister

No. I think it is too early to start looking in a particular direction. I would just say that it needs examination.

Question

There will be a post mortem in Victoria ...

Prime Minister

After every election, Australia-wide, you have an examination to see what you need to learn from it. There is nothing new in that.

I would just like to repeat something that I said last night on national television, and that is to thank all those people who have supported the Government Parties - either by their vote or by working actively for the Government and the return of the Government. I do feel very strongly for those supporters of the Government who have lost their seats, because there have been some very good people amongst them. I hope they will come back into the political arena at some point in the future. I would also want to repeat that our purpose is to govern for all the people of this nation, and not just those who might happen to vote Liberal or National Party. That is our objective and one which we will seek to discharge as well as we possibly can.

The other thing which I did not say last night, which I should have said last night; I do not think I would have been able to carry the fight on in the way in which it did, and to a successful conclusion, if it was not for the very particular support and help of Tamie through the campaign and indeed, not just during campaign, right throughout my political life. And I should have said that last night.

Question

Do you think Sir Billy is going to get back in? \_\_\_\_\_

Prime Minister

On the last figures I saw last night, yes.

Question

Very close, isn't it?

Prime Minister

Very close. But on the last figures I saw last night he would be -- but again, when it is as close as that you have got to wait until all the votes are counted and for the absent votes, the postal votes.

Question

Anybody you feel particularly sad to have lost?

Prime Minister

Yes, but I think it is invidious to bring out comparisons.

Question

Prime Minister, the size of the Ministry - you've got a 27 men Ministry at the moment. Can we expect that to be reviewed downwards?

Prime Minister

I think it is too early to start speculating or making decisions about that. Obviously again, as one would expect after an election, you talk with your own colleagues about these things. What is more important than the size of the Ministry is the size of the Public Service as a whole.

Question

PM, when are you going to come to Canberra. (Inaudible) at the farm.

Prime Minister

I will probably go to the farm tomorrow morning for a couple of days. But there are certain things I will be putting in train tonight or tomorrow morning as I indicated earlier, so that for the legislation we would want to introduce in that group session, the drafting instructions can be given so that it can be ready for us.

Question

What are you looking at sir, end of November?

Prime Minister

I would think probably the last week in November or the first week in December, but again, that will have to be finally determined after I have discussed it with my colleagues.