



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, TREASURY PLACE, MELBOURNE, 17
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E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, what's the latest on the pilots dispute?

PM: Latest on the pilots dispute? Well the situation is quite clear. The airlines are significantly rebuilding their capacity. We're taking the Air Force out in the middle of December. International airlines will be out by the beginning of January and airlines will be handling the Christmas traffic and next year we will have what I've been continuously promising, and that is a significantly more efficient airline industry.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, your reaction to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Remuneration Tribunal decision to bring on its hearing on the chemists. Are you happy with that?

PM: Yes, I welcome the decision of the Tribunal. We have consistently sought to get a resolution of this issue which meets the requirements, the legitimate requirements of the pharmacy profession, of the consumers and of the taxpayer. Those are our triple responsibilities. We were very close, as you know, earlier this year to getting agreement with the Guild. That slipped us by and so we had no alternative but to go to the Tribunal under the legislation. We accepted the umpire's decision. The elements of the pharmacy industry have expressed unhappiness about elements of the decision, about its data base, about its methodology and about its outcome. Now under the announcement of Mr Justice Riordan, he's agreed to open all these issues and he's saying to them, 'well if you've got concerns, I will listen to them and listen to them in detail, whatever you've got to put.' I'm prepared to visit the States and visit centres in the States, in all States. We will co-operate with that and of course in regard to some of the decisions that we've made, post the

(PM cont) decision, we'll continue that. For instance, the essential pharmacy allowance, we're prepared to continue that. As an indication of the total good faith of the Government you will recall that one of the things that I said in the package after the decision is that we would be prepared to contemplate adding to the Tribunal a person with experience in the retail pharmacy industry. So I've authorised the Minister, in his response that he'll be releasing this afternoon to Mr Reardon's statement, an indication that we would be prepared to add such a person for this inquiry. So I trust that now any concerns that our friends in the pharmacy industry have got, that they will bring before the Tribunal take the opportunity to put every piece of information that they want to. We don't want any information withheld, we want a decision which is fair for everybody.

JOURNALIST: Did you ask the Tribunal to sit early?

PM: No. This is an initiative of the Tribunal.

JOURNALIST: What happens to the \$60M package now?

PM: Well as Mr Staples will indicate in his statement which I've authorised, just how that will stand now. What we need to do with all that is something that we will need to discuss before the Tribunal when it meets. But I've said just moment ago that the essential pharmacy allowance for instance, we think that should go ahead, that makes sense. I've also said in regard to representation on the Tribunal, if someone with experience in the retail pharmacy industry, I'm prepared to go ahead with that so that can be part of the new review. That would presumably give even more confidence to pharmacists that their concerns will have been fully understood and considered.

JOURNALIST: Will you expect the pharmacists to stop campaigning against the Government now?

PM: I think you'll see in Mr Justice Riordan's statement which I have only had the opportunity of reading briefly because I have been in EPAC all day, but he refers to the need of course if they are going to take this opportunity to do so in a situation where there is no duress.

JOURNALIST: A Macquarie Bank report has suggested the Government's policies, economic policies are short sighted, referring directly to monetary policy. Did that come out in the EPAC conference today.

PM: No, it certainly did not. I think if you were going to characterise the contributions at EPAC today of the discussions on the economy, I think there was general agreement as to the thrust of the Government's economic policies.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, the Opposition says that it's preparing for an early election in the new year. What chances?

PM: I think this Opposition is becoming an increasing joke, isn't it. As a charitable man in politics, one of the most charitable in the history of this country, I would say, I would simply give this kind advice to the Opposition. Before they contemplate getting into an election they ought to conduct their first fight first, and their first fight is to get their own act in order. You have a situation where people outside the Party, outside the Parliamentary Party, are to a very large extent setting their agenda -

JOURNALIST: You mean John Elliott?

PM: You said that, I didn't. You also have a situation where there are the deepest of divisions within the Liberal Party, within the National Party and importantly between the Liberals and the National Party. I would think that before they think about tackling a strong and unified Government the best thing they could do would be to try and get their own acts together.

JOURNALIST: Tony Eggleton says that he believes Labor, to use his word, is panicking over the impact of the Opposition's family tax package and says again, to use his own words, he believes that you'll offer a sop to families.

PM: Is that right? Well I'm very, very interested to hear the observations of Tony Eggleton. Over recent years he hasn't got a very good track record. It's not going to be improved next time round:

JOURNALIST: Are you going to have anything more for families between now and say the middle of next year?

PM: I would've thought that if I've got something to announce before we go to the election I would pick a somewhat different locale and context and time and situation to announce that than in this environment.

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