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## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF NEWS CONFERENCE, VICTORIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, MELTON, 2 NOVEMBER 1990

E & O E - PROOF ONLY

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, how important do you believe education reform is?

PM: It's the most important single reform that any society can undertake. As I was saying in my speech here, you can characterise a society as to whether it's truly democratic by the measure of the equality of opportunity to education. That was one of the great disasters of Australian society before we came to office. As I said, only one in three of our kids stayed on in the education system and these great conservatives who after seven years in office had increased the retention rate by 2%, I've doubled it in my period of office. There's now two out of three of our kids staying on and we've reflected that in vastly increased expenditures for TAFE and in the educational area because unless you have a situation where kids, whatever the income level of their parents or wherever they live, unless they've all got an equality of opportunity then you haven't got a democratic society.

JOURNALIST: Well if this is so important why was it not then on the agenda of the Special Premiers' Conference?

PM: It was.

JOURNALIST: Well Mr Dawkins says that the Premiers rejected -

PM: Well it just goes to show that if you ask a question you should always be sure of your facts. It was on the agenda and it's listed on those items which will be the subject of review and report to the Premiers' Conference next year.

JOURNALIST: Well Mr Dawkins says that the Premiers have picked on him by -

PM: Well I'm not getting into that. I've told you the answer to the question.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, on the ... old subject of opinion polls, the latest one shows a substantial erosion of support for Labor, particularly among blue collar workers. What comment do you have on that?

PM: Well as I've said before I wouldn't like to go to a poll now because there is some hurt in the community from some hard things we've got to do. But let me make this point. You talk about blue collar workers. If you wanted a perfect illustration of the difference between Labor and the conservatives you've got it here. You're right in the middle of it. For most of the post war period, the overwhelming proportion in post war period, certainly from 1949 on, they had control of this country. The federal level and certainly at the level of Victoria here. And what was their legacy in education? A pathetic level by international standards, as I've said, where only one in three of the kids stayed on in school. If you were a kid who came from well to do parents or if you lived in the right part of town, you had no problem about access to education. But if you came from relatively low income families and you lived in the western suburbs your chances were near to zilch. Now we've transformed that and I treat with contempt the people who say we haven't got concern for our roots and for the ordinary people. This is living proof of all the years of conservatism and the western suburbs have nothing, they were treated with contempt when it came to educational opportunity. I committed myself when I came to Government with my Party in power that we were going to change that. We've changed it here in Melbourne, we've changed it in Sydney and this Australian society is now characterised not by privilege in education that you had before we came but now it's characterised by equality of opportunity.

JOURNALIST: Mr Hawke, do you think that the Kirner Government will have to lift its game dramatically in Victoria if you are to hold office?

PM: Well obviously Joan and her colleagues realise that they have been very seriously hurt by the events of the past year in Victoria. It's hurt them and it's flowed on and it's hurt us. But that's no secret to Joan and I believe in the relatively short period that's she been Premier she has made a tremendous start. Let me say I've just come from a two day Premiers' Conference in Brisbane and the respect in which she was held by her colleagues right across the board was most remarkable. She is, I think, outstanding and she has the determination and obviously to the extent that she fights back and improves her position here in Victoria, that will be of assistance to us.

STUDENT: Mr Hawke, would you ever consider increasing Austudy ... helping the students ...

PM: Would I ever consider it? I've been doing it for seven years. I do more than consider it, I've done it.

JOURNALIST: Would you increase ...

PM: I'm not here for an argument.

JOURNALIST: There are increasing signs from overseas that there's this greater and greater expectation that the crisis in the Gulf is moving to a climax. Is that this Government's assessment and is there anything that can be considered to get the hostages out?

PM: Well you've got two sets of questions there. Let me go to the first one. Now obviously I am privy to a fair bit of private intelligence and so on and I can't share that but I can say this, that I don't think there's anyone in the world, anyone, who can say with certainty what the future course of events is in the Gulf. I think you can say these things. There is a determination on the part of most nations of the world who have united under the unanimous resolutions of the Security Council of the United Nations that the annexation of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein shall not be allowed to stand. That determination remains very, very firm. And it's being backed by an increasing presence of resources there in the Gulf. The second point I think flows from that, that I think it must be becoming increasingly apparent that Saddam Hussein that he will not be allowed to retain Kuwait, that his forceful annexation of Kuwait will not be acceptable to the international community in general and including most importantly to his Arab neighbours. So I would hope that an intelligent assessment of those facts should lead to a withdrawal - an unconditional withdrawal by Saddam Hussein. But as I've said before on all the evidence, you're not dealing with someone who is totally rational in his calculations. But I would hope that the increasing build up of evidence that he cannot sustain and will not be allowed to sustain that position will lead him to a peaceful withdrawal. I can say thirdly this point, that I know that the leadership in the United States does not want war. It is serious when it says it doesn't want war, that it wants a peaceful resolution of this matter. And that certainly is the position of my Government. Now in regard to the hostages, which was the second part of your question, you will have noticed that the European governments have unanimously made the point that they believe it is not helpful for the semi-official moves by particular nations to send people in there and try to negotiate the release of some hostages. What happens is that some get released and others are left and it tends to confuse the determination of the rest of the world to bring about an end to this matter. Now having said that, I want it understood that as far as we're concerned, these two things are important. Firstly, that we are unremitting in the work by our official representatives there, our diplomatic people in protecting the interests of the hostages and working for their release. There is not a day goes by in which our officials are not working to that end. Secondly, I say this, that if in fact some individuals seek to go there and work for the release then we would hope if they do that, that they may have

some success. But it is, I believe, a correct judgement by European nations that at the official level the way it should be done is in the way it is being done, behind the scenes ceaselessly but that the attempt to give some credibility to Saddam Hussein by having senior people meeting and negotiating with them is not, in the overall sense, helpful.

STUDENT: Bob, how are we going to go in the cricket, mate? Are we going to beat them this year?

PM: Yes, too right mate. Too right.

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