



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
NATIONAL ART GALLERY, MELBOURNE, 11 MARCH 1992

E & OE PROOF COPY

PM: It's very obvious that my parliamentary colleague, Dr Hewson, is exceedingly rattled. Today he has forgotten where his candidate's factory is, but worse than that, in his terms he is now apparently deciding that all of the things that we have done, that he has described as unfunded in the One Nation package of the Government on the infrastructure side, may be things he can adopt and add to. So, the ideological model which he has given everybody with the Fightback package is now unravelling with the first sort of pressure in a by-election campaign. This is faster than even I would have expected it. That is, that Dr Hewson is now grabbing for the fiscal lever, whether it be further give-aways off the Budget or adopting Labor's infrastructure programs, that is building ring roads around cities which he described a couple of weeks ago as grossly irresponsible and unfunded. So he doesn't know where he is standing in Budget terms or in ideological terms and it just means that the first time someone said to him look, hang on what's wrong with the ring road around Melbourne, it means the trucks aren't running through our suburb, he straight away said maybe I can give you that, maybe I can do that. It doesn't auger well for his program, and of course in government what you see is just a run-away of our fiscal policy.

J: But he does say that he will be able to fund it from growth in revenue?

PM: Yes I know, but that's just gibberish because we've got the growth forecasts there which he says were too optimistic. And at the same time he adopts our growth forecasts and then takes the revenue from them. He doesn't know what he's doing.

J: But isn't that sort of adoption the great tradition of Australian politics?

- PM: You mean he poses a compliment by adopting our policies? It's a backhanded compliment. I'd prefer him now to stick to his last, that is to stick to his dry, unimaginative last of Fightback.
- J: Prime Minister, will you make a visit to Indonesia a priority?
- PM: Not a priority, but I would like to go there at some time this year and that's a matter of trying to see when I can do that.
- J: Do you have a date in mind?
- PM: Not really, no.
- J: Do you also consider going up to Papua New Guinea for their celebrations on ANZAC Day?
- PM: I've been asked and I'm thinking about that now.
- J: Prime Minister, the Opposition seems certain you're going to drop the political ads legislation coming up to the Wills by-election.
- PM: The Government has not made up its mind about this. What I said was that we needed sometime to see just what impact this sort of legislation was having on a number of elections and that's what we're doing.
- J: What's your feeling about that ban?
- PM: I'll tell you after we've had some time.
- J: Mr Keating, is the fact of the matter, according to Mr Hogg anyway, that just as much money is now being spent as before?
- PM: Mr Hogg is an authority on this matter, I'm not. I'm not really able to comment about that.
- J: Would you be upset if the High Court ruled the legislation out?
- PM: We're always upset if any of our legislation has unconstitutional features.
- J: One of the concerns that emerged in the wake of the Tasmanian election was that Labor down there lost a chance to put across a rather complex message through television advertisements in a way which would have simplified the issue and made the choice clearer. Is that sort of concern something that's worrying you know about the ad legislation?

PM: We're moving into a period where the political contests maybe fought without the capacity to produce the arguments, and that needs to be thought about. But by the same token, the cost of producing the arguments has become prohibitive for the parties.

J: Would you like to have the opportunity to attack the GST on radio and television in an election campaign?

PM: I think the GST is such a stationary target we can attack it fulsomely, effectively, through the normal processes of the media.

J: Mr Keating, is there any chance that your consideration of this topic would create any changes this side of the by-election?

PM: No, of course not.

J: This side of the next federal election?

PM: That's for us to make a judgement about. We're still looking at it.

ends