



PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING, MP
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J: Prime Minister, the newspapers this morning have got a poll which shows that the Coalition's Fightback Mark II seems to have been well received. Do you believe that that poll will be sustained?

PM: No, those polls are, I mean we'll see what the polls say. That will take a while, a poll over the weekend on a matter like this is just next to worthless. We knew News limited were doing this poll, we told them that last week, that they apparently wanted a story for today. I don't think this is the one to take much notice of.

J: Are you concerned that it has turned the corner a bit for the Opposition?

PM: Dr Hewson is running on a policy he doesn't believe, this is the biggest con job in Australian history. This guy was telling me, two weeks ago, the stimulatory policies were wrong. He said One Nation was a mistake and now he is trying to emulate the Government's policies. What I've said in the House is that if Australia wants stimulatory policies delivered, let the people who actually believe in them do them and that's the Government. He is running on policies he doesn't believe, on money he doesn't have. I notice this morning he's trying to back away now from Telecom, that is the centre piece of his funding on Friday, is this morning, he's running back away from it. People have got to understand this about Telecom. either Dr Hewson drives a competitor out, that is Optus, to lift the profitability of Telecom to sell it or he lets Telecom do the commercial thing and put in timed local phone calls. You notice in his statement there was no talk what so ever of declines in prices or phone prices which the Government has, that is, inflation minus five per cent which we have as the guidelines for Telecom charting - none of that. To make Telecom a profitable show to sell it, you've got to let it do the totally commercial thing and the totally commercial thing is timed local phone calls. There is no way Telecom could be floated to private institutions without it being able to charge market prices for its product and that is, timed local calls. So, Dr Hewson today in

a quite startling display of back pedalling, is running off the Telecom thing which last Friday was the centre piece of his funding.

J: You said One Nation is ten months old, is it time for a face lift before the next federal election.

PM: You say that, but look, the Liberal party has come to our policy, we haven't come to theirs. They are the ones who now say stimulatory policies, they are the ones saying One Nation was right. Remember John Hewson said, look I took a year to put this policy together, he said this last year, he took a year to put this together, he said we thought about this, we've dorted every 'i', we've crossed every 'r', what he told us last Friday was that Fightback was wrong and what was right was the One Nation policy of a stimulus and basically a policy of inclusion for the community. He is the one who has had to shift ground, not the Government. So, it's not a matter of giving One Nation a facelift, One Nation is riding on supremely as I said as an idea. The thing that has had it is old Fightback Mark I, she's in the garbage bin.

J: So we can't expect any more give-a-ways before the next before the next ...

PM: I think it is very interesting in Australian politics, after a decade of abstemious economics, the media of Australia are now inviting the parties to spend their heads off.

J: Would you say if the trends in these early polls are sustained, that makes a February election very unlikely?

PM: Why should I debate election dates with you jokers.

J: Is today's environmental story the start of an election campaign?

PM: That was there anyway, that's been there for months, after months of work and planning, this was on. We set this date three or four months ago. The thing is polls taken over Saturday after ... look, you don't have to be a political scientist to know this fact - a poll taken on Saturday after a statement released on Friday is rubbish.

J: Prime Minister, last week Senator Richardson said that although the environmental movement wasn't exactly in love with the Labor party that Labor could still depend on the votes because the alternative was even more unattractive. Is this what today is all about?

PM: No, what today is about just continuing to build on the job. The soil and water issues, the larger role on Murray Darling river system, which the Commonwealth can play because it is a trans-state national issue, is, I think, another important thing to be doing in the environment agenda. As is a lot of the measures today, to deal with feral animals, to deal with mimosa pigra, to deal with locking up some of

these pastoral lease areas which have been part of contiguous environment protection zones. These are all items on the agenda, the study into Shoalwater Bay, one of the last great virgin areas of the Australian east coast. These are things which come from a party that is interested in the environment, again it is the same point, in terms of stimulatory policy, the Government believes in it and delivers those policies. In terms of having a decent safety net and including the Australian community in the policy, the Government believes it and delivers the policies. The same as the environment, the Government delivers it and believes the policies. The Opposition don't believe it and they are out there now trying to say that the hard hearted view of last week is now all off. There was a Richard Nixon phrase, I can't remember it, it was inoperative, I think. It has all the sincerity of that sort of treatment and I just think the public are much too sharp for Dr Hewson, they'll see right through him and his cynical Federal Director, Mr Robb and his poll driven research and his poll driven policies.

J: Would you see any special flood relief for South Australia?

PM: There is a permanent Commonwealth-State regime for flood and drought relief and any problems in South Australia will come up under that regime.

J: How important is South Australia in the reckoning for the next election, will it be an important decider for you?

PM: The thing is this. Dr Hewson has a South Australian policy, it's a zero tariffs, zero Adelaide policy. That's his policy. Zero tariff, zero Adelaide. On Friday he never shifted that policy, he stuck to zero tariffs for the motor vehicle industry and that will see and in many other areas of the manufacturing industry the largest base of South Australian employment decimated by imports. He had a chance to consider his position, he took it, but didn't change.

J: Melbourne's Northland College is due to be closed, do you have any comment on Mr Kennett's actions there?

PM: Dr Hewson says Mr Kennett's problem policies are the cause of my problems. Mr Kennett doesn't have a GST. Mr Kennett is running on Dr Hewson's industrial relations policy. The only thing is he put it into place first because he got elected. Now Dr Hewson is disparaging in rhetoric Mr Kennett, but still adopting, absolutely, all of his policies. The main thrust, that is to put eight million Australians onto common law contracts. What we are seeing from Dr Hewson is no change. His policy is basically this, prices up and wages down. Prices up under a consumption tax, wages down under an industrial relations policy where eight million Australians award conditions and pay are destroyed and where he pushes people onto common law contracts. All that Jeff Kennett had done for the rest of us is show us in action what John Hewson's policy had in the print and it is pretty cynical of him now to disparage Mr Kennett when he, Dr Hewson, is the author of Mr Kennett's policy.

- J: The Northland College is an Aboriginal College, the Melbourne people are pretty upset.
- PM: Mr Kennett is closing schools all over Victoria and again he's got to deal with his own community on these things, but what he has done is introduce the first leg of John Hewson's and John Howard's industrial relations policy and in doing that he's done in a sense some service to the nation in alerting Australians to what they can expect from a Hewson Government because Dr Hewson again had the opportunity last Friday to ditch this crazy industrial relations policy. All he did was reassert it.
- J: Prime Minister, how confident are you that Labor will pick up green preferences at the next federal election?
- PM: Anyone who is genuinely interested in the environment has got to look at the environmental record of the Government and its obvious, the whole Party's obvious concern and commitment to the environment. Not just the Government, but the Party. And if it is a two party choice, if you left it to the likes of Mr Reith and Dr Hewson they'd mine Hyde Park.
- J: Mr Keating, Standard and Poors don't seem too concerned that Coalition policies would be that negative for Australia's credit rating, how do you react to that?
- PM: And we are not too concerned about what they think.
- J: But they have just reaffirmed the ...
- PM: In political terms, what's that matter.
- J: Premier Arnold has asked you to break the nexus between Commonwealth public servants and politicians pay, have you considered that yet?
- PM: Understand this, there's nothing about the Liberals, you see them when they are unfettered, at their natural worst. The night that Mr Kennett was putting through the cuts to peoples pay, he was putting through a wage increase for State ministers. And of course would be, they think, horn to rule squad think the world could never pay them enough. So in a totally phoney display of contrition for this, Dr Hewson said on Friday, yes he'd cut MPs' pay back. MPs' pays have been caught up under a now long standing series of arrangements where they are treated the same basically as members of the public service, he knows that.

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