



## PRIME MINISTER

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP  
INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN NAUGHTON, RADIO 8DD  
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KN: .. you may have heard on AM earlier today, it seems that there was some mirth at the expense of Senator Bronwyn Bishop. The mirth occurred in the House of Representatives, and it seems as though some of Senator Bishop's colleagues didn't come to her rescue as a Bronwyn Bishop was doing the rounds of the Government benches. In fact, Michael Wooldridge actually crossed the floor to find out what the joke was, came back passed it around his colleagues and they all had a good giggle.

Well, to find out just what the joke was, and other things, I am joined in the studio by Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Thanks for coming in.

PM: Good, Kevin, nice to see you.

KN: What was the joke?

PM: Just that as Kim Beazley was telling us about this dinner or lunch which Senator Bishop had attended, and where she had passed these remarks about economic policies in the '80s which had caused some mirth at the lunch apparently, as he went on, it was quite a long answer, and not one person on the Coalition side got up to interrupt him. Up the back one of the National Party fellows got up to move an extension of time, you see, so that was the joke.

KN: So, it was as simple as that?

PM: It was as simple as that. That sort of produced a general hubbub and giggle on both sides.

KN: And a bit of humour for the day. Now, that's sort of been the issue that has stopped the Coalition, the one that has dogged the Government since half way through December has been the one relating to Sports and Environment Minister, Ros Kelly, known as the sports-rorts affair or whatever. It's an issue that has been around now for two months, that must do a bit of damage?

PM: I think, look, it is a ripple in the Canberra pond I think. These things, you see, journalists, being professional, take the things up and have a look at them as they

turn up. But I think the public they tend to just put a big discount through all this stuff, I mean, they come and go. And I think Ros Kelly's position is that no one has made any allegations stick that there is any fraud in any of this, so there is no fraud. Everyone is admitting that, even the Coalition. The Auditor said a program like this notionally is open to fraud. But the interesting thing about these sports grants, this is all the small sporting organisations in the country who might need facilities for, it could be netball, or it could be ....

KN: But hasn't the argument been, it is not a question of whether the money was spent in the right areas or not.

PM: I am just going to make this point to you. It has to be spent before it is recompensed. So, it is not a matter of writing a cheque which is then basically wasted or blown or something, it has actually got to be spent and then it is recompensed. So, therefore the opportunities of this thing being open to abuse are fairly diminished.

KN: But isn't the argument the fact that decisions are made in the Ministers office, as opposed to in the Department?

PM: Yes, that's the charge by the Liberal Party, saying that there is political bias in them, but when the Coalition government decided to, you know, build a dam here and build an airport strip there, they were made in Ministers' offices too. I don't think you can pin a Minister and say that decisions are necessarily wrong because they are made in the Minister's office. I mean, I was the Treasurer of this country for nearly ten years and most of the primary decisions I took were made by me.

KN: On white boards?

PM: They were made, often, in my head. No boards at all.

KN: Let's go on to that question of white boards.

PM: That is what happens. You can be in a discussion on the matter which I have seen this in the Expenditure Review Committee of the Government on many occasions, discussing something, and come back a day later and propose something that has no paper at all. I mean, this idea that there has to be a sort of paper thing that has got to be recommended by the Department is just simply an invention of a couple of characters on the front bench of the current Opposition.

KN: And also a question of concern for the Auditor-General, but just going back to that question of political damage, because the story has been around now for a while. Things like this white board angle, those sort of things can go into folk lore. Now someone suggested to me today that if the Australian Taxation Office knocked on a small business and said where's your records for the last seven years and the business person said well they were all on a white board, the Taxation Office wouldn't wear that would they?

PM: No, but what's happened here is that all of the proposals which Mrs Kelly has approved came from the department with recommendations. When I say with recommendations, not that which one or the other should be approved, but that they were all adoptable. The choice was then a matter for hers after making

judgements about each particular one. I mean, we do elect Ministers to make decisions. And what the Coalition is saying, that this is shocking, this Minister's actually made a whole lot of choices here, this is dreadful. You know, if there is not a bit of departmental paper with some wallah's name on it, it's a stew.

KN: So Ministerial decisions are part and parcel of the political landscape?

PM: Exactly, I mean, one of the things about this government is that, you see before the Labor Government in 1983, the place was run by the bureaucracy. That's why Australia was in a hole. I mean, the power of Ministers to make decisions is a very important thing. Now, what the Coalition is saying is - look, we want to see a recommendation from the department recommending this particular thing against that particular thing. Whereas if all of the proposals coming from the department to Mrs Kelly are adoptable ones, it is then a matter for her to decide which ones are adopted. Now, whether she does it in her head, on a white board, or doodles on a pad, I mean, in the end, I don't think it matters. But, I mean, we have got all this sort hand wringing. Last night we had Paul Lyneham on doing the second interview for the week with Senator Kernot and she had her most misty expression possible, more in sorrow than in anger she said that, you know, Mrs Kelly should go. The previous two nights she said there shouldn't be a whitewash by the House of Representatives Committee. So Mrs Kelly turned up, took 300 questions, but that wasn't enough apparently. You know Senator Kernot is now again talking about some inquiry. With these minor parties there is always veiled threats through their remarks. And then saying we will think about all this. The fact is, this has gone on for weeks. Not a sole, not a member of the Coalition, not anybody has established that there is any fraud here or anything wrong. It is really just a matter of choice about decisions and they don't like our priorities.

KN: But it is certainly a story that you would like to see go away?

PM: Look, Kevin, it will either linger longer or it will go. In the end, it won't make a tinkers cuss worth of difference to what happens to the country in the broad.

KN: Now the reason that you are in Darwin for the football match between Collingwood, of which you are a member, and the Aboriginal Allstars. The match obviously attracted your attention when Allan McAlister got in touch?

PM: He said to me would I like to come. And I thought it was a good thing to do. I think the match is a good match. I think it is a good idea and being associated with Collingwood, and having a fairly big spot in my heart and mind for the Aboriginal people of this country, I thought this was a good opportunity, particularly for Aboriginal sports men and women. And I see this as basically a celebration of them.

KN: Charlie Perkins said yesterday that, to many Aborigines, sport is one of the few ways in which they can change some the lifestyles that they've been stuck with because of family and social tragedy.

PM: Well I agree with that. I think that is right.

KN: So can you see the value of this game then being telecast and broadcast all over Australia as, if you like, a very big and public step into, perhaps, widening that whole process?

PM: Well I think it is just another recognition of the fact that the Aboriginal community of this country have delivered to the nation great sports men and women. And that they excel in all codes and they do it often. In this, we've got, drawn together from around the country, Aboriginal players of Australian Rules and, of course, a fair contingent from the Northern Territory, playing one of the great sides of Australia, Collingwood.

KN: The great side?

PM: The great side, well I think the greatest sporting club in the country.

KN: Not much argument here about that. Finally, there is going to be a bookmaker out there, who are you backing, or is that a stupid question?

PM: I don't think there is going to be any losers out of this, you see. I know someone is going to end up winning on the day, but I think everyone is going to win because I think it is a good thing to do and it is a celebration of the huge contribution and athleticism of Australian Aboriginal people, in this case Australian Aboriginal men, into this code. So I wouldn't want to try and pick this one, Kevin, I know you are a Collingwood supporter and maybe the underdog bias in us would have us go for Collingwood. I have got divided loyalties on this one.

KN: Okay, Prime Minister Keating thanks for your time.

PM: Thank you Kevin.

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