



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP
INTERVIEW WITH JOHN LAWS, RADIO 2UE, WEDNESDAY,
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JL: On the line from Canberra, we have the Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Prime Minister, good morning.

PM: How are you John?

JL: Have you got any money?

PM: Well, this is Mr Webster is it?

JL: Yes.

PM: You see, it's State Government Ministers without any vision and without any ideas. When the national government talks and they say well, rather than us give you a plan or sit down and negotiate something with, give us a cheque, give us some money. In other words, if you want something give us some money. Now, the Commonwealth has got a lot of money in Sydney now with the Better Cities Program in Pymont.

JL: Yes.

PM: ... \$117 million and a number of areas around Sydney. I made an offer to the Fahey government, that is, that we would deal with them on this subject. They never came back to us. Not at any stage and I've been waiting for a response and a proposal. One which says look, it costs this much to take the expressway away, these are our idea about the railway. What has happened here, John, is the State Rail Authority and the Roads and Traffic Authority ... look, we're not having this, we want to keep our expressway and you can see basically, they run the Cabinet down here.

- JL: Well, many people would feel that way because many people would see it simply as being pig headed and non-visionary to leave the wretched thing there when it is an eyesore and does precious little good, but they are saying it would cost \$400 million to make the alternate arrangements and they can't afford it. Now, it's hard for anybody to deny that they're not telling the truth?
- PM: Based on what though? Based on what? I mean, putting the railway under ground or terminating the railway at Wynard. I mean, it didn't always go round past Circular Quay. Doing what with the road system? Selling off the real estate either end. I mean, what's the basis of that? See, at no stage has the New South Wales government come back to the Commonwealth about the issue. I'll tell you what's happened here John - two things.
- JL: I was led to believe, could you tell me if I'm wrong, I was led to believe and, I think, you might have told me that you said that you were so keen on the idea you'd be happy to sort of give them a hand, help, I think, was the word used. Is that true?
- PM: That's right and in other words sit down and where some of these projects are beyond the capacity of a State government and particularly where you've got national ... I mean, this city is going to be the show case city of the world at the end of this century.
- JL: Well, it should be.
- PM: It's not going to be with the way the Fahey government is administering it with a Casino in Pyrmont, with the destruction of Pyrmont by the Roads and Traffic Authority, with the decision to leave the Cahill Expressway there, the fact is that, and I'm told that this decision has been made for two reasons. One, that the National Party wouldn't stand spending this sort of money in the city - that's point one.
- JL: Yes, well, that was intimated by Robert Webster.
- PM: Well, he is a National Party Minister. And point two, that the Cabinet is not strong enough for the SRA and the Roads and Traffic Authority. Just look at the destruction at Pyrmont and you can see the sort of tyranny that these bodies are actually wreaking on Sydney. No central planning. No idea about objectives, if they want to put an expressway or an elevated expressway through an urban area, they just bang the houses and the buildings out of the way and there it goes - ugly as sin - and the aesthetic and the urban environment is the last thought they have.
- JL: Yep, well, you've said to me on more than one occasion that Sydney is the most wonderful city in the world. Very few people would argue, but I suppose your personal view and personal pride in Sydney can't allow

you to simply hand over the money because you want something done. There are other things that have to be taken into account.

PM: There are important objectives here. The Olympics is an important thing.

JL: Important to all Australia.

PM: Well, the Commonwealth joined with the former Labor government - with Neville Wran and Laurie Brereton - to get this harbour tunnel built.

JL: Yes.

PM: Together we made arrangements to build a harbour tunnel. That left the opportunity then of feeding eastern Sydney other than by via the Cahill Expressway. So, it's now an opportunity to take it down, but I'm afraid this Government has no courage and no vision.

JL: Well, when you say you are prepared to help them does that mean you would give them financial aid?

PM: Yes. I've said to them if they come back with a set of arrangements that we would consider it, but it's got to be a scheme, an arrangement. But, basically what they've said is 'look, we don't care about it and there's no way the National Party is going to let us spend this money in Sydney, so, we are not doing it.' So, the Commonwealth offer just went ... apparently Robert Webster said we reneged on an offer. Well, that's a straight untruth. A complete untruth.

JL: Maybe I could get Mr Webster back again and suggest to him that ...

PM: Ask him when we reneged. Is there any correspondence? And, there won't be.

JL: Yes, he said there was incidentally.

PM: No, there was no correspondence. The fact is I was waiting for them to come back to the Commonwealth and they never have.

JL: Anyway the point is, it's another thing that shouldn't be a political issue should it? We're talking about the beautification of the greatest city in the country.

PM: You've got to have governments that have got some heart, John.

JL: Yes, and you've got to have governments that are prepared to be a bit co-operative.

PM: ... and they still haven't got an Olympic Chief appointed. They want to build a building as ugly as sin in Pyrmont which will destroy that whole

area over there and basically that's because of lowest common denominator guidelines. I mean, the casino shouldn't be in Pyrmont, it should be in the city proper. And, I think, that the people of Sydney and New South Wales, indeed all Australians, who are interested in Sydney particularly as the Olympics are arising, there's a stewardship here given to the Fahey government to go and make some decisions for the nation - not just for Sydney or for New South Wales - and making a horrible mess of it.

JL: Yes, and you are prepared to be co-operative in the making of the decisions?

PM: Yes, but I'm not prepared to say, to down-the-line National Party ministers 'look, here's an open cheque for what you want to do', and them saying to us 'otherwise we won't deal with you.' The Commonwealth will not deal with any government on that basis.

JL: Well, I suppose the Commonwealth couldn't do that because you can't have people holding a gun to your head can you?

PM: No and, you know, without basically doing what these ... see, there is a central issue here, John, these authorities are outside of political control.

JL: That's right.

PM: The State Rail Authority and the Roads and Traffic Authority will wreck any urban environment, they will destroy any city state if it suits them. They are run by engineers and all they are about is building bigger and more impressive, in their terms, expressways or corridors and the urban aesthetic, the urban environment, the beauty of the city ... I mean the whole notion of beauty is not even in their lexicon.

JL: Yes, the thing is again and I hope you agree, that this really should not be a political issue should it?

PM: Well, not when the Commonwealth government which has no responsibilities for Sydney directly has said generously because of the Olympics we will sit down and look at the central quay side area of Sydney and Pyrmont and where we have already invested, on the verge of investing \$117 million.

JL: Yes, well, you've given the City of Sydney the Customs House and there surely is the opportunity to make the most wonderfully aesthetically pleasing area for an entrance to this great city in this great country.

PM: There are two things that the Commonwealth has done, that I've done recently. One was to give to the Council of the City of Sydney a sixty

year lease on the Customs House because it is a central civic building of the Quayside. It's now hidden behind the railway station.

JL: Yes.

PM: The other thing we did was to, in the course of those financial arrangements, give the City Council the capacity to buy down the heights of the buildings behind the Opera House, so the Opera House wasn't marred by a big, ugly set of buildings built on those sites behind the Opera House.

JL: Yes, it's bad enough that people ought to remember when they are complaining that it could have been worse if you hadn't have been able to do the deal with the City of Sydney.

PM: What will come there won't be perfection, and it wouldn't be as I would like it all, but it is going to be much, much better than it would have ever been. Now, the only leadership which has been shown in the area of the central city and the Quayside and these environs is going to matter so much to Sydneysiders and to the country over the long term is via the Council of the City of Sydney and the Commonwealth government. Not the Fahey government.

JL: OK, well, you've now made it patently clear that the offer is there to help. Help, of course, in what form I don't know and that's none of our business at this stage, but something could be discussed and would be discussed if they chose wouldn't it?

PM: But, I'm not going to have some down-the-line National Party minister from a State government saying 'well, Prime Minister, you give us a cheque and then don't ask any questions.' I mean, we are not dealing like that and it's up to New South Wales to come back with a proposal. They have not done so. The Commonwealth hasn't reneged. This is just a failure of leadership by the Fahey Government, nothing else.

JL: Prime Minister, thanks for your time.

PM: Thank you, John.

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