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PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP
DOORSTOP, MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, SYDNEY
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PM: I am quite happy to respond to any questions you might have.

J: Mr Downer's difficulties – how do you feel about the prospect of facing John Howard across the floor?

PM: I keep saying – and let me be entirely consistent and say again – the problem with the Liberal Party is not the jockey, but the horse. The Liberal Party is now seriously rent by divisions, even in this latest episode more bad blood has been created – it is a party divided in itself, it now lacks a philosophy, it doesn't know what it wishes to do with Australia. It is in much the same state as the UAP was in the early 1940s, and Mr Howard's return will only continue the fracas that has existed every year since he claimed the leadership for the first time.

J: Would you be determined – in your own words – to crucify him?

PM: I will not respond to silly pap questions like that.

J: But would you....

PM: But let me just say – John Howard will try to take Australia back to the country and the values he believes in, which will all be about rugged individualism initially, and then private reward fracturing that sense of nation and unity, that sense of compassion for those not as well off – those egalitarian values which make Australia. The important thing is – in this turmoil in the Liberal Party – I think it is important for the public to know that the Government has its hand well and truly on the rudder. And that Australia has just completed probably its best economic year since the War – 6% growth and 2% inflation, the highest employment growth after any recession we have ever had, the highest productivity growth probably in 20 years, and I hope to see the continuation of that through 1995. So, they

may be the cork bobbing around, but the Government has a sure hand in the directions the country is taking.

J: Prime Minister, do you expect to see the resurfacing of the immigration debate now that John Howard is back in town?

PM: John Howard will try and remake himself – when he was asked after those remarks on immigration to withdraw them, he said "not on your life". The Australian – pamphleteering for him a week or so ago – gave him the opportunity of what he called an apology...look, John Howard hasn't changed his views. When John says he didn't mean it, you say "sure you didn't Johnny – sure you didn't".

J: Prime Minister, are you tempted to go to a snap poll?

PM: Well about as tempted as I have been by every other question inviting me to do that.

J: Prime Minister – on Arthur Boyd as Australian of the Year?

PM: Arthur is a great Australian – a great figure and a great interpreter of the Australian landscape, and of the Australian soul I think. A person who understood much about the ethos of Australia, and created that diversity – perhaps unity – in his painting between Australia – the old ancient country of Australia, this landscape, and the European civilisation where most of us are from. And I think he has been singularly successful at that, and the prodigious energy in his retrospective just a year or so ago, you could see how over 60 years just how much this man has produced, and how he has interpreted our lives.

J: It's true, though, that he is more of an English resident these days?

PM: But look at the pictures – they are all about the Australian bush, they're all about Australian legends, and they are all about things that seek to define this country.

J: What did you think about...inaudible...comments about changing Australia Day – do you have any sympathy for that?

PM: Well, the 26th of January has that historic presence about it, but I think that the whole country is understanding more now – particularly post-Mabo – about reconciliation, about us being one nation and one country, and this is a matter, no doubt, that over time Australians will think about and maybe meet John's view.

ends.