



# PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP  
AND THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, THE HON KIM BEAZLEY MP,  
PRESS CONFERENCE, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, 20 JUNE 1995**

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PM Well, I am very happy to announce that the Labor Party has a new Deputy Leader and the Labor Government has a new Deputy Prime Minister in Kim Beazley. He was elected unanimously and with broad acclaim in the Caucus and I noted - I didn't need to because everybody understood - that the seamlessness of the change, Brian Howe's gracious resignation and Kim's unanimous election speaks volumes for the unity and sense of purpose which the Government has, the collective spirit and the genuine good will that was in evidence today. I spoke in the room about the continuity in the Labor Party and the fact that such a change and the manner of such a change actually means something. In our Party which is a very clannish organisation, personal relationships and the nature of this change does matter and it matters to us and I am delighted that Kim's father could be here on this occasion, purely by accident I'm told, and I made the point that the oldest Labor Party in the world has this continuity.

When I first came here Kim senior was a member here and he took John Curtin's place in the House of Representatives in 1945. At that stage, he and I used to have discussions about my friendship with Jack Lang who had attended Henry Parkes' rallies in the Sydney Domain and with other leading people in NSW such as McKell and you can see that continuity. And then, of course, I got to know Kim before he came to Parliament and now we have had a Parliamentary life together and he has a long and distinguished record as a Minister from 1983, sharing this period with me and his colleagues.

So, that continuity is there and in our Party continuity and sense of history and commitment to common ideals matters and the mood and sentiment and good naturedness of our relations together matter to us as well. At any rate can I say this is a very strong result for the Government. It makes the Government strong with a young man as a Deputy Prime Minister who's had enormous and extensive experience.

I think it is a very strong outcome for the State of Western Australia who, again, have kept that great tradition of supplying significant people to Labor Governments that have been there at the critical turning points of the nation and Labor's history and I welcome Kim's election as Deputy Prime Minister.

I look forward enormously to working with him. I think that this verve and commitment that he will bring to the job and also as he is from his state of origin Western Australia means I think again a sense of us looking at the country and going at the problems with imagination and vigour can only be reinforced as a consequence of tonight's election. So for my very public congratulation to him and I now invite Kim to speak to you and say a few things to him and maybe ask him some questions.

KB Well thanks very much Paul it is a great honour, a great opportunity. I had an opportunity in the Caucus room, just a moment ago, to pay tribute to Brian Howe's service, the extraordinary role that he has played over a lengthy period of time now in the Labor Government as a person with very clear cut comprehension of the social needs of the nation and a real capacity in Cabinet to make a difference in argument on the detail of policy issues.

I ought here to say how deeply flattered and grateful I am at the opportunity to serve with Paul as Prime Minister. This is a government with vision, it is now unique, I think, in the political process of this country, it is also a government with policies. And the fact that we have a very clear sense of direction, that we have an understanding of the needs of our nation. That those needs go very much to the issues of survival in an international community in which there is nobody who feels that this is a country owed to living. It is a tough hard fight for the nation and it requires people with both vision, clarity and the toughness and will to carry that through and the honesty to declare their intent to the Australian people as to what there is intended in the relationship between Government and the Australian people. I think, from my point of view, my job is to listen as well as speak, to absorb what those in the community wish to say to us about their experiences and how they see life. I regard it as a particular challenge to get out amongst our working people, the families to point out the social safety net, the industrial safety net that has been put in to protect them. I also feel that I do have a special role in the medium size and small states.

The great engine of the political process in this country does reside in the suburbs of our great cities of Sydney and Melbourne. There is no question about that but in many ways the forward development of the nation is a product of what is going on in smaller and medium sized states, particularly my home state of Western Australia and Queensland. And I do regard myself as having a special role to play there in conveying the direction of the Government and ensuring that

our message, our concerns have got across and that the concerns of the people who are on the receiving end of Government policies and directions have got across to us.

J Prime Minister you spoke about continuity in the Labor Party. Do you now see Mr Beazley as perhaps your national successor?

PM Well, I mean I want to make certain first and foremost that if he is to succeed me at whatever point that is - that he succeeds in Government. I think that's what we are both about: winning the next election. They are always hard to win in Australia, as it ought to be. I mean the public insists that the parties deliver quality to them in terms of policies and obviously Kim's standing in the Party, his record as a Minister in now so many senior portfolios and now his endorsement unanimously as Deputy Prime Minister makes him, if you like, the obvious person in the longer haul. We want that to be a longer haul but that matter, of course, is up to the people as it should be in a democracy.

J What about the career of Carmen Lawrence now, how would you characterise her future prospects?

PM I think her future prospects are as good as the day she arrived here, probably better now she has got the experience of time under her belt in terms of health. She has a very large domestic portfolio responsibility and anyone in the Labor Party who in any way damages the Coalition will always be in for a personal attack. This has been true of Whitlam, it has been true of Neville Wran, it has been true of me, it will be true of her: anyone who can do them damage. So extending the arm of the executive in Western Australia to try to prey into the business of the opposing party shouldn't become a norm in Australian Politics and shouldn't be rewarded. And she is, in standing up against that sort of behaviour, standing up for all of us who believe that there are protocols in this country to observe and there are decencies which the Western Australian Government has not been prepared to observe. Were I to announce a royal commission into the goings on of the former Fraser Cabinet here they would be outraged as we are outraged by the Court Government's behaviour. I think the public have already given us the answer of what they think about that and that is not very much. Premier Court's standing has fallen dramatically in recent times. This is one of the reasons for it and the vindication of the high standing of which he is held.

So, I think, she can take this in her stride and go on about her great public career in the cause of the Australian people and in the cause of Labor.

J: Mr Beazley, do you see yourself as the natural successor to Mr Keating?

- PM: I don't see myself in any position other than I have already announced previously. I see that as an interesting issue for the next century. I think we are blessed in the Labor Party with a whole variety of alternative leaders of which I happen to be one, but that situation has not changed as a result of any events today.
- J: Mr Beazley, in the past you and Mr Keating haven't always seen eye to eye. I think the Telecom battle was one, I think you were the chief numbers person for the previous Prime Minister, how are you going to get on now?
- PM: I'm glad he wasn't so good at that at the time.
- KB: I don't think you could say that it was an outstanding success, if that was true. We have always got on extremely well in Government and prior to our being in Government. I first met Paul, when I used to come over on regular visits as a youngster really and he was a young man in Parliament and my father used to point him out to me as the person to watch and I have been watching him ever since and have been very impressed with the process.
- J: Mr Beazley, when did you find out the Deputy's job would be vacant and what were your reasons for standing?
- KB: Well, there had been a few rumours around as you are well aware. There was something run in the press over the weekend and there had been some discussion, I understand, around the preselection processes in Victoria. But, I don't think I was aware of anything final really, until last night on that from recollection.
- J: Mr Keating, do you have any regrets that it wasn't a woman, given Labor's affirmative action policy, wasn't a woman who became the Deputy?
- PM: No, but we don't have an affirmative action policy for the leadership. We are a mature party, we have a very big role to play and perform and these positions will always fall to the people the Caucus believe are best to fill them. I think, this is always a matter of choice for any member of the Party and all the members chose, in a sense, Kim and those who decided not to stand, if they were ever going to stand, chose Kim by their actions and that includes Carmen Lawrence. I do want to see a greater participation by women in the affairs of the Parliamentary Labor Party and I think there is no doubt if there is no formal affirmative action policy being undertaken by the Caucus, there is certainly an informal policy and that is to try to promote women to the Ministry and to the Cabinet and when the moment is the moment to positions of leadership. On this occasion, the Caucus took the view that Kim was the most experienced person and given his record here, it is very hard to argue that point.

- J: Mr Keating, will you give an undertaking that if you win the next election, you will stay the full term?
- PM: There is no point in winning elections to give them away. I have kept making this point over and over. A lot of you want me to trade in months or periods of this Parliament, I keep telling you I don't want to do that.
- J: Mr Keating, did you ever contemplate in thinking about this change of deputy leadership as an opportunity for a reshuffle given ...
- PM: This matter came, and I said to you this morning, from Brian Howe's own view that he thought that this was the time for him not to nominate again for his selection for the seat of Batman and having made that decision thought about whether the Party's interest would be advanced by him staying as Deputy Prime Minister as Lionel Bowen stayed as Deputy Prime Minister until the poll. He thought, in these circumstances, it was better to resign his position and it was, as Kim said a moment ago, only really yesterday that he came to that decision. So, there has been no forethought about ministerial changes, but the point is that the Cabinet and the Ministry are working well and as I said to you this morning, we have just produced a surplus Budget, I think, about our fourth in our history. The Coalition never ever produced one. We have introduced that massive change to retirement income and savings in the Budget, Kim presided over with root and branch examination of the expenditure programs with there gross savings of the order of about \$1.5 billion and you know more recently we have had the Justice Statement released by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice with imagination, I think, and flair. And, the structure for the republic - the proposal that I put down - the Government has been doing many things and I hope doing them well. So, there is no argument around and no need therefore for us to be talking about a major reshuffle of the Government.
- J: Prime Minister, will you be making another visit to Queensland before the State poll?
- PM: Probably, I will.
- J: Given the achievements you have just been talking about, you must be disappointed you are not getting a bigger kick out of the polls then?
- PM: Well, it depends on what you think a poll registers. What you think a poll registers and how you read it. I think, just look at the position we are in at this stage of the last Parliament and we had other people making similar observations, there is a much closer gap between parties now and you can't ever, I think, assume that the Australian public will take, as a government, a party that won't say what its policies are. That somebody who stands for nothing. I mean, I think the last month has made it clear that John Howard is out of his age

and out of his depth with the problems which Australia faces now. This is not lost on the public.

J: Mr Beazley, you said that the Labor Party had a range of alternative leaders and the events of today hadn't changed that, Mr Keating also made you the more obvious alternative in the long run, do you think it has made you the more obvious alternative?

KB: I wouldn't disagree with anything that Paul says, but I think this is a show that has real strength across the breadth of it. This is one of the principle differences between ourselves and our political opponents. We have any one of a number of people who could be made Prime Minister, they have none. They have not got the bottom to them to form a decent Cabinet. They have not got the capacity to carry the foreign relations of this country. They have not got the capacity to carry the very considerable requirements and difficulties there are in fitting into a Budget with what we have available to us - essential social protection for the communities. So, we actually have a huge range of people who are alternatives and a whole lot who don't feature very much in the press, but are sitting there waiting in the wings. I am not that much different in age from the Prime Minister and he is going to continue for a very long period of time.

PM: We are happy, of course, to take questions. This is an occasion of some celebration for us, we don't want to truncate it, but nor do we want to stay on pointlessly or needlessly. Is there anything else you might want to ask? If not, thank you indeed. Let me take the opportunity of shaking your father's hand (Kim Beazley Snr).

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