



**PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP  
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN - 11 MARCH 1996**

**TOPICS:** Budget costings, swearing in of Ministers; Telstra; youth unemployment

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**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister, thank you for your time.

**HOWARD:**

It's a pleasure, Ray.

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister - does that sound strange, sound like someone else?

**HOWARD:**

Yes, I sort of turn around, go like that, see who's behind me but I guess I will get used to it.

**MARTIN:**

Have Mrs Howard and the kids called you jokingly, "PM" yet?

**HOWARD:**

Oh many times, but the last few weeks in particular have been a time that has brought us even closer together because you can't really throw yourself into an election campaign unless you do it as a family and they have been absolutely wonderful. No person could

have asked for more family support and loyalty than I have received. It's just been wonderful.

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister, in your oath today, the Ministry swore allegiance to the Australian people, to the Queen, but not to heirs and successors as in the past. Was there a reason for that?

**HOWARD:**

I just thought the form of oath which I wrote was appropriate. We committed ourselves to the Australian people first. As is appropriate, we swore allegiance to the Queen. She's part of our Constitution. The question of our Constitutional future is to be determined through a process involving a convention and I think in every sense of the word, the oath got it right. It was a nice, balanced expression overall of a commitment to serve the Australian people. I see the office I hold now as an office at the service and the disposal of the Australian people above everything else and I wanted that expressed first and foremost in the oath that I took and my Ministers took.

**MARTIN:**

But no mention of heirs and successors, no indication that we may have a republic in three years?

**HOWARD:**

No, I think it's really silent on that. It recognises the... look, my view on that is that the Australian people will have a vote before the turn of the century to resolve that issue and I haven't deviated.

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister, a sneak preview. Will you finally tell us what the Budget deficit is tonight?

**HOWARD:**

Peter Costello is going to make a statement on that and that's the right way of doing it and he will be doing that tomorrow morning.

**MARTIN:**

Is it a cause for alarm though?

**HOWARD:**

I don't think anything should be a cause for alarm but Peter will be dealing with the matter in a professional, comprehensive way and I don't really want to speculate about it tonight.

**MARTIN:**

Worse than Paul Keating admitted?

**HOWARD:**

No, I don't want to speculate, Ray.

**MARTIN:**

Of course, you've had the figure for days, I presume. It sounds a little like Paul Keating who didn't speculate either.

**HOWARD:**

I received certain advice a few days ago. I said then that the right thing was for the Treasurer to say something about it after the new Government had been sworn in and that's what we're doing. We were sworn in this morning and he will make a statement tomorrow morning.

**MARTIN:**

All right let's move onto one of the other issues in the campaign - Telstra. With Paul Keating now out of the way, have you thought of the possibility of going to Kim Beazley if he is the Leader and talk to him about getting it through and just ignoring Cheryl Kernot?

**HOWARD:**

Well, I will think of every option but the Labor Party has said that it is as implacably opposed to the sale of one-third of Telstra as are the Democrats. If I had any indication from the Labor Party that it would have a different view, I would be delighted to talk to them, but I would be amazed if the Labor Party were willing to do that, although ironically enough the sale of the Commonwealth Bank occurred because we supported it and the Democrats opposed it and I'd be very grateful if Mr Beazley were to return the favour but I doubt it.

**MARTIN:**

If the Labor Party in opposition remains implacably opposed and the Democrats - if it came to the crunch I mean how serious are you prepared to push this? Would you go as far as some people talk down the track of a double dissolution?

**HOWARD:**

I think it is far too early to start talking about it - heaven's above - we've only just been sworn in. But I still believe that when the crunch comes, there'll be a great number of people who voted for the Greens and the Democrats who will say we are just not prepared to pass up the biggest environmental package in 50 years out of some ideological commitment to 100% Government ownership of Telstra. We're not talking about Government control of Telstra, that stays whether we sell a third of it or not. It's the difference between 66 and two-thirds percent and 100% and I just can't believe that people who care for the environment are going to say that is more important than fixing the Murray-Darling basin, fixing the pollution in our rivers, fixing the ocean outfall - all of those long term environmental projects that desperately need attention, surely they are more important than a 100% Government ownership of Telstra.

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister, you've made youth unemployment a major campaign issue. Are you aware of the Paxton family of Melbourne?

**HOWARD:**

I am, yes, I've followed that very closely.

**MARTIN:**

Is a haircut or the wrong uniform colour, is that a legitimate reason for not taking a job?

**HOWARD:**

Look, I think their attitude to most Australians was completely unacceptable. I would have thought that attitude really stuck in the craw of hard working people in this country - battlers who pay their taxes, struggle to raise their families, and they resent, they don't mind people who can't get a job and who want a job, and who are desperate for a job, they don't mind those people being looked after but I think the whole Australian community has no tolerance for that kind of assumption of guaranteed support irrespective of attitude.

**MARTIN:**

If someone had been out of work for a period of time and they happen to be vegetarian and they are offered a job, a good job at McDonalds, should they take it?

**HOWARD:**

Well, I think many people would say yes, I really do. I mean, you put a difficult, perhaps it's not a hypothetical example, but the Paxton case demonstrated to many people that there are still some in our community who think that social support is not a two way contract.

**MARTIN:**

In short though, are you going to target those sorts of people - let's forget the family of the Paxtons - but people who....?

**HOWARD:**

Well, look, I'm not going to quote - "go out to get anybody" - but I am going to see that our system runs in a way that people who are not trying are treated as those people should be treated. And if you are not trying to get a job, and if you are not prepared to take a job offer, then I don't think people can expect a lot of sympathy from the rest of the community, because it is hard working battling Australian taxpayers who have got to foot the bill, and I can understand their anger.

**MARTIN:**

All right, Prime Minister, thank you again for your time and good luck.

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