



PRIME MINISTER

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
LIBERAL PARTY OF AUSTRALIA (VICTORIAN DIVISION) STATE
COUNCIL MEETING
CAMBERWELL, VICTORIA
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Mr President, Jeff Kennett, the Premier of Victoria, Peter Costello, the Treasurer of Australia to Tony Staley the Federal President, all my other Federal and State parliamentary colleagues, past State and Federal Presidents of the Liberal Party, ladies and gentlemen.

Can I first of all thank Michael Kroger for that very warm and quite moving introduction. It really is quite an emotional moment not only for me but it is an emotional moment in the history of our Party.

Hubris is a bad thing in politics but legitimate satisfaction and pride in achievement is a necessary and appropriate thing for all of us occasionally to indulge. And if ever a group of people deserve to take a moment off and to reflect upon a long and ultimately successful journey. It is all of those people - and there is so many in this room today who - have battled long and hard over 13 years to bring about a change of Federal Government. And I can't tell you how proud I am as the Federal Parliamentary Leader of the Liberal Party to address this Annual Meeting of the State Council in Victoria. To convey from the bottom of my heart my gratitude for the great loyalty and support the Division has given me in good times and bad over the years.

To again compliment the Division on its strength and professionalism, to thank you election after election for delivering until this last election when at long last some of the other States caught up with you, more than your fair share of seats in the Federal Parliament.

And could I also take this opportunity of congratulating my colleague in Government, Jeff Kennett, on his absolutely remarkable win only a short time ago.

Of course ladies and gentlemen much of the strength and professionalism which has been exhibited by the Victorian Division over the period of which I've spoken was due to the great leadership of State President of Michael Kroger.

My friendship with him has been something of which I've been very proud and very publicly vocal no matter what the circumstances. I've found in him as a State President a person with whom one could work very effectively to achieve sensible reforms. In the forging of the Coalition arrangement in 1989 which brought a joint Senate ticket back to Victoria and which banned three-cornered contests for sitting Members and Sharman Stone in years ahead will have great reason to thank that arrangement. It was due in no small measure to the tremendous work of Michael.

But it is a great occasion for the Liberal Party and there's just one or two very direct things I want to say to you today. But one of the most important is that having finally got back into Federal Government, having completed that long march that I described, let us sensibly consolidate that win, let us sensibly build for the future. And one of the things we must sensibly do is to honour our history and to treasure our past.

We haven't always been very good at that. The Labor Party has been extremely good at it, they have built failures into icons. We on the other hand have sometimes walked away from our past and we've all shared the blame in that respect but we have a very rich and honoured past. And many of the pillars of the organisation in the past are here today and I join Ted and Tony and others in paying tribute and it is a great pleasure for me to look down and see all of the people organisationally over the years so many of them that I've worked with.

And we ought to honour the contribution of our great Prime Ministers of the past. I mean it was the Menzies era that gave to this country that unparalleled period of stability and prosperity in the years after World War II and it is still for me as the Prime Minister in the 1990s an emotional experience to be embraced by somebody who came to this country from Italy or Greece or Latvia or Estonia or Lithuania in the early 1950s and to say that I came here when Menzies was Prime Minister and he gave me and my family a future and I will never forget it. And it was those great years after the War under the Menzies period that contributed so much to the modern Australia. So let us never be ashamed of our past, let us always defend it with great pride and I think also of the rich history of the Victorian Division in particular. Of the great years of Bolte, Dick Hamer and of Lindsay Thompson and now of course the new ascendancy under Jeff Kennett.

There is so much of which we have to be immensely proud but there is also a great deal that we must be humble about and humility is an important component in politics.

It is a humbling experience to be the Prime Minister of this country. It is a humbling experience that you have an opportunity if you do the right thing to change the country for the better. And on the night of the election one of the things that I said was that I didn't want to lead a Government that would be a pale imitation of its predecessor. That you were there to do positive things for the good of Australia and Australians. You are not just there to enjoy and luxuriate in the pleasure of being in office, there is

no point in that and it has always got to be the role and responsibilities of Liberals to do good things for the future of our country and of our people.

And one of the great responsibilities of Government is to give to the people of Australia a sense of security and stability both from external attack and also internally and yesterday, in reaching historic agreement on prohibition on weapons, we made a mighty contribution to delivering a safer and more secure Australian society.

The Governments of Australia decided that this country is not to go down the American path. The Governments of Australia decided that we would strike a great blow for the future safety of our suburbs and of our provincial towns and cities.

It won't be an easy decision for many tens of thousands of law-abiding Australians and I say again, as I've said in the past, I regret that very much. But I think we have delivered a workable prohibition that fair-minded people will understand and accept and the overwhelming majority of Australians will enthusiastically embrace as an appropriate response.

And it's a remarkable testament to what we can do through Commonwealth/State cooperation and I want to thank the State Governments, I want to thank Jeff Kennett, I want to thank all of the State Premiers for the role that they played. Collectively the leaders of Government in Australia matched the national need and that is what people want, that is good government. It is using the mandate and the authority of office to do good things for the future of this country.

We have ahead of us a great responsibility. We have economic responsibilities, we have social responsibilities, we have political responsibilities.

We went to the last election with a carefully crafted program. We put at the centre of our election platform strong commitments to a number of fundamental values. If I want there in the years ahead of us to be a legacy of the years immediately before us I want my Government to be seen as a Government of values and a Government of principles more than anything else. I want there to be a [inaudible] of the decisions that we take those great values, those commitments to individual [inaudible] those commitments to family values, those commitments to sensible and long term economic reform.

As Michael said in his introductory speech, I and many other people here have long championed the cause of industrial relations reform. Michael, himself, and Peter Costello fought and won an historic battle in the 1980's - to establish the authority of the ordinary courts of Australia over careless and damaging industrial conduct. We intend to implement the principles for which they and many others fought in the 1980s. And those principles are very simple. And they are that people should have the right without lead or hindrance to make contracts at the workplace level. But they can involve a trade union if they want to. But if they don't want a trade union involved then no trade union has the right to impose itself against the will of the parties to that contract.

We'll remain as a Party utterly and totally opposed to any semblance of compulsory unionism. We will restore the secondary boycott provisions of the Trade Practices Act. And very importantly we will throw out Labor's job destroying unfair dismissal law.

That is where the Liberal and National Parties stand. And the week after next the legislation to give affect to that program will be introduced by Peter Reith into the House of Representatives. And I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Peter on the tremendously professional way in which he has handled himself on that legislation in the short period that he's been Minister for industrial relations.

And the whole of the Australian community will be watching after that legislation has gone through the House of Representatives. They'll be watching to see what happens to it when it gets to the Senate. They'll want to know whether the Australian Democrats are in favour of throwing out our stupid unfair dismissal laws or whether they want to keep them. They'll want to know whether the Australian Democrats, and the Greens and others are for or against compulsory unionism. They'll want to know whether the Australian Democrats and others are for or against liberty in the work place. No policy could have been more openly exposed, no policy could have been more repeatedly advocated or championed than the policy of industrial relations reform. And if we don't have the authority of the Australian people to implement those changes then no Government in the history of this country has an electoral mandate to do anything. It's as fundamental as that.

But until we get rid of our arthritic, old fashioned, essentially pre World War I industrial relations system we are not going to see the sort of long-term economic growth on a sustained basis that this country needs to do two things and that is to cure our current account deficit problem and over time reduce our still unacceptably high level of unemployment.

Another piece of legislation has been introduced over the past couple of weeks and that's legislation to give effect to our commitment to sell one third of Telstra. Once again something that we openly talked about. It wasn't in the pocket, or up the sleeve or in the drawer. We didn't just vaguely refer to it. We openly said to the Australian people, "a vote for Howard is a vote for the sale of one third of Telstra". And people had an opportunity and they voted in an impressive way for us. And what the minority Parties and the Labor Party in the Senate have got to decide when the roll is finally called - are they for or against the greatest capital investment in the future of Australia's environment ever proposed by any Government. It's as simple as that.

Because the economic reality is that you can't fund that one billion dollars expenditure except out of the proceeds of the sale of a capital asset. Thanks to Kim Beazley and his \$8 billion black hole we don't have the resources from anywhere else. So, there's only one choice - if you want that environmental expenditure you've got to support our program. And a vote against our program on Telstra is a vote directed at the heart of the environmental regeneration of Australia. And there is no wriggling and there is no room to move on this. There is no second chance. There is no alternative proposal. If you want the Murray Darling cleaned up, if you want a long term attack on soil degradation, on ocean outfall, on river pollution and all the other long term

environmental concerns that Australians, especially young Australians, have - then you have to vote for program that we're going to put down. And it will represent a very interesting choice for those who long have held themselves out as champions of the environment.

Wouldn't it be ironic if the Greens and the Australian Democrats having long said that their environmental credentials are better than anybody else's - wouldn't it be fascinating, wouldn't it be ironic if they were the people who denied to the Australian public the best environmental capital expenditure program that anybody has proposed. Now, we stand very clearly. We told the Australian people what we were going to do. We took them into our confidence. We were honest. We were open about it. We said if you vote for us we're going to do these things. I can't wait to be kept honest on the subject.

All the time that I've been Leader of the Party I've spoken about the importance of the family unit in our community. In the wake of the terrible events in Tasmania of a couple of weeks ago there has been debate, not only about gun control laws, but there's been debate about some of the material on television. Debate about some of the health policies that are administered around the country, our approach to the mentally ill in our community. I've established a sub-committee of Ministers, chaired by Richard Alston, that is going to take a calm and reflective look at some of these issues. We're not going to be into any knee-jerk responses. But I think the Australian people want a whole of Government response to these kind of challenges. But none of us should ever imagine that any set of laws, or any measure of Government leadership, can replace the role of parents and can replace the role of families inculcating social values and proper social attitudes. And all of us have a responsibility to emphasise that. All of us in Government have a responsibility to pursue policies that will help sustain families. There are enormous emotional and personal values in stable and united families. Above and beyond that, of course, in a social welfare sense united strong families are the best social welfare safety net ever devised by mankind.

But we are going to keep faith with our commitments to Australian families. Our industrial relations policy will allow parents to better blend their work and family responsibilities. We're going to reinforce the right of Australian parents to choose the type of education they want for their children and not a type of education dictated by the State. We're going to strengthen the position of families in relation to private health insurance through our commitments. We are, of course, over time going to build a fairer taxation system for Australian families.

As I frequently said during the campaign rebuilding trust and believability between the people and their elected representatives is one of the most important challenges that we face. Another great challenge we face is to rebuild public confidence in our national institutions. I believe in the simple proposition - the Parliament controls the Executive and that the law of this country controls all of us. And that simple proposition is the greatest bulwark we have against a loss of freedom and the loss of liberty. All the elaborate declarations of principle mean nothing if our institutions are not free, not respected and if they don't work. And that is why we have moved quickly to restore the dignity of the national Parliament. I congratulate Bob Halverson on his election as speaker of the House of Representatives. He has already brought a

degree of dignity and good humour to the place. Let me say that on Thursday we had 25 questions at Question Time. I've got to say, I like it. It's terrific to be there. Some of my colleagues keep saying, John, isn't it about time to wind it up and get away. I rather like it. I mean, we sat for so long on the other side. I find it very hard to move away.

The other thing I like is the way my colleagues deal with the questions. I mean, gee they're a great bunch. Gareth Evans at question time! The questions are much longer than the answers with Gareth. And it's a great delight to watch them trying to come to terms. But more important than that we are going to treat the Parliament seriously. I'm not going to have rostered day off at Question Time. I'm going to turn up every day and so are my Ministerial colleagues.

And over time I think we can rebuild trust and respect in our national Parliament and that is enormously important because one of the worst legacies of the former Government and of my predecessor is the way in which he contemptuously debased the Chamber that represents the aspirations of the Australian people. He called it in his grander moments the clearing house of the nation's business and yet in his darker more frank moments he said that Question Time was a courtesy extended by the Executive to the Parliament. That was a measure of the contempt that he held. We intend to be very different. We intend to keep faith with our commitment to restore the dignity and the authority of Parliament.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a great opportunity if we are sensible, if we listen, if we are appropriately proud at one moment but also appropriately humble about our responsibilities. We have the opportunity over the next few years at both a national and a state level to build a new Liberal era that decades into the future will be looked back upon with great pride. It was no accident that we won impressively. Just as it was no accident that Jeff Kennett won again so impressively. We won because we demonstrated a capacity to relate to the mainstream of the Australian community. The greatest devastation of the Labor Party on the 2nd of March was to watch seat after seat long regarded as composed of True Believers, as they call them, fall to us. And to see the depth of the swings. To realise that if you go outside Melbourne and the other State capitals and Wollongong and Newcastle you don't find a single Labor seat anywhere in the nation. And in its geographic spread it's the greatest victory that we have won since the foundation of the Party.

Now, of course, some of it was due to weariness with the former government. But a great deal more was due to the fact that we communicated as a group of people that understood the mainstream aspirations of the Australian people. A group of people that were prepared to put behind this country some of the suffocating social censorship and political correctness which has been another very bad legacy of the former government.

It will once again be possible to debate sensitive issues in this country without being accused of being a racist, or an extremist, or a bigot. I think it is immensely important for the quality of public debate that that be the case.

Ladies and gentlemen we have a great opportunity. We have a great opportunity most importantly of all to do good things for the Australian people.

Political organisations exist to get elected into Parliament it's candidates to implement the values and the principles and the policies for which that political organisation stands. That was the first lesson I learnt when I joined the Liberal Party in Sydney back in the late 1950's. And whenever the Liberal Party has adhered to that simple proposition that it exists to articulate its values and principles and to serve the people its been successful.

As I look around this room again and I think of the contributions of so many people to rich history of our Party, I am sorry in our moment of great victory that Julian Beale wasn't re-elected. Julian, I thank you warmly for the tremendous help you gave.

I want to thank Ron Walker for providing the sinews of war. But most importantly in the collective sense can I thank all of you who over the years have kept the Liberal faith. As I said to the NSW Division a few weeks ago I would never would have become Leader of the Opposition, I would never have become Prime Minister, none of us would ever had the great privilege of being in Government if we had not enjoyed the support of the rank and file members of the Party and the way in which Tony Staley and Andrew Rob and Ron Walker and so many others and Peter Poggioli and Ted Baillieu here in Victoria. The way in which you dedicated yourselves so single-mindedly to making our victory a reality is something that I still feel very, very grateful for and I will always do.

I will never lose touch with the grass roots of the Liberal Party, I will always listen. I was once part of those grass roots, I still am. I believe in the Liberal Party, I am proud of it. What I have now I owe to Liberal Party so very, very much and Janette and I can't express to you the depth of our gratitude for helping us to achieve something that over the last 13 years to so many of us seemed unachievable. And a great sense of relief that great sense that a mission has been accomplished and a new vista opens up is about the most satisfying thing that somebody can have in public life

We now have ahead of us the great and more important task of governing well for all of the people of Australia and leaving behind at the end of that next journey a better country, a happier country, a more secure country and a country even more at peace with its past and its present and even more optimistic about its future.

Thank you.