



PRIME MINISTER

2 June 1996

TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP LAUNCH OF SMITH FAMILY APPEAL HOMEBUSH, SYDNEY

E&OE

I'm very happy to be here this morning to do two things. Firstly to launch the Smith Family's Winter Warmth appeal, but secondly, and in a sense more importantly, to take the opportunity of commending to the Australian community organisations like the Smith Family who do such a valuable job in providing for the more needy people in our community.

I have always regarded the work of the great voluntary welfare organisations as being absolutely indispensable to a compassionate social welfare safety net in our community. In saying that, I acknowledge of course, the ongoing responsibilities of the Government so far as the provision of social welfare payments are concerned, but no society can provide a genuinely sensitive and compassionate method of assisting the less needy and the less fortunate, the more needy in our community without the help of organisations such as the Smith family.

Some years ago I spent an evening without any fanfare in the media with one of the major welfare organisations in Sydney observing first hand some of the experiences as best one could as an observer and not as someone faced with the same situation himself of people who were homeless in Sydney, and I was struck by the multiplicity of support services that are provided to those people by organisations such as the Smith Family, the Salvation Army and the society of St Vincent de Paul, and I've always had a very strong commitment in my previous political responsibilities and now as Prime Minister to assisting those organisations, to publicly commending them, and in particular in relation to the Smith Family, warmly endorsing the Winter Warmth appeal.

And one oughtn't forget in the process of doing that the great contribution that many sponsors make and many Australian companies make towards keeping those

organisations going. Sometimes some commentators are unsympathetic to the role of corporate Australia in our community. On occasions like this it is well to remind the Australian community that there are many large Australian companies, Franklins and the ...(inaudible)... company and many others that are represented here today are examples of that, but that as well as being legitimately in the business of profit making and employing people and serving customers, they are also very generous corporate citizens who are willing to make significant contributions to the alleviation of poverty and distress in our community. I don't pretend for a moment that Australia has anywhere near solved the problem of looking after the more needy in our community. It is a constant challenge no matter who is in power, no matter what your political persuasion might be. I want to make it clear this morning that no matter what the budget imperatives facing the new Government may be, we do not intend to walk away from our responsibilities to the poor and the most needy in the Australian community.

A balance must always be struck between financial responsibility and human compassion and I don't intend one of the legacies of my years in Government to be the judgment that we were insensitive to the really needy and genuinely poor in our community. I recognise there are many people. I recognise that one of the most daunting and distressing things about modern life in Australia is the widening gap between the rich and poor. The answer to that is not to erect an attitude of hostility to the more fortunate in our community. The answer to that is to have policies which care for those who are less fortunate, policies that encourage the more fortunate to make a contribution to looking after the less fortunate and to try and achieve a balance of economic and social policy that always recognises that the quality of a nation's life is in part constituted by the way in which it looks after those in the community who need help. No government can do it without the help of organisations like the Smith Family. At the coal face they understand the difficulty of raising money. No organisations value a dollar more than those that have got to raise those dollars through seeking the voluntary contributions of the public. They have a marvellous mix of pragmatic understanding of where need exists and where it might not exist and also the tremendous task involved in raising funds to look after the less fortunate.

We are still, by the standards of the world, a very lucky and a very wealthy country and that puts a special obligation on all of us, not just the Government, not just the Prime Minister, but it puts an obligation on all Australians to help those who need their help. In the past, Australians have always been very generous people and I think it is one of our great characteristics and the frugal and efficient way in which organisations like the Smith Family are run, their focus on getting the maximum possible investment in looking after people from the dollars they raise, mean that it is an organisation that is deserving of ongoing support from the Australian community.

I thank the Smith Family on behalf of the Australian community for the work that it has done over the years, particularly at winter time and also at Christmas when that season of festivity and thanksgiving it is often the only pathway to sharing in the celebration of Christmas for many thousands of Australian families. It is a great organisation. It deserves your help, it deserves the help of the Australian public. I have pleasure in launching the appeal, I thank the organisers of the Smith Family, I thank its corporate sponsors. I encourage all Australians to contribute towards the Winter Warmth Appeal. Thank you.