



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Howard'.

## **PRIME MINISTER**

8 September 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD, MP  
ADDRESS AT THE WESTERN AUSTRALIA STATE CONFERENCE  
RADISSON OBSERVATION CITY HOTEL, WA**

**E&OE**

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Thank you very much Richard, David Honey the President of the Western Australian Division of the Liberal Party, my Federal and State Parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I can't describe to you the sense of pleasure and satisfaction it is to at long last address a meeting of the Western Australian division of the Liberal Party as Prime Minister of Australia.

It is an historic moment to have again, after 13 years of drift and 13 years in the wilderness, to have on the platform here in Perth both the Liberal Premier and the Liberal Prime Minister. And I want at the beginning of my address to express my immense gratitude to Liberals in Western Australia, not only for the remarkable achievement of the last federal election which saw, even on top of the great result achieved in 1993, saw three more Labor seats lost by that party. It was a great achievement, and of course it built on earlier great achievements. It is true, Richard, that this State contributes disproportionately and generously to the export income of the entire nation. It is also true that until the last federal election this State contributed disproportionately to the federal success of the Liberal Party and it took the other States until the last election, particularly the States of New South Wales and Queensland to catch up with the strike rate of Western Australia. And I am very conscious of that and I am very grateful for the work of the Western Australian Division and the professionalism and the capacity to campaign effectively at the grass roots that has always been a hallmark of the Liberal Party in Western Australia at both a State and a Federal level.

It was a great achievement, the last election. And the delight in seeing even more Labor seats lost and to have Don Randall and Ricky Johnston as additional Liberal members in the House of Representatives, we are truly delighted to have the both of you with us. It is important, as we justifiably reflect with pride and satisfaction and genuine emotion in the

aftermath of that great victory on the second of March. It is important that we understand why we won. Because in a proper understanding of why we won is the foundation of winning again. If we misunderstand why we won last time, we may not win again. And the political history of Australia is littered with the bodies of party leaders and Prime Ministers who didn't really understand why it was they won in the first place. We won on the second of March through a combination of circumstances and factors. Of course we won in significant measure because of the accumulated frustration and hostility of the Australian people towards the former government and in particular the former Prime Minister. We should be realistic and pragmatic enough to understand that. It was a government that had grown out of touch with the mainstream of the Australian community. It was a government which danced to the tune and the siren call of noisy minorities and not the great mainstream of Australians. It was a government that had grown arrogant, it was led by a group of people who truly had become possessed with the idea that the Labor Party was born to rule. It used to be said of us, however wrongly, that we had born-to-rule mentality, yet if you look across the House of Representatives chamber at question time and in Parliamentary debates, the mob who really do have the born to rule mentality are the new opposition members in the House of Representatives. They still can't work out why it is that they lost and they can't work out why it is that they were rejected. So it is in large measure the case ladies and gentlemen that we won the last election because of the unhappiness of the Australian electorate with the previous Government.

But it is also the case that for the first time in 13 years we got the right distillation of politics and policy. Being successful in an election campaign is a combination of political skill and commitment to forward-looking values. If you only have the values and the economics right and you get the politics wrong you are not going to win it. And if you only have the politics right and you've got no economic commitment and you've got no values then you don't really deserve to win. And for the first time, I believe in 13 years at a Federal level we got that combination right and the other thing that we got right is that we displayed particularly in the 12 months leading up to the election both within the Liberal Party and between the Liberal Party and the National Party, we displayed remarkable unity and we demonstrated the adage that has been demonstrated again and again in Australian politics that when the Liberal and National Parties work together they win together and we did it very successfully. And the unity within our own ranks and between the Parliamentary party and the organisation played a very significant role in that victory. And I want express on behalf of the Federal Parliamentary party their immense gratitude for the unselfish loyalty and devotion of the rank and file of the Liberal Party organisation particularly in the lead up to the election. So it is important when we look back on why we won to remember that of course the detestation of our opponents was an element. We got the right distillation of politics and values, we had great political unity. But I think we also touched something else, another chord in the Australian community and that was a desire to once again see the Government of this country composed of men and women who saw themselves as the modest, even on occasions, humble servants of the Australian people rather than a group of men and women who in some way thought through divine ordination they had a right to comprise the Government of this country.

And that sense that the Government was distant from the people and that sense that the Government no longer represented or understood or listened to or thought about the people of Australia was one of the most powerful reasons why the former Government was rejected. And if we remember that, then our prospects of re-election are very good. But if on the other hand we forget it and through the passage of time we become arrogant and presumptuous in office then the same fate awaits us. The Australian electorate now is less tribalised politically than it has ever been since the end of World War II. Many of the old automatic allegiances are gone. It is no longer invariably the case that I vote Labor because Dad did or I vote Liberal because Dad did. The different generations have different attitudes. Political allegiances amongst people under the age of 30 are in a state of constant flux and mobility. Now that presents an enormous challenge and it also presents great opportunities and if we understand the nature of the changed electorate, we understand all of those things then we have great prospects for the future.

The theme of this Conference ladies and gentlemen is about the future and that is what our attention should be directed towards. We were elected by the Australian people of course to respect the past and respect the rich history of the Australian nation but we were also elected to provide to the Australian people goals and aspirations for the future.

I remember Sir Charles Court once saying to me, he may have forgotten, about eight or nine years ago, when I was the previous Opposition Leader, he said: John what you've always got to do is tell the Australian people what your goals are about their future. And that was a very sound piece of political advice. Australians are aspirational people they can be inspired, they are suspicious of humbug, and properly so, but they can be encouraged to lift their aspirations for the future. And it is only natural as we move toward the next millennium and as we move towards the celebration of the centenary of the foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia that the Australian people should look toward the next century and should look toward the future. They want a Government that understands that the world of the year 2000 will be very different from the world of 40 or 50 years ago. They don't want us to forget our past. They want us to nurture it and respect it but they want us to implement policies that do build for the future. And that is the task we set ourselves when we assumed office after the second of March. And the budget recently brought down by Peter Costello, I want to take the opportunity of paying a personal tribute to the remarkable job that Peter, as Treasurer and Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, did in preparing, bringing down, presenting and propounding a very successful Federal Budget. That was the first of the building blocks for the future because what the Budget did was what the Australian people wanted us to do. They wanted us at the first available opportunity to tackle the fiscal legacy that we had inherited from the former Government. They wanted us to attend to the payment of the bankcard liabilities that we had inherited from our predecessors. They didn't want us to leave it to year two or year three. And I don't think any of our supporters would have thanked us for saying well it's a bit difficult to do the first year we'll get around to do it

in year two or year three because they would know instinctively that if you weren't game to tackle it in the first year immediately in office you were never going to do it in the second or third year. So we did set about doing that and the Budget has been very well received in the Australian community. The positive nature of the reception of the Budget has of course aggravated our political opponents. It has been seen by and large by the Australian community as a strong but fair Budget. The Australian people will always accept difficult decisions on two conditions. First and foremost the decisions have got to be fair and in the national interest and secondly they've got to be properly explained and understood. And if you do that, if you look every interest group in the eye and say well you won't like what I have done but when you look at what has been done in other areas and you look at the dimension of our problem you will understand why it was necessary to do it. And I believe that in every area we can do exactly that. We can look an interest group in the eye and say we know you don't like it but you will understand that in all of the circumstances that it was necessary. And the other great achievement of the Budget is that we have been able to keep faith with the core commitments that we took to the Australian people at the last election.

I am very proud indeed that the family tax initiative will be delivered in full on the promised date. I am very proud that the health insurance rebate, the tax rebate will be delivered in full on the promised date. I am very proud that the tax incentives in capital gains tax for small business will be delivered on the promised date.

And if the Australian Senate is wise, which I hope in the end it will be, we'll be able to deliver in full, once we have sold one third of Telstra, the largest ever capital investment in the environmental future of Australia. And if you're looking about building for the future of Australia, if you are lifting your sights to the next millennium and you care about the natural environment of this country, something Australians of all ages across all generations and across all party divisions now really do care about, and will in your heart want to see that \$1 billion go into that great National Heritage Trust of Australia, that will tackle the ongoing, the really important environmental challenges of Australia, the salinity, the pollution of our river systems, the degradation of our soil. They are things that do have to be tackled if we are to build for the future and if we care about the environmental inheritance of our children and our grandchildren.

I'm very proud of the first Coalition Budget since 1982. I'm very proud that it did properly distil our economic, our social and our political responsibilities. I'm proud to call it a strong, fair budget. I'm proud to call it a budget for the mainstream of the Australian community. But that was but the first of the building blocks as we look towards the future. There are many other things, ladies and gentlemen. We campaigned before the election on a number of central platforms. One of them, of course, was our very strong commitment to the centrality of the family unit in Australian society. We've already begun to reflect our priorities in that area through the budget announcements. We also hold very dear the role of small business within not only the Australian economy but also within the broader community. So many of us in the Liberal Party owe our philosophic identification with our Party to its great commitment to private enterprise and small business. So if the Australian dream that you and I understand is the idea that you might start your working life with nothing, take a lot of risks, build up a business, work your inside out in the process and pass on something better and something more substantial to your children, that has always been very much part of the Australian dream as I've understood it and it's a dream that's favoured a lot in recent years and it's something that's got to be given more life and more vigor. And that's one of the reasons why I have for ten years, and so many of my colleagues here today and all around Australia have campaigned so strongly for industrial relations reform. Industrial relations reform lies at the heart of a better economic climate for small business in Australia.

Unless, at a national level we can liberate the industrial relations system of this country we will not be able to have the free and vigorous and positive and productive climate that small businesses need in Australia. Unless our industrial relations reforms are passed by the Australian Parliament, we will not be able to get rid of Laurie Brereton's stupid, job destroying, unfair dismissal law. That industrial relations reform bill, the workplace relations bill, is without any arguments, the most important piece of legislation to be presented by the new Coalition Government. It contains within it five essential commitments; the unfair dismissal commitment, the commitment to getting rid completely of compulsory unionism, the commitment to get rid of the restrictions on the formation of enterprise unions, the commitment to bring back the very effective secondary boycott prohibitions in the Trade Practices Act that have protected so many businesses around Australia from the predatory behaviour of trade unions, and finally of course the very important commitment to allow Australian workers to have a real choice between whether they remain under an award or whether they go into a workplace agreement. And we'll know within the next few weeks as to whether we can get that legislation through the Parliament. We continue to negotiate in good faith with the minor parties in order to, I hope, achieve their support. It is an important piece of legislation, and if it is passed essential unimpaired it will create at a national level a new and better climate for workplace relations. It is not an anti-worker bill, it is not an anti-union bill, it is a pro freedom, pro-small business bill and that is why we are so very strongly committed to it.

But we also <sup>campaigns in</sup> the election, ladies and gentlemen, on the issue of unemployment. I don't mind acknowledging, as all Australians concerned, about the less fortunate in our community or to acknowledge that unemployment, particularly amongst the young, still remains the greatest unresolved social problem that we have. There are many reasons for high unemployment, some of them are the consequences of the degenerative processes, particularly in family life, in the social structure of this country of the progressed over the last 20 or 30 years. A lot of the explanation lies in the rigidity of our labour markets and our industrial relations system. It is no accident that countries like New Zealand and the United States that have freer labour markets have lower levels of unemployment. I know it's uncomfortable for our political opponents to be reminded of that, but it happens to be a central reality. It is also a fact that over the last 10 years the Australian economy has not been able to grow at a sufficiently fast rate to allow jobs to increase and unemployment to come down without that strong growth spilling over to a current account deficit or balance of payments crisis. And year after year we've had the problem that whenever we get a bit of economic growth going, we suck in too many imports, there's a balance of payments problem, interest rates go up and the whole show gets closed down. Now what we've got to do is to remove the speed limits on growth in this country and you can only do that if you free up the supply side of the economy. If you get rid of the rigidities, you get rid of the stupidity which created the situation a couple of years ago where beef producers in Australia could sell their product off the hoof at something like 60 per cent less than beef producers in the United States, that after it had gone through the processing and the distribution and the transportation chain, it ended up being 40 cents a kilo dearer for the Australian people than for the United States wholesalers. And that was because of all of the rigidities of our industrial relations system. You don't find bloody minded unionism much worse in this country than you'd find it in the meat processing industry, and it's a very good example, a home grown example, a painful example, of just how those rigidities add to the cost of production in this country. So getting rid of the speed limits on growth in Australia is very much about economic reform. And then you hear governments both at the state and the federal level talking about economic reform and you hear them talking about industrial relations, waterfront, transport, electricity, gas and all sorts of other reforms. They are not talking dull, dreary accounting concepts, they are talking about the real life and flesh and blood of the competitiveness of Australian industry.

So building for the future is about getting the budget back in the black. It's about addressing the problems of small business. It is also very much about addressing the need for accelerated micro-economic reform in this country. It's about developing, at a

national level, the energetic, outward looking, innovative, entrepreuneuring culture which is so redolent in most of Western Australia. And I don't want to finish this pleasure of addressing the Western Australian audience without acknowledging their particular contribution of Western Australia to the economic strengths and the economic vitality of Australia. You are rightly proud of the contribution that your State makes to the export income of the nation. You rightly remind any federal government of the impact of particular laws and particular attitudes on the economy of Western Australia.

I am, as Prime Minister, very conscious of the importance of the resource sector as well of course of other sectors of the Western Australian economy. We have that very much in mind when decisions were taken in relation to such things as the diesel fuel rebate in the budget. We also had that very much in mind in our desire to effect reforms to the Native Title Act to make that active accordance with my pre-election commitment more welcome because it is undoubtedly the case with that Act in its present form does need change and reform in order to make it more workable, more workable for miners, more workable for the indigenous people of Australia, more workable for pastoralists, and more workable for governments at both a State and federal level.

Unity between Federal and State governments of the same political persuasion is very important. We have the happy circumstance at present that we have federal government and governments in five of the six States of Australia and the two territories of Australia of the same political stoke. It is a long time since we had that happy conjunction. I want to say how important it is to me as federal leader, to have the understanding and the cooperation of my State colleagues. I have immense admiration for the job that Richard Court has done as Premier of Western Australia. He has been a great contributor to the national political debate while at the same time as any State Premier must and should do, he's been a staunch and outspoken advocate of the particular concerns and the particular interests of the State of Western Australia. And whenever he may choose to face the people of Western Australia, I am very confident of what the outcome will be, and he will go into that battle and he will go into that political contest with a wholehearted support and admiration and respect of the Federal Parliamentary Liberal Party and of myself personally. I suppose it's something like this, the temptation to say something, even a little bit, about your political opponents is almost impossible to resist. Although, you know, some people say John, you shouldn't say anything about them. And I wasn't intending to say anything about my political opponents today, I was in an extremely charitable mood as I flew across the Nullabor, but then I happcened to have been reading the paper as I came across a little item in the Sydney Morning Herald, the side column of that, normally amusing, not always but often political insightful column of Alan Ramsey, in which he talked about Gareth Evans' mental political state. He recalled an interview that Gareth made with Derryn Hinch a few weeks ago and he was talking about what it was like to be in opposition. I mean, he could have asked me, I would have told him. And Gareth complained, he said they don't take much notice of you and he said it's called relevance deprivation syndrome. He went on to say nobody takes any notice of you even though you're busting your tail off day in, day out to get a message out. It's that combination of impotence and irrelevance that really is pretty, pretty mind boggling

particularly when you've been, as you say, as the victim of change...  
Dear, dear me. Dear me.

That ladies and gentlemen, in a sense, said it all. You recall at the beginning of my speech I said one of the reasons why we won was that the Australian people thought that the previous crowd really had got hopelessly out of touch, really were taking them for granted, and really assumed that all they had to do was turn up on polling day and get reelected. Once politicians start thinking like that and behaving like that then they really deserve to be thrown out of office and I think the fact that somebody feels like, publicly talking about just how dreadful it is...if you've been a cabinet minister for 13 years, which he was, and you held a portfolio of Foreign Affairs and a few other senior portfolios and you've only been in opposition for seven months and you feel that you've got to burst into public and whinge about it, you really have got a problem with your ego. And I think it says a lot about the arrogance of the former government, but it's a lesson to us, it's a lesson to remain in touch with the Australian people.

The last thing I want to say to you today, ladies and gentlemen is a very personal thing and that is that to be the Prime Minister of Australia is without doubt the greatest privilege that could ever come the way of any man or woman in this country. I want to say to you that all that I have achieved in public life I owe to the great party to which all of us belong. I became a member of Parliament because of the Liberal Party. I became a minister in the Fraser government because of the Liberal Party. I became leader of the Liberal Party and I'm Prime Minister because I lead the Liberal Party and the Liberal-National Party Coalition. Like so many people in this room I've devoted all of my adult life plus a lot more to the service of the Liberal Party.

I've been through the good times and the bad times and the good times again. So I've never lost sight of affirmative influences on my political thinking in my early years in the Liberal Party in Sydney. But the people who were my heroes then are the people from whom I took advice and received encouragement and, on occasions, inspiration. The Liberal Party has never been a zealously ideological party. But it's reached its greatest heights and its greatest moments when it's been a party of both ideas and ideals. People say to me is the party an ideological one I say 'no, this is a party of ideas and it's certainly a party of ideals. If you look at the last 50 years the great ideas have come from our side of politics. The great ... in immigration tolerance, the white Australian policy, the reception of so many Indo-Chinese refugees in the 1970s, that came from our side of politics. Many of the great social welfare reforms, the care for the genuinely needy came from our side of politics. The great principle of quality of opportunity and choice in the education of children, irrespective of whether it was a government school or an independent school. That was pioneered by our side of politics having been resisted for almost two decades by blindly ideological Labor Party that couldn't see the essential principle of freedom that's involved in that. The great ideas in the economic debates of the late 70s and through the 1980s they were changed from our side of politics. It was the Coalition that proposed financial deregulation. It was the Coalition that first propounded an industrial relations reform. It was the Coalition that first propounded privatisation in the public interest. Remember when Bob Hawke and Paul Keating said 'that if you sold the Commonwealth bank Ben Chifley would turn in his grave'. They said it was akin to burning down the gum tree to do so. Getting the ... of time because we had led the intellectual debate they succumbed and they came into line and they rather ... complied because they need the money and now they pretend that their opposition to a sale of ... one third of Telstra is based on some great principle of commitment to public ownership in this country. After what they have done, after the hypocrisy they have displayed on issues like the Commonwealth Bank and Australian Airlines and Qantas, they have no right even to be in the debate of our privatisation in this country any longer.

We are most importantly of all, we are a party of ideals. We believe absolutely in the importance in the individual worth and decency of every man and woman in this country. We believe that self fulfilment and self esteem is important, that that is always more important in the imposition of the collective corporatist wheel on individual freedom and individual liberty. We believe very, very passionately in the role and the importance of the family unit within our society. Of course, not all families are happy but that doesn't in any sense destroy the fact that a stable, functioning, united family is the greatest source of personal happiness and material security that has yet been devised by mankind. And collectively those functioning united families also happen to comprise the most efficient welfare delivery system that mankind has ever devised. So ladies and gentlemen, this is an occasion to reflect with personal and collective humility on the great responsibility that has been given to us by the people of Australia. It is an occasion for me to thank the Liberals of Western Australia for the tremendous loyalty, stoicism and commitment and support that so many of you displayed over such a long period of time. It is an opportunity for me to express my gratitude to the Liberal Party and it's an occasion for me to commit myself and my colleagues to the service of the people of Australia. An occasion to say that on all occasions the great goal of my Government will be to do good things for the people of Australia. Thank you.