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## PRIME MINISTER

23 September 1996

### TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP SPEECH TO EPPING BOYS' HIGH SCHOOL, SYDNEY

E & OE.....

Thank you very much Mr Ecclestone. To my parliamentary colleague, Andrew Tink, to all of the other special guests here today, ladies and gentlemen. Could I thank you, Mr Ecclestone, for your very warm words of welcome and could I also thank you Aaron for your very kind words, and can I start my remarks today in saying a couple of things about Epping Boys' High School. I say them in the context of my view and my attitude and the attitude of my Government towards the public education system of Australia. This is a good opportunity for me on behalf of the Government, although education is primarily a state government responsibility, for me to say how much I admire and respect the contribution over the years to the education of young Australians of the public school system and the public education system of Australia.

I'm a great believer in competition in all things, including in education but I want in the context of saying that, to remark how important to the strength and quality of education all around Australia is the public education system. I, myself, spent the twelve years of my primary and secondary education at a government school and I am very grateful for the education that I received in the government education system, and I want to take this opportunity publicly and quite unreservedly to complement the teachers and the staff and the other people who run the state education system not only of New South Wales but all around Australia. It's a challenging task and it's a task that deserves the gratitude of the community and the praise of those in government and also the respect and the regard of the pupils and students who pass through the state education system.

I know that today is one of the formal assemblies that you have during the year and as Aaron remarked, he is now coming to what he quite correctly describes as the nervous end of six years. I know something of the atmosphere of the upcoming higher school certificate. I have passed through two of them over the last four years and I've got another one the year after next, so I'm very attuned to the pressure of that exam. I'm very attuned to understanding how important that is in the life of young men and women as they leave school and map out the sort of careers that they want to make for

themselves. I just wanted in the few moments available to me today to say something about the goals that you may have in life, to say something about the kind of world that particularly the Year 12 students of Epping High School will pass into.

It's always very important when you come to a watershed in your life, and leaving school is a watershed in your life. Life is never the same. - it changes profoundly once you leave school and as the years go by, you realise just how dramatic the change in your life really was when you left school, and the world that the young men and women of Epping Boys' High School and Cheltenham Girls' High School will be entering when they leave school at the end of this year is a very different world from what it was 10, 20, 30 or 40 years ago. In many respects, it's a far more exciting, optimistic world full of opportunities that weren't there before. In other respects, it has challenges that didn't exist in the past. But the most important thing for any group of young people leaving school to keep in mind is the importance of always having some goals in life, of always setting yourselves certain targets and seeking to achieve them. I know through my own life that I've constantly set myself goals. On many occasions, I thought that I would never achieve them. On many occasions, most other people thought that I would never achieve some of those goals but I kept them there and I kept persisting, and you will find through life that persistence and application and resilience is one of the most important, if not the most important quality that you can possibly have in life.

You can never overestimate the advantage of a good, basic education. You will find in the years ahead that the basic training you received at this school in the fundamentals of reasoning and of intellectual thought, that those things will prove to be quite priceless in the years ahead. You may have on occasions over the last few years thought them rather tedious, even useless. You may think that now. I can promise you as time goes by, if you hold those views now you will revise them in the years ahead because the world that you will go into, the world that you will enter as we come to the end of this millennium and move into the next one, is a world that more than ever will require qualifications, will require high quality education and more than ever, will require people who set themselves with very firm and very strong goals. So setting yourself goals and always seeking to achieve them and applying yourself and demonstrating resilience in achieving those goals is about the best piece of advice that I think anybody in position on an occasion like this could possibly give you.

I think the other piece of advice that I think I could give you is that always understand the importance of achieving a balance between your career aspirations and your personal aspirations. Never neglect your career in total deference to your personal pursuits of pleasure and your personal relationships but equally, always find time in your working life and in your career for your relationships, your relationships with your family, your relationships with your friends. Always achieve that balance between the pursuit of a career, the achieving of particular goals and an enjoyable social life and the rich fulfilment, the close associations particularly, but not only through the family are going to bring you.

That is the best kind of balanced advice that anybody could presume to give. A generation of young Australians who enter a world whose workplace opportunities are a lot different from what they were 20 or 30 years ago. It is true that there is a higher level of unemployment now than we had in this country 20 or 30 years ago but it is also true that the employment vista, particularly for girls, is much greater now than what it was 20 or 30 years ago, that the opportunities that are there, the potential that instead of when you get your first job, thinking that that is your job for life or for half your life, the prospect that you may change your careers, and that you will have the confidence to change your careers through your working life, is something that didn't exist a generation ago. People were far more cautious and far less willing to chance their arm on altering their careers as they went through life.

In many respects, you are entering a safer world than some generations before you. You may not think that, bombarded with so much of the negative aspects of life, you may think you are entering a less safe world, but in many respects, the threat of war, the removal of the potential of nuclear annihilation, and it's only last week the United Nations recorded by a record vote an agreement of nations for a comprehensive ban on the testing of nuclear weapons. A generation ago addressing a gathering like this, it may not have been possible to say that the threat of nuclear war has receded quite dramatically. You are also I hope entering an Australian society made a little safer as a result of the combined actions of political parties right across the political spectrum to prohibit the possession of automatic and semi automatic weapons, a quite dramatic breakthrough in providing a greater sense of personal security and personal safety because in the lives that you live and the occupations that you go about, physical as well as emotional security, as well as employment security is one of the things that people desire most.

I think the very last and most important thing that I'd like to say to you, ladies and gentlemen, is that it is tremendously important always to retain a sense of hope and a sense of optimism about the future. It's something of a cliché to describe Australia as the lucky country. It still remains amongst the most fortunate nations in the world. It is still a nation with an incredibly high living standard. It is a nation of very great tolerance, it is a nation that treasures the fundamental freedoms more dearly than most. It's a nation of very egalitarian, social instinct. It is refreshingly free of the class division of older societies. I hope it also remains a little apart from the crass materialism which is always a danger in modern, sophisticated, technologically advanced societies.

In other words, as a nation, particularly as we move towards the next millennium, we have a capacity to create something which is quite special and quite unique. Australia is not now, and it never ought to be a carbon copy of any one other society or other nation. It has some of the best qualities of the old world, it has some of the best qualities of the newer world, and it's cheek by jowl with the fastest growing economic region in the world, and we have by our own instincts and our own disposition a kind of culture and a kind of attitude that is quite special. So it is with a very great sense of optimism that I talk to you today and particularly give my good wishes to those members of this assembly that will be undertaking the higher school certificate. I have got to say I agree with those who in recent days have said that with all of its imperfections, there is no substitute for the higher school certificate. I believe in a

public examination system. I believe that there needs to be some benchmarks and I think the idea that you can dispense with having that kind of public examination is a fairly unrealistic approach.

Ladies and gentlemen, can I finally say to you that I always enjoy the opportunity of going to schools and going to universities to say something of what is important to you, I hope, and to also say something about my own personal views and values and attitudes. I would encourage all of you to take an interest in the public affairs of this country and I don't care what political side that is. We are a very competitive political society and I am quite certain that the spectrum of political views of Australia is as well represented here as it might be in any other part of the country and that's a very healthy, welcome sign, and no matter where your disposition might take you, can I say that being interested in politics and being interested in public affairs is something that can make a major contribution to the future of society and the future of the community.

Politicians are like everybody else - they are a mixture. Some are good, some are not so good and some of them you may think are even something else. Whatever that may be, ladies and gentlemen, at the end of the day in a democracy, those people who are elected to Parliament reflect the choices and they reflect the views of the cross section of the Australian community and I hope that you will take away from your years at this school very fond recollections, that you will remember the good times. The not so good times will recede into the past. You will have cause to reflect upon the quality of the education that you received but most importantly, I hope all of you take into your future life some very clear and identifiable goals. I hope you always keep striving towards them and I certainly hope that you will achieve a proper balance between your career pursuits and your personal pursuits. The one without the other is always an empty, unfulfilled existence and men and women find their greatest satisfaction if they can best combine the satisfaction and the pleasure from fulfilling associations with family and friends, with the satisfaction of a career goal achieved, a job well done and the satisfaction that through one's occupation you have made a contribution not only to your own self fulfilment but also to the broader goals in building a better Australia and a better community.

Thank you and good luck to you all.