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PRIME MINISTER

20 October 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD, MP
LAUNCH OF NATIONAL CARERS' WEEK
WOODSTOCK, HOBART, TASMANIA**

E&OF.....

Thank you very much Judi Moylan, to Peter McKay, to Paul Calvert, Mrs Avril Fink, ladies and gentlemen. It's a very special pleasure for Janette and myself having just left the, I suppose the inevitable political rigour of a National Conference of our own Political Party, to come to this lunch to share a few moments in helping to launch National Carers' Week.

When you are in politics you meet a lot of people, some of the interviews you have have no impression at all, other interviews leave a mark on you for a little while and then they're forgotten and then other discussions are ones that you never ever forget. Several years ago when my eldest child, my daughter was doing her HSC, I interviewed a lady in Sydney who described some of the difficulties she had in a situation in a very small home when one of her children was doing the HSC and the other of her children was a male adult who was profoundly handicapped and she was caring for him, with all the difficulties and challenges that that involved - and at the same time trying to provide a reasonable, congenial environment for her other child to study for the HSC. And the sort of description that she gave to me did leave a real impression. And it kindled then, I was not the Leader of the Opposition then, I was just a Shadow Minister, and it kindled an

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Often but not always in a family situation, usually but not always, in relation to a frail and elderly relative - always involving though a degree of personal commitment and a degree of love and devotion to responsibility and devotion to what they see as their duty to their family members or otherwise their loved ones. So it is very appropriate that there be a National Carers' Week.

It's important in a society such as ours to take time out to honour the contribution that unsung heroes make to keeping our society together. No society can work without volunteer commitment and effort. There are many, many people in Australia every day of the week, every week of the year who want to give of their time and their effort and their talent and their energy and their intellect to help others - to look after others - and they draw a satisfaction from that. But it is important not to take that for granted - in a broad sense the community ought never to take its volunteer effort and devotion for granted. It ought to be willing on occasions to publicly honour it and to accord to people who are willing to do that, the respect and gratitude to which they are entitled. And I am so very pleased to associate myself with this because my Government is about a lot of things and it's not just about getting the economy right - that's very important - it's not just about the sort of day-to-day arguments on taxation, industrial relations; they're all important too. It is also a Government that is concerned about the kind of society we are and the kind of people we honour and respect and the sort of value system that we have. And looking after one another is the most important component of the value system of any society and I would like to think that something like a proper role for carers in our community is an issue that straddles any political divide. I don't seek to pretend that this or that side of politics has done it this or that way or any better than the other. If we can reach an agreement on this I'd be more than happy to give credit to my political opponents for anything that they've done in this area.

And I'm happy to say that being seen by others, as sort of making some cuts and restrictions elsewhere - we have been able to do a number of things in our last Budget which I just wanted to very, very briefly mention today because they are an indication of the commitment we have. We have increased the number of days that a carer may temporarily cease caring in a calendar year without affecting the eligibility for the carer payment. We're extending from 10 to 20 hours the number of hours per week that carers may spend in employment, voluntary work, educational training, whilst being eligible to receive the carers' payment. We've established a National Carers' Programme which will integrate the existing array of respite care programmes into a single programme. And this will greatly assist family carers who until now have had to find their way through a maze of individual programmes, each with their own eligibility criteria and

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different bureaucracies. We're going to provide an additional \$36.7 million to the National Respite for Carers' Programme over the next four years and this will help to ensure that there is a wider array of readily available respite options suited to the diverse needs of individual carers. We're also going to establish a national network of carer resource centres and with funding of up to \$700 000 a year nationally - these resource centres will help carers to liaise with care providers in identifying and delivering respite care most relevant to individual needs.

Now these are just some of the commitments that we make and I do want you to accept from me a very genuine commitment by the Government to the worth, to the notion of what carers do, to what it demonstrates about the humanity and the decency and the values of the people who provide the care. A decent, civilised, humane society always requires personal sacrifice by individuals but that personal sacrifice ought never to be taken for granted and it should never go unacknowledged. And the greatest deeds of personal commitment are performed in the home environment where people care for sick and frail and dying loved ones and those in their family who have particular disabilities which the rest of us don't have. And they really do represent some of the most wonderful stories that anybody can tell about the decency and the love and the care of men and women in our community.

And I can't think of any cause that is more deserving of respect and honour than the cause of the Government of this country and the Leader of that Government for the time being, I hope for a while, saying how much we honour and respect your contribution. And I want to say on behalf of my Government, on behalf of all of the Australian people - thank you for what you are doing; thank you for making it a better and a happier and a more decent and a more humane society. And I hope that my Government can over the years ahead continue to provide help, that you have some very articulate advocates on behalf of your organisation and good luck to them. Articulate advocacy is something that always ultimately has an effect on Governments and that's very, very important.

But this week is a very important week for you. It's a very important week for those who believe that Australian society is more than just a combination of economic numbers and arid policies, it's also about values and love and compassion and care - and it's a very important week and I'm very proud as Prime Minister to have been asked to launch it - to say a few words about my own personal interest in your responsibilities and also to wish the Carers' Association the very best of good fortune and to thank all of you for the magnificent personal contribution you make - and for the collective contribution you make to a warm and more decent and more caring Australian community.

Thank you.