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PRIME MINISTER

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP PRESENTATION OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARD PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA

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To Robert Gottliebson, my Ministerial colleagues, Michael Wooldridge and Judi Moylan, other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am very honoured to continue an honourable tradition and that is of the Prime Minister of Australia having an award for companies that make such a direct contribution to assisting people with disabilities in the workforce.

We often have debates in this country and in the community, and people do it amongst themselves, as to whether things were better in the good old days or whether they're better now, and those sort of debates will go on forever. And when you draw up a balance sheet I guess you can say there are some things that maybe were better done earlier. But gee, there are a lot more things that are done better now. And one of those things that I believe that Australian society has undeniably advanced in enormously over the last 20 to 30 years is our whole attitude towards our fellow country men and women with disabilities. Generations ago it was something that was not as well treated. It was something that people often felt embarrassed about, they didn't want the world to know about. There was a totally different attitude. Now humanely, sensibly, from an economic standpoint, doing good business means that we adopt a far more beckoning, a far more inclusive, a far more day-to-day sensible, commonsense attitude towards those of us who have disabilities.

And the way in which we have made great strides over the years, particularly, I think, over the last 10 years or so, to encourage firms to build their workforces to include people with disabilities, their recognition is the slogan of what the opening video said, *'Doing Good Business'* or *'It's Good Business'* - I'm not quite sure what order it came in. But I know that the centrality of the message is that it's good business and it is good business. But it's also good citizenship and it's also very good human relations and it takes peoples talents for what they are and it reminds all of us that in different

ways everybody in the Australian community has got a contribution to make. And I can't think of a better way for the communities, through cooperation between governments and companies and unions and citizens generally, I can't think of a better way to express a practical citizenship, a better way of expressing that common thread of egalitarianism, that common thread of the Australian 'fair go' with which all us can identify in our different ways and on which all of us can agree.

Reading a little bit about the different activities, big and small, around Australia, not only over the last year but before, the contribution they make to incorporating into their workforces people with disabilities, the contribution that those people make to the success of those companies, it's a mutual thing. It's not a charity exercise, it's an exercise in humane commonsense. And I think the companies that engage in it, I think they should be applauded and I welcome the way in which so many have participated. I want to congratulate the Federal Government departments that have played their role in setting an example and giving a lead which many in the private sector have emulated, some perhaps not as well as others. And one hopes that the emulation spreads throughout the community.

But this is a very nice function. It's a very warming occasion to be associated with. And in presenting the awards in a few moments, I do want to thank the sponsors - that streak of privatisation about me always encourages me to thank the sponsors - and to thank them very warmly because it's a very nice interaction between Government and private business. And I want to thank the companies and the employers, big and small, that have contributed towards today's awards. But most importantly I want to thank the target group of Australians - if I can put it that way - to which these activities are directed, to thank you for the very valuable and practical contribution that you are making to the success of the firms that employ you, the firms that you run, the contribution that both of them are making to the overall health and strength of the Australian economy.

Relations in the workplace is a very important policy area for my new Government. In all its ramifications relations in the workplace have received quite a lot of publicity in recent weeks. This is a different but very special aspect of good workplace relations. And the way in which so many firms have demonstrated, in a practical way, their commitment to good workplace relations is exemplified by the turn out for this presentation and exemplified by the practises and the attitudes of the companies involved. I warmly thank you all and in anticipation I collectively congratulate those who are about to be announced as winners of the awards.

Thank you.