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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
A CURRENT AFFAIR WITH RAY MARTIN**

E&OE.....

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister thanks for your time. Are you listening to those voters?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Yes I am.

**MARTIN:**

Well, would you agree with Tim Fischer that this whole affair has damaged your Government?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No I don't think it has damaged the Government because we've done the right thing. I mean just let's understand what we've done. We have sent this matter off to the police. At all stages I have accepted legal advice unlike the former Government that disregarded legal advice to send Senator Colston to a police investigation 13 years ago. I know it is sometimes unpopular to uphold due process and defend the operations of the rule of law, but it is my responsibility to do that. I can promise the people of Australia one thing, that I will allow the full rigour of the law to operate in relation to anybody - be it Senator Colston, former Senator Woods, Michael Cobb or indeed anybody else on either side of the parliament who may be the subject of allegations about abuse of parliamentary entitlements. I can understand why the people of Australia are angry about these things. I regret it. The great bulk of members of Parliament are honest men and women on both sides. When something like this

happens we all suffer a bit, we are all diminished a bit. I understand that and it hurts me a lot that that occurs but it is not enough for me to say I am upset about it and I am hurt about it, I've got to do it properly.

**MARTIN:**

The stench has been around for months of this Colston affair. Why did it take you so long to give it to the Federal Police?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Because there is a process of sifting allegations. I mean, I want to tell you for example, the idea that the Senate President should refer some of that material which she ultimately did - not ultimately - she did quite quickly, possibly to the Federal Police and get legal advice on it, that was something that I proposed. Look it all stayed in....

**MARTIN:**

This has been a political football as you know for both parties... why don't you actually ... (inaudible)...and get rid of that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well Ray, my announcement last night hasn't stopped the Labor Party from continuing to kick the football. Don't imagine that simply by referring something to the Federal Police you are going to stop the Labor Party trying to score political capital. I mean, remember one thing about this. The Labor Party is particularly bitter about Colston because he resigned from the Labor Party. Now I understand that, but I think the Australian public ought to bear that in mind. But can we just go back to the base point and the base point is simply this : I promised the public of Australia that I will not stand in the way for one second of the full operation of the law of this country against any citizen, whether that citizen is a member of Parliament, a member of my Party or a member of the Labor Party or a member of the media. No matter who it is I am certainly not going to play favourites, but I do have a responsibility as Prime Minister not to suspend the rule of the law, not to get carried away and judge people...

**MARTIN:**

Prime Minister it has looked as though you have been more interested though in Senator Colston's vote and the expediency of that rather than justice and what we call old-fashioned Aussie decency.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that's not right. I mean if that had been my situation I wouldn't have acted as I did last night.

**MARTIN:**

Well the report was that in fact you only acted because you understood that the *Courier Mail* had the story and were about to drop the letter.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well that's wrong.

**MARTIN:**

When did you learn?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I learnt about it early last evening.

**MARTIN:**

And yet your Minister went Mr Jull went on television last night....

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well he didn't know about it then.

**MARTIN:**

So did you know then?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No - well at 7.30pm I had heard a whisper and I was trying to get hold of letter, and as you know you never act on a whisper in Parliament House otherwise you'd be bumping into walls every hour.

**MARTIN:**

Well Mr Jull said yesterday the Colston affair makes people think that all MPs are crooks. Would you agree?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I would put it differently. I think it does feed a cynical view in the community and I think it does make people disillusioned and I'm sorry about that because most men and women who go into politics are quite dedicated and I say that as generously of people in the Labor Party side as I do of my own, but there are some who don't.

**MARTIN:**

But tonight you see you've got your chosen Deputy President of the Senate, plus a former member of your Cabinet, plus a senior member of your Government all facing fraud charges and possible jail.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well not a senior ... no former member of my Cabinet, a Parliamentary Secretary. Well, they are all entitled to a presumption of innocence. I mean, there was a member of the Labor Party under Mr Keating's leadership who was convicted of rape and sent to jail for ten years. Now at no stage did we endeavour to sort of spread the responsibility for that. I mean these things happen.

**MARTIN:**

But how much evidence did you want. I mean, if you look at Senator Colston's track record it goes back in fact to when you were Treasurer back in 1982, November '82, there was 4000- odd...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I didn't know anything about that. I mean, I heard Mr Beazley explain his inactivity of 1983 on John Laws this morning by saying that there was no public clamour to do anything. The public didn't know about it. That's why there was no clamour.

**MARTIN:**

But he had to give back over \$20 000 in those years. I mean, how much do you want before you say well we want the police in this?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well I had no, Ray, I had no control in 1983. I was kicked out.

**MARTIN:**

But in November 1982 you were the Treasurer.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well those matters were not referred to me in 1982. I have no recollection of those matters having been referred to me. Now as far as I am concerned, what I have done in relation to Colston, when the allegations were made in the Senate he was asked for an explanation. He gave that explanation. The Senate President then, certainly consistent with my advice sought the advice of the Attorney General's Department as to whether the matter ought to be sent to the Federal...

**MARTIN:**

So you don't think you've ....

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No hang on, this is whether the matter ought to be sent to the Federal Police and the Attorney General's advice to her was to wait until the other investigation had been completed and the whole thing could be looked at together. Now that was the advice that I had from the first law officer of the Commonwealth until last night and...

**MARTIN:**

We are out of time Prime Minister. Is it cynical to say that the reason you've held off is the fact that you need Senator Colston's vote?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

That's completely cynical. I believe I have behaved correctly. I have sent this matter off to the police in the light of the statement of Mrs Smith last night that fundamentally altered the basis on which we had previously been acting and I just say again, unlike Mr Beazley and Senator Evans, I did not disregard the advice of the head of the Attorney General's Department to send Colston for a police investigation. They did and that's the difference.

**MARTIN:**

John Howard, we've got to go, thank you for your time.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

It's a great pleasure.