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11 May 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
OFFICIAL OPENING OF SCALABRINI VILLAGE  
AUSTRAL, SYDNEY**

E&EO.....

Thank you very much George, to the Deputy Premier of NSW, Andrew Refshuage, to my colleague, John Fahey, the Minister for Finance and also the Federal Member for this area, to Craig Knowles, to my other parliamentary colleagues, to the Fathers Provincial and most particularly my friend, His Excellency the Ambassador to the Republic of Italy in Australia, to Father Nevio who is synonymous with the Scalabrini Village, you can't talk about the Scalabrini Village without talking about Father Nevio and to all the other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I remember very well when I came here in October of 1987. I came as Opposition Leader. I did say that if I ever became Prime Minister, and I've got to say in October 1987 I thought it was a little distant, if I ever did become Prime Minister that I would return and I am very happy to be back here today. And I'm also very happy to recall some of the things that I said in October of 1987 and to say to all of you that what those words meant then meant just as much some, almost 10 years later. And the most important thing that I think I said in October of 1987 was that of the enormous gifts and benefits that the Italian people have brought to Australia, none was stronger, none was greater and none ought to be more cherished than the commitment of Italian people to the care and nurture of their family members, especially the elderly members of their families.

It has been one of the great symbols of the contribution that Italian people have made to Australian life, particularly since the end of the Second World War. And their demonstration of that care and commitment is an object lesson to other sections of the Australian community and that was true 10 years ago and it remains true today and I'm sure that when one of my successors comes back here in 10 or 15 or 20 years time that he or she will be able to say exactly the same thing. He or she will be able to say that the demonstration of care and nurture within the family by Australians of Italian descent and Italian background is an object lesson to all of the rest of the Australian community.

Ladies and gentlemen today is an occasion for me, on behalf of the Federal Government to honour the particular contribution of the Scalabrini Village, of the movement that is throughout the world committed itself to the care of the aged. It is

of course as people grow old that they are able to spend their years in retirement in touch with their cultural roots as well as in touch with the members of their family. I remember a conversation I had with Sir James Gobbo, now the Governor of Victoria and certainly one of the greatest of all Australians of Italian descent saying to me in a chat we were having about cultural issues, he said there is nothing more incongruous he said than the notion of an elderly lady of Italian descent who spent the first 40 years of her life in Italy being encouraged to sing the Road to Gundagai around the piano in a nursing home. And of course he put it well, there is nothing wrong with the Road to Gundagai, it's a terrific song and I know that a lot of Australians of Italian descent can sing it as well as other Australians, but the truth simply is that as you get older you reach out more and you need the support and the comfort and the familiarity of your cultural roots and your cultural background.

That is why the Scalabrini Village is so important. It is why another organisation that I have association with within my own electorate, The Sir Moses Montefiori Jewish Home is so very important to Australians of Jewish belief. It is important that people feel that comfort and ease in the culture which is their first culture and their first understanding and therefore it is a very, very strong commitment of my government to maintain as part of its approach to aged care policy, a respect for, and a promotion of villages and complexes which have a particular cultural identification.

As Carl Melvey mentioned, and in saying that I was to particularly salute the impressive contribution that Carl Melvey has made to the Village. The great contribution that he has made to the community life of the Italian people in Sydney and also the very impressive contribution that Carl has made in his general professional and business life and I think you are indeed lucky to have a person of that business and commercial acumen to give you so much advice and to have had that counsel for so long and so persistently and in such a loyal fashion.

We have ladies and gentlemen, as Carl mentioned, we have at a Federal level made some changes about the funding of nursing homes and I want to take the opportunity of saying to you today very directly that those new funding arrangements, once they are up and running, will tackle head on the problem that has been developing over a long period of time of how on a fair and equitable basis, whilst protecting the people who can't afford to make a contribution and our scheme will protect those people it will protect those people fully how you can get some more capital into the nursing home area. And as a result of those changes I can confidently predict that over the next few years a much larger amount of money, we calculate about \$130 million over a four year period, will be injected in a much needed way into the nursing home structure of Australia because they have over the years those nursing homes they have become starved of capital. And no government, whether it is Labor or Liberal, State or Federal has unlimited resources to provide for exercises of that kind of what we have done whilst protecting people who can't afford to make a contribution we'll introduce a system that over the next four years you are going to see the injection of a much needed sum of about \$130 million into the capital needs of nursing homes and I think when those reforms are up and running and when the finance and the equity and the protection they involve for the under-privileged is recognised and understood they will be seen as a very far-sighted, a very courageous and a very, very necessary structural reform. But most importantly we'll get more money into nursing homes in Australia

and that is, with an aging population, an absolutely essential policy objective of any government.

Can I finally say ladies and gentlemen that the retired people in Australia have been a very important goal, have been a very, very important element of the policies of my government over the last 13 months. I'm very proud that the commitments we made in relation to the taxation treatment of self-funded retirees were introduced in the last budget. I am very happy to say that many retired people will benefit from the tax incentives of private health insurance that will come into operation on the first of July. And I think in a number of ways the retired community of Australia will find Tuesday night's Budget a very, very welcome Budget. It will be a good Budget for retired people in Australia and most importantly of all over the last few years we have been able to achieve in Australia and I don't know that it started immediately on the second of March 1996 but certainly we have built on it and made it a little better and we have been able to achieve a very low level of inflation. And there is nothing that destroys the stability and the savings of elderly retired people in any community than high rates of inflation. And although some of the retired people may not welcome the slightly lower interest rates that have come with lower inflation certainly over a long period of time price stability is enormously important to the retired people.

So ladies and gentlemen can I say to all of you in a very personal way I'm very, very happy to be back here. I love mixing with and coming to functions involving the Italian community in Australia. It's an opportunity for me on behalf of the rest of the Australian community to salute the enormous and unselfish generous contribution that Italian people have made to Australia. Italians comprise the largest group of immigrants to this country with a non-English speaking background. They have penetrated and reached and achieved in every area of Australian life, whether it's the professions, it's business, it's politics but most importantly of all they have in every area of Australian life made as individuals and as families and as part of the community they have made an enormous contribution and an ongoing contribution to the tolerant open, diverse and very cosmopolitan Australian society which we now have.

I say on behalf of all the Australians of non-Australian descent, thank you. Thank you from all of us for the contribution that you have made.

Ends.