



**PRIME MINISTER**

4 September 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
ADDRESS AT THE  
PRIME MINISTER'S EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS  
PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA**

**E&OE.....**

Thank you very much Judi. To Dr Michael Wooldridge, to Ian Leslie, to my other Parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to be here again to personally present these very important awards. I came last year. I thought the award was one of the very good, and I think forward-thinking awards devised under the patronage of the Prime Minister of Australia, whoever he or she may be at any given time.

I was tremendously impressed last year with the enthusiastic support of men and women in business, the enthusiastic support of Government agencies and also the strong personal commitment of my two Ministerial colleagues, Michael Wooldridge and Judi Moylan.

So I am very happy indeed to be back here again this year and to say how much I see what these awards recognise and acknowledge as being a very important expression, not only of common humanity but also a very important expression of commonsense and forward thinking on the part of the employers who do employ people with disabilities, on the part of people who do look in a forward-thinking way to the advantage of incorporating into their businesses and their agencies, not in any kind of patronising or tokenistic way, but in a fully inclusive way, people who may have one or other kind of disability.

The participation of companies and agencies in the Award has grown significantly over the years since the Award was established some eight years ago and I know that this year a new category in the area of higher education has been established. But what I think is important about this Award and what is important about the attitude of companies and agencies and employers which it recognises is that their commitment to the employment of people with disabilities is a commitment that will not only express

that humanity but of equal importance, will add value to their businesses and will add value and capacity to the performance of their agencies. And the way in which the myths in relation to people with disabilities over the years have been steadily dissolved is one of the more heartening developments in the past generations.

We often as a society reflect on whether we've gone forward or gone backward over the years. In some areas perhaps we may not be doing things as well as we were a generation ago but I think in most areas we're doing them a lot better, and one of the areas where we are doing them a lot better is in relation to our fellow Australians who may have one or other kind of disability and I think we have a more open-hearted, a more commonsense, a more co-operative, a more understanding, a more forward-looking attitude and whilst we still have a long way to go, none of us should imagine that those with disabilities, particularly with profound disabilities, still do not suffer a far inferior quality of life than the rest of the community

But we have come a long way and people who have contributed to that march to a higher level of humanity are represented here today, and I want on behalf of the Government to very warmly thank all of the employers who participated, whether they are in the private sector or whether they are in the public sector.

I want to thank our sponsors. You should always thank sponsors. I always thank the voters, they sponsor me, and I always thank the people who support these gatherings and you know, it's easy sometimes to knock the big companies but the big companies will very generously put their, many of them, not all of them - and those that don't should feel progressively embarrassed because they haven't - but most of our large corporations are very good corporate citizens and I want to thank the sponsors and I also want to thank personally Ian Spicer for his particular contribution to the awards process, as well as of course again thanking my two Ministerial colleagues who have given this a very strong, personal commitment.

Can I say to all of you that you have in Michael and Judi two people who, whilst being very committed to reform and very committed to the process of having intelligent, workable economic outcomes in the decisions they take, they are, above all else in their respective portfolio responsibilities, interested in caring for people and the personal commitment that I know Judi has brought to these awards and to the cause of encouraging the employers of Australia, large and small, to employ people with disabilities, is a very visible token of it.

So can I again say how delighted I am to be here. It's a demonstration of my Government's strong commitment. It's a demonstration of my Government's gratitude to the humanity and commonsense of employers and agencies who have participated. Can I finally congratulate those Australians with disabilities in the workforce for their skill, their application, their guts, and I hope you see in today's awards a small recognition of the contribution that you, together with your employers, have made to a higher plane of decency and humanity within our community.

Thank you.

[ENDS]