



**PRIME MINISTER**

19 October 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
DOORSTOP  
HARBOUR BRIDGE, SYDNEY**

E&OE.....

**JOURNALIST:**

What's your response to the polls showing a lot of voter support out there for Cheryl Kernot?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Those polls were all done in the immediate aftermath of an unexpected event that received enormous publicity and you always get that kind of response. I think it will be some weeks before you get a proper read-out from the Australian public as to whether this has had any beneficial effect for the Labor Party or any detrimental effect for us. It's a sort of an instant Messiah/instant copy reaction done the day after and I've known of plenty of examples in the past where that sort of thing has occurred. I think you just have to wait and see. You get a distorted, unrepresentative result because you've had an unexpected event, huge publicity. People might say: gee, this will solve all our problems, and they give it a tick. Then after a few weeks go by they realise that nothing much has changed and it's still a choice between the Labor Party and the Liberal Party and the Labor Party now includes somebody who abandoned her previous values. That's my reaction.

**JOURNALIST:**

Doesn't the poll show that support for your party is continuing to drop though? I mean, doesn't that confirm that?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No...

**JOURNALIST:**

Confirm the trend of the last few polls of support for the Government is dropping.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, the poll that came out the day Mrs Kernot resigned showed the Labor Party primary vote at 32 per cent. This poll shows it at 54 per cent and one of them has got to be badly wrong.

**JOURNALIST:**

So this sort of voter support for Cheryl Kernot is unsustainable, is it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

What I've said is that you can't construe from a poll done in the 24 hours after a widely covered, unexpected event like this any kind of long-term trend. People who do that are misreading previous events of this kind and are making a very big mistake. You just have to wait and see.

My guess is that over the longer term it won't have any appreciable effect on support for the major parties. It was inevitable that there'd be some kick-up and that has happened.

**JOURNALIST:**

What sort of effect will it have on your re-election strategies?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

None. Our re-election strategy will be based upon the record of reform over the three-year period and also on us offering a view and a vision about the future of Australia that is starkly different from that of the Labor Party. We'll be offering people a clear choice about a different direction as we go into the 21st Century. The Labor Party, by contrast, will be falling back on a very negative campaign.

**JOURNALIST:**

[Inaudible]

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No they don't. I've been in politics a very long time and I've seen all of the polls. They've gone in all directions in the time that I've been in. And I do know this, that it's always a mistake to assume that a poll done straight after a widely publicised, unexpected event is representative of media, let alone long-term opinion.

**JOURNALIST:**

At the moment they're sending a very big signal. Surely you must be concerned in some way or alarmed that support for Cheryl Kernot and the ALP will continue.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I can only repeat what I said a moment ago. The last poll before these was the Morgan Bulletin Poll that showed Labor's vote at 32 per cent and our two-party preferred vote at 57.5 per cent. This one shows Labor's primary vote at 54 per cent versus 32 per cent. Now, one of them has got to be woefully wrong and you can take your pick. I'm not going to even try because it's too early.

**JOURNALIST:**

But you can't write-off the fact that there is a massive wave of support there for Cheryl Kernot.

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I don't accept, in any long-term sense, that that's the case at all. All I note is that a poll done within 24 hours indicated a certain thing. And the point I'm making to you is that often in the past, when you get an unexpected event in politics, it gets blanket press coverage, people pick up their papers, turn on their bulletins and say: gee, this is interesting, I'll give it a tick. And then a few days go by and they think, well, it doesn't really alter anything. I think that is what you are seeing at the present time.

**JOURNALIST:**

What about the polls showing support for Cheryl Kernot's comments that you lack vision?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I think it's all in the same context.

**JOURNALIST:**

Are you talking to Sally-Anne Atkinson about...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

No, I'm not talking to Sally-Anne Atkinson. If she's interested in running for the Liberal Party in a seat anywhere, well, there are preselection processes. She was a very good and popular Lord Mayor of Brisbane but I can assure you that I've had no discussions of any kind with her and you shouldn't construe in my response a preference either way. If she's interested in running for the Liberal Party, well, she ought to talk to the Party organisation and discuss that with them. But I'm certainly not involved in any discussions with her at all.

**JOURNALIST:**

Has the Party organisation been talking to her?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I don't know. You'd better ask them. I don't know.

**JOURNALIST:**

You would support her though...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I'm not going to express a view in relation to a preselection that's not going to be held until early next year, clearly not.

**JOURNALIST:**

[Inaudible]...Mr Smith as your candidate for Dickson...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, he's the sitting member and while he's the sitting member he enjoys the support of the organisation. The question of who the candidate is at the next election will be determined at the beginning of next year when nominations are called. I'm not going to further qualify that.

**JOURNALIST:**

[Inaudible]

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I simply repeat what I've said.

**JOURNALIST:**

What about David Colston's announcement...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

He's not a member of my party.

**JOURNALIST:**

No, what's your thoughts on it?

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Well, I don't think he'll win.

**JOURNALIST:**

[Inaudible]...David Colston will go...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

I just said I don't think he'll win. I don't think he'll win the Labor preselection. Look, it's a foregone conclusion that Kernot will be the Labor candidate for Dickson. What is not a foregone conclusion is whether after a few weeks, a few months have gone by people are going to wear what has occurred. Now, whether she wins or loses in Dickson will be determined by, not only the local campaign, but also by the overall campaign and the attitude of the Australian people at that time which could be right out to March or April of 1999 to the two major parties. But I don't think there's any doubt that Cheryl Kernot will be the Labor candidate. I don't think they will have got that wrong.

**JOURNALIST:**

What if Colston ran...

**PRIME MINISTER:**

Look, I haven't the faintest idea. I just don't think he'll get up. Either way, any party, any State, I don't think he'd win.

[Ends]