

Concession Speech: Paul Keating, Prime Minister (ALP)

March 2, 1996

“Let me, let me begin by saying that, I want, I wanted to deliver for all those who supported us, but obviously it wasn't to be.

O-K...(applause)...thank you...(applause)...I've always passionately believed that all power, all power came from the public every last morsel of it, and its the nation's perfect right to decide who they want to govern.

I take this opportunity to congratulate John Howard. I wish him and his government well, we, we ran a hard campaign, I've met as many people in the country as I was able to meet, I wanted to be real, I wanted to go out there, but I think there was always an underlying view that the government had been in office a long time.

And, even though, even though there was argument about this it had been, that was an undoubted fact, this is a great country with a great future and it deserves a government that will live up to it. And this is what, this is what we've tried to do...this is what we've tried to do.

I think Labor is finishing this period in office with a very proud record, we've (applause)... thank you... we've opened the country up, and turned it towards the world as never before, and we've done it in a way which has also put a high premium on social equity and social consensus, and I think that (applause)... that in, that in such things as access and equity in areas such as health in Medicare or in education or in care for the aged or for the young.

In these areas, in our commitment to employment in running the economy faster than others would have run it, the fact that we've got now thirty percent plus more jobs than we had 13 years ago, that we've had a rate of employment growth right as fast as anywhere in the world, has been an express undertaking and commitment and policy of a Labor government, we've always stayed true to the faith and to the creed, of making certain that people had as many opportunities as possible to a job and that's why we put on job growth as strongly as we could do it.

We've also (applause)...that's right..., thank you, thank you, and we've also, we've also taken the bigger view and tried to do something about some of the intractable problems like a proper basis of reconciliation with our Indigenes, which we held to be important (applause)...I think, I think in all these things, health, education, care for the aged, the young, employment we've set new community standards and the Liberal party has explicitly acknowledged those standards in this campaign.

With Medicare, with the labour market and with mainstream issues like the environment, they have not won on the policies they had in 80s and the early 1990s, they've won on policies which the Labor party has created as new standards in this country (applause).

And it takes ...thank you... and it takes a lot to, it takes a lot to lift a country's standards on such big issues, not just, it's not just on one term of parliament or even two terms because the opposing party always thinks they can come and turn it back, but to create new standards and have them explicitly acknowledged by the alternative government is real social advancement and something that Labor can be proud of...(applause).

I think we can also say that in opening Australia up, in peeling the tariff wall away and removing exchange controls and giving the country some real breadth and life inside it we have turned Australia to our neighbourhood, we've reoriented it to the world, we are now part of this community of nations in East Asia and the East Asian hemisphere and that's, and again another legacy of Labor. Giving Australia that place in the world... (Applause)...

I suppose you can say perhaps in a nutshell, equity and enterprise at home, and opportunity abroad has been the thing that has motivated us, and we've left the incoming government a country in good order, with good growth, (applause) with good strong growth, we've averaged four and a half percent over the last three years, each year the last three years, twice the western world average, strong employment growth in fact the strongest in the western world, low inflation and a set of policies any nation in the world, social policies any nation in the world will be proud of (applause).

Now can I say, thank you, can I say on my part, can I say on my part that I, outside of my family I've had two great loves, that's Australia and the Labor Party and I proud to be able to say today, that I leave office with them now as proud, as proud of them today as I was when I began 26 years ago (applause).

I'm exceptionally proud of what Labor has done over 13 years and I'm proud of what I was able to do over four years and I've got to say not once did I tackle and take on a second best option, I always, I never threw a policy fight, I always went, I always went for the big ones. And people may say well, uh, the big picture and call it into question, but in the end it's the big picture which changes nations and what ever our opponents may say, Australia's changed inexorably for good, for the better (applause). Thank-you.

Now public life, public life is the most noble of all professions because to serve the public is the noblest thing one can do and to do it in a way where you keep trying to reach standards and have a team and a party to run with you, in putting those standards into place is the very essence of good public policy and good public life, I think Labor has given this to Australia in this period.

Can I say of course I won't be contesting, re-contesting the leadership but I'd like to, but, but I would like to a thank, But I would like to thank...(crowd chants "we want Paul")...

Thank-you.... thank you very much, thank you, thank you, but I would like to, I would like to thank our candidates, quite a, quite a number of our, a lot of our members of course have lost seats, I want to thank them, I want to thank our candidates, I want to thank our workers all of you here tonight and I want to thank our supporters, those who've believed in us those who voted us through those years those who've given us majorities, and those who supported us today, I want to thank them all.

I want to thank all those who believe in the creed of Labor and understand just how important the Labor party has been to Australia, ah, in all ways at the critical junctures of it's history, turning the country the right way and imagining something bigger, imagining something better, that is (applause)... I've always thought that could I say, thank you, that imagination is one of the big characteristics of public life, there has to be imagination, and there's got to be belief, belief in the people and faith in what we've created here and how we can make it bigger and better, so... so, I'd like to take this opportunity again of thanking all those who've supported me, not just tonight but down through the years, and those who've supported the Labor candidates across Australia, those who've worked for Labor, and in fact all those Australian's who believe in something big and better, I'd like to also thank my wife Anita who's with me tonight, I'll bring her over here (applause).

I'd like to (applause)...thank you, thank you very much. I'd like to, I'd like to also, I'd like to also take the opportunity, I'd like to also thank, I'd like to also have the opportunity (crowd shouts "hip hip hooray")...Thank you very much indeed, thank you very much indeed.

I'd also like to take this opportunity of thanking my children who have lived with the vagaries of public life and the deprivations of it and the highs of it. It's an experience in their life obviously which has made them richer, but it's also put pressure on them and, I'll always, you know, be grateful to them for that, for taking it so magnanimously and so generously, we all thank you, to serve, to serve the nation as a government has been a great offer, a great honour, and to all of you again, can I conclude on this note, thanking you sincerely for the faith, the hope the belief and sticking with us through these years... thank you indeed."

Source: Transcribed from records in The Age and Australian Politics Online