

Concession Speech: Kim Beazley Opposition Leader (ALP)

Warnbro YMCA, Western Australia, October 3, 1998

“Well, it appears that we have won at least 17 seats tonight with 12 hanging there, swinging a bit doubtful. And while I don't want to formally concede defeat tonight, I do have to tell you it will be difficult for us to reach a majority from that position. And, therefore, I think a win by us is unlikely.

But I can say this: this is the biggest number of seats won by a first time Opposition party in this country, this is the biggest swing to a first time Opposition party since WWII.

We are in the unusual position of having polled a better vote in two party preferred terms than at any point of time since 1984.

For the first time in four elections I'll go to bed not worrying about my own seat.

Can I firstly say I would like to thank the Australian people for the attention that they have paid us over the course of the last five weeks and the dialogue that they have had for the last two and a half years.

I've learned a lot. I've learned a lot about their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations, their fears, their concerns, their anxieties, their love for their families and their love for this country. We have a wonderful people and our democratic institutions are foremost among democratic institutions in the world.

And we have learned from those aspirations of the Australian people that they crave, above all, security for themselves, opportunity for their children and their families, unity for the nation and a cleverness and a good heartedness and good sportedness which are exactly the sorts of things we need to survive and prosper in the difficult and turbulent times ahead of this nation.

And I do thank them for returning, again expressed in those two party preferred terms, a majority vote for the Australian Labor Party. And we won't betray that trust. We indicated in this election campaign very firm stands. We will maintain those stands. We now have the comfort of knowing that they are positions agreed with by most of our fellow Australians.

If, as I suspect from the minority of votes, the Liberal and National Parties emerge in the next few days with a majority of seats, they have a mandate like any Government of this nation to govern well. They have a mandate to govern well. That is what the Australian people will expect of them.

The Australian people, who love their democratic institutions, even though those of us who sit in them fail them so often, also expect of us an Opposition that will keep a Government accountable. We would not have obtained the marvellous result that we have obtained today had we not proved adept at that.

And I would like to thank my colleagues in the Senate and House of Representatives, all shattered and floored at the end of the last election, who picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and in so many areas very effectively held this Government accountable. Their services will be needed again and they will be enjoined by a large number of fellow Australian Labor Party representatives as a result of their efforts after this election.

Can I thank, too, my wife and family who are almost complete here on the stage. But 8.30 is beyond Rachel's bedtime even on special occasions like this. So, Mrs Annus is going to spend her time over the next five minutes putting her to bed with any sort of luck.

But my family have been a wonderful boon and support to me in this campaign as they have been to me through my life. And I've actually had the odd experience of seeing more of Susie in the course of this election campaign than I've seen of her in the last two and a half years.

And then can I thank the magnificent Labor Party organisation. I mean, I ask 'how did we do it?' How did we manage to get together after that shattering defeat and put together a coherent strategy and a coherent policy. And I thank in that regard our National Secretary, Gary Gray and the team who worked with him in the National Office. This has been a harmonious election campaign and they have done very well indeed.

And they've been well served by a number of State Secretaries. A number have been very close to the campaign and all of them in organising that campaign and I thank in particular in that regard one State Secretary who did work, and it's invidious to single out one, but John Della Bosca worked in the Agency for the entirety of the campaign and his assistance in that regard has been invaluable.

Can I then move over to thanking my staff. I have a large staff and they are too numerous to name here - but they know I love them. And they know that I need them. And they know that they are a deal cleverer than I am, and thank God for it. But I particularly thank David Epstein, who is my Chief of Staff, who has worked even longer hours than I have throughout this campaign and has, I think, kept his...well, my wife says he's kept his sense of humour. I have news for her, he hardly ever keeps his sense of humour. But nevertheless, he has done extraordinarily well in this campaign.

And then yesterday, not here but in Victoria, I metaphorically hand balled the political process to the thousands and thousands of Party workers and helpers around the country who had been working so hard on campaigns for so long and then took all the burden on the final day. We are marvellously served in the Australian Labor Party by our voluntary helpers and they have not let us down. They never do. We sometimes let them down. They have not let us down.

And I particularly thank the hundreds and hundreds here from the electorate of Brand who have done so well for me this time. I'm very grateful to you.

And through your efforts can I also thank the electors of Brand - for the first time in my political life they have given me something that looks remotely like a safe seat.

However, I know enough about my fellow West Australians to know this: that they regard continuing performance as essential if that situation is to be maintained.

We have also, I might say, had a magnificent result here in Western Australia. This is a substantial reversal of what was a seemingly permanent decline in the Labor vote here in Western Australia. And we have done very well indeed.

I notice my Mum and Dad are here. I'd love to thank them. Mum and Dad provided the best Labor Party advertisement of this campaign, there's no doubt about that at all. And they, of course, have sustained me through my life, educated me, trained me, and made me whatever there is of me today.

Can I finally return to where I started off, and that was with the great Australian people. We are a great resilient people, we Australians. We have to be. In so many ways the world is tipped against us. We are a very small country in population terms, occupying a very large piece of the world's real estate. We do that only by drawing upon all the reserves of cleverness and unity that we have.

We must always, those of us in political parties, strive to enhance, not deplete those reserves. We must, as a people, constantly turn to each other and not on each other and against each other. We must, as a people, and I believe we do, operate in a way that gets the very best out of the multicultural and multiracial society that we are. In many ways I think that that has been emphasised by this election campaign and this wonderful outcome that we have had.

Finally, the labour movement. The labour movement is a very broad Church, as some have said in the past. It consists of its political and industrial wings. We understand that the right of ordinary workers to collectively bargain is an essential part of the democratic process in this country. And we have been well supported in this campaign by all elements of the labour movement.

Well, in conclusion I'm proud to say the Labor Party is back in town. And we approach the next three years with great confidence.

Thank you very much.”

Source: Transcribed from audio at Australian Politics online and original documents.