

Concession Speech: John Howard, Prime Minister (LP)

Wentworth Hotel, Sydney, 24 November 2007

“Thank you. Please, please, please — my fellow Australians, a few moments ago I telephoned Mr Kevin Rudd and I congratulated him and the Australian Labor Party on a very emphatic victory.

This is a great democracy and I want to wish Mr Rudd well. He assumes the mantle of being the 26th prime minister of Australia and I want to say there is no prouder job in the world that anyone could occupy than being the prime minister of this country.

I wish him well in the task that he will undertake. And I want to say on behalf of the Coalition that has governed this country for the last 11 ½ years that we bequeath to him a nation that is stronger and prouder — a nation that is stronger and prouder and more prosperous than it was 11 ½ years ago.

And can I say to all of you that it has been an immense privilege every day of my life over the last 11 ½ years to have been the prime minister of this beautiful country and I want to thank the Australian people for the privilege they have given me over that period of time. I respect it and I honour it and it is something that has really been the most unbelievable experience. The Australian people are the greatest people on earth and this is the greatest country on the earth.

I've led a Government that has taken this country from deep debt to strong prosperity. I've led a Government that has never shirked the difficult decisions. I've led a Government that has reformed the Australian economy and left it the envy of the world.

I want to extend to a number of people my deep gratitude. I want to thank all of my parliamentary colleagues for their loyalty and their dedication over these long years in government. I want particularly to thank Mark Vaile and his two predecessors, John Anderson and Tim Fischer, both of whom served as deputy prime ministers.

To my own deputy and Treasurer Peter Costello I owe a very special debt of gratitude. He's been a wonderful steward of the Australian economy and the future of our party is very much tied up with Peter Costello. He is very much our future.

And I want to say to those of my colleagues who have fallen in electoral battle today — please, please — to those of my colleagues who've lost their seats today I thank them. I grieve for some of those young members who've been in parliament for only a short period of time, some of those wonderful people who won in 2004 and also for some of my ministers who've done such a wonderful job.

I particularly grieve the loss of Mal Brough who led the intervention in the NT which represented an absolute watershed in indigenous policy in this country and I hope that the new government of this country maintains that intervention to the full because it's very important to the long-term benefit of the first Australians.

This is not the time to reflect in detail on everything that's happened over the last 11 ½ years except for me to say again what I said a few moments ago. I leave office as prime minister of Australia with our nation prouder, stronger and more prosperous.

Can I also say this — ok, please — can I also express my thanks — please, please, just, please, please, please, please. I'm very grateful for your expression of support but I'm trying, I just want to address a few more remarks. I want to thank the Liberal Party Organisation, I want to thank Brian Loughnane the federal director and the state directors of the party all around Australia, and Chris McGivern the federal president.

I also want to say this: that I accept full responsibility for the Liberal Party campaign and I therefore accept full responsibility for the Coalition's defeat in this election campaign.

The only other thing that I want to say, that the Liberal Party of course will need to choose a new leader and I wish that person, whoever it is — and I have indicated very clearly from my earlier remarks who I believe it should be. I believe the future of our party does lie very much with Peter Costello and others who will come in behind him. The Liberal Party will have a process of rebuilding to undertake.

Can I say to all of you as I conclude my remarks and at the end of my political career; can I say to you that I owe more to the liberal party than the Liberal Party owes to me. The Liberal Party has been unbelievably generous and loyal and forgiving and understanding to me over the 33 years that I've been in Parliament; the 15 or more years that I have led it and the 11 ½ years that I have been prime minister, and I will always feel greatly in debt to the party that has meant so much to me.

And finally — please, please — finally, I want to express my gratitude, my love and my thanks to the members of my family, but before singling them out can I also say how much I have appreciated the support and loyalty of my personal staff, many of whom are here tonight. Tony Nutt, my chief of staff; my personal secretary Susanne Kasprzak, and the members of my press staff who've sort of adorned those early morning walks. And to all my other advisors and helpers and — wonderful people, who've put up with a sometimes cantankerous leader and prime minister over the past few months. It has not been easy and I want to thank all of them very warmly, for the support they have given me.

I want to thank the members of my family. My wonderful children: Melanie, who can't be here tonight because she's bridesmaid in the wedding of her best friend, I mean she told me I'd chosen the election on the wrong day, but — and it appears that she's right. But she and my wonderful grandson Angus handed me my how-to-vote card at Ermington public school today.

To my two wonderful sons — Tim, and it's lovely to have his girlfriend Sarah with us on the stage tonight, and Richard who's come back from America for the last week of the campaign, I just express publicly to them my pride and my love for them and for everything they mean to me and to my life.

And finally, to the wonderful person beside me. She's not only been the love of my life but she's been my rock and my advisor and my life's companion for 36 years and through all of my political ups and downs — hmm? Has been? No, no, continues to be, yes, I belong to a family of debaters, we keep correcting ourselves! But ladies and gentlemen, I owe everything that I've achieved in these recent years to a wonderful strong family and Janette has been the cement, Janette has been there all the time and she's had to put up with a lot and I just want to publicly say to her not only how much I not only love her but how much I am in her debt for all the support and counsel that she has given me.

My friends, although it is still officially in doubt it is very likely to be the case that I will no longer be the member for Bennelong. But whatever ultimately is the situation I do want to thank the people of Bennelong who've done me the honour of electing me to represent them in the national parliament for some 33 years, and I thank them very warmly.

Lastly, can I say to all of the people of Australia that it has been a tremendous honour, opportunity and privilege to have served you. Public service is the greatest form of service that can come one's way in life and I've had great privileges.

Naturally I'm saddened by the defeat of the Coalition tonight but I count myself very fortunate to have been the beneficiary of the support of the people of Australia for so long. I thank them, I wish this nation well.

I believe very profoundly that Australia's best years lie ahead of her and I wish the government elected by the people today the very best of good fortune in the years ahead, thank you."

Source: Transcribed from original footage.