

Concession Speech: Kim Beazley, Opposition Leader (ALP)

Rockingham WA, 10 November 2001

“I am very proud of the Australian Labor Party, its Members of Parliament, its workers in the field tonight for a magnificent campaign — and we have held on to a position which I could not believe we would five weeks ago and I'll say more about that a little bit later.

But I have to, tonight, I'm afraid for all of you, I have to concede defeat. We have lost this election, there is no doubt about that. And I congratulate Mr Howard on his re-election. I hope, as Prime Minister of this country for some time, that he has and does bear in mind the concerns and needs of all Australians whatever their background, whatever their background in the time that remains for him as Prime Minister of this nation. I congratulate him on his re-election.

Can I say this, five weeks ago it looked as though we in the Labor Party faced one of the most devastating defeats in our history. It is an extraordinarily difficult thing to conduct an election campaign against the background of an ongoing war, and in circumstances where people feel that great sense of insecurity.

Governments all around the globe have been the beneficiaries of massive public support as the people of the nation turn to the leadership of the government of the day in order to get themselves a sense of comfort and security.

To conduct an election campaign against this background from Opposition is the most difficult task that any Opposition can undertake. I am so proud of the way we fought.

We have fought for the security of the Australian people. But we have also offered more. We've looked down through the fog of war to the kitchen table of the average Australian family.

To those who sit around it, we've listened to their hopes and their dreams, the aspirations that they have for their young folk that they get a decent education, the aspirations and concerns that they have to ensure that they have access to affordable health care. Their love of the future of this nation, the determination they have to see it as a constructive and creative nation, a nation where people don't leave when they have bright ideas, but come here when they have bright ideas.

We alone in the Labor Party brought these issues to the campaign table and let me let you in on a secret — they're not going to go away.

I am afraid to say, that crisis in aged care, health, the problems in our public schools, they'll all be there tomorrow. They'll all be there as a massive challenge to governments.

There will be a broader challenge to government, too. How are we going to be able to draw upon all our people, whatever their background, whatever racial group they come from, whatever cultural background they have, whatever religious background we may have, how are we going to draw on the strength of all our diversity to ensure that we as a nation survive and prosper? This now is a very real challenge. We don't

stand these days where we did once in the high regard of the nations in the region around us.

And yet, in that high regard, lies crucial elements of our security. This is the future challenge for government - how we address these things and deal with these things. It cannot be said that the election process that we have just been through necessarily assists that.

But what can assist it is the natural coming together of the Australian people after a great political contest, to think about the things which unify all of us and the gratitude we ought to have for being able to share in the prosperity of this lovely land, to be able to share in the prosperity of this lovely land.

It is a challenge for all of you, but it's a challenge that I will be joining you in as a humble backbencher shortly. It is not my intention to remain as leader of the Australian Labor Party.

It has been an enormous privilege for me to lead this great Party, this 100-year old Party, this Party that has so much of Australian history bound up in it. The greatest political Party and one of the greatest Australian political [inaudible] still there fighting and battling for the needs and concerns of the ordinary Australian through every hardship that they confront and for every political difficulty that we confront.

So, I bow out of Labor Party history now and — to all of you, ordinary members of the Australian Labor Party, who [inaudible] the years... ("We want Kim")

I thank you for your support but please don't make this any harder than it is. We've got lots of people to thank.

Can I just say these things. Firstly, there are a lot of people I need to thank and I start with the broad rank and file of the Australian Labor Party. To all of you, as I watched our political opponents pay their booth workers on a day like today and all you get paid is psychic capital. You get paid the contribution of your love and your labour for our great Party so I start with thanking the ... Labor Party ... (applause).

Then I go to my Caucus colleagues who've assisted us so well in this campaign. My backbench and my frontbench colleagues it would be invidious to mention, impossible for me to mention all of them to whom I owe a debt. But I will start with the Deputy Leader, my Deputy Leader, Simon Crean — a great and loyal Deputy. (applause) And [inaudible] Peter Costello [inaudible] in this election campaign.

And thanks, too, to colleagues who sat, if you like, in the engine room of the actual campaign itself. I think here of Bob McMullan, of John Faulkner, of Stephen Smith, who, unseen and behind the scenes, made a massive contribution to the way in which we did our advertising.

I thank all my other frontbench colleagues for the way they were prepared to get out there and fight in the marginal seats, though many of them hold seats by a hair's breadth themselves, unselfishly they went and joined their colleagues in circumstances where they might have been inclined to stay home basically because they wanted to win. They wanted so much a victory for this country and a victory for our Party.

And can I thank, too, the Party organisation. I think in particular of Geoff Walsh and his team.

I thank all our State Secretaries and the State branches of the Party who have assisted him and those on his campaign team operating out of Melbourne. They performed so very, very well indeed and my gratitude goes to them.

But then can I go to my staff. My staff here in Brand who kept the homefires burning. Then my staff in Canberra who sacrificed so much to work for the Australian Labor Party. It will be impossible for me to mention them all without getting emotional but I must mention one who stands to represent all of them, Michael Costello. He sacrificed massively to come to my office and he has been a marvellous coordinator of all our activities and the staff tell me an enormously humane boss. But to me he has been a guide and mentor and encouragement, I do thank him so much for that.

Can I thank our ex-Labor leaders and Prime Ministers who came out so cheerfully for us in this election campaign. They all did. Bob Hawke, particularly, was everywhere and I do thank him for what he did for us, too, in this election campaign.

But above all, can I thank my family - Susie and my daughters - for being such a marvellous ...

At one level I regret this result enormously. In fact, 99 per cent of me regrets this result enormously but there is one per cent reserve which says that the 'gone fishing' sign that goes up on my door means I've actually gone home. And what a wonderful reward that is to be able, after 21 years, to do that.

But tonight I just bow out by thanking the Australian people. We are a great nation. We have a nation with a capacity to be better. We have a nation with a capacity for a generosity of heart. Like any nation, there are dark angels in our nation but there are also good angels as well. And the task and challenge for those of us in politics is to bring out the generosity that resides in the soul of the ordinary Australian, that generosity of heart, so that we as a nation turn to each other and not against each other in the circumstances which have.

There is one key thing to all of this, I do believe, and that is this: it must always reside in the intentions of [inaudible] hearts [inaudible] political parties of this nation that they do understand what an ordinary Australian family feels, and that if we look to security internationally, you look further to security in the hearts and minds of those around the kitchen table because there's no doubt at all that the sense of generosity in the hearts of an average citizen often start with a sense of security at home. And if they do not feel a sense of security then their capacity to feel a generosity is often marred.

Now, that has always been a challenge that we in the Australian Labor Party have understood. A great 100-year history of the Australian Labor Party continues.

We have saved enough of a great Caucus to be able to ensure that at the next election campaign we will put forward an alternative government that will win.”

Source: Transcribed from audio and original documents.