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**ADDRESS TO THE JOHN CURTIN RESEARCH CENTRE**

**SOFITEL, MELBOURNE  
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**\*\*\*CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY\*\*\***

Good evening everyone.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

And I acknowledge that – 118 years after Federation - words of respect aren't enough.

As the Labor party of Land Rights and Redfern and the Apology, we must work with the First Australians to achieve true equality: in our laws, in our schools and workplaces and in our Constitution.

It's always a great honour to reflect on the life and example of John Curtin.

Of all our Prime Ministers, Curtin stands tallest in our history, because it was his fate to face the sternest and most unforgiving test of national leadership.

Recently, at that wonderful celebration of Bob Hawke's life, Kim Beazley spoke of how Bob revered Curtin as a man apart.

Because no other Prime Minister – before or since – could imagine the scale and consequences of the decisions he had to make.

And yet Curtin was also a deeply human hero.

He had tasted personal and political failure many times, he wore his share of scar tissue.

Curtin's battle with alcohol is well documented. He grew up around family pubs.

He spent the early years of his career in the union movement. And according to his biographer David Day "the culture of the male-dominated union movement was steeped in beer and Curtin was steeped in the culture".

After running the Victorian anti-conscription campaign of 1916, Curtin finally faced up to his problem.

In July 1916, in his early 30's, Curtin in the modern parlance, checked himself into rehab at the Lara Inebriates Institution which was housed at what is today Pirra Estate in the northern part of my electorate.

It was the nadir of his life. And while his battle with alcohol would continue through his life, he engaged with the battle for the first time in Lara.

Pirra, with its pleasant cricket oval and beautiful bush land, is a picture of serenity. It is a place where Curtin found the space, away from the daily churn of events, to do something very difficult and refocus his life on a new path which took him back to a productive existence and ultimately to becoming our nation's greatest Prime Minister.

Finding the space, away from winning any given political day, so that we can forge a path back to winning the next election is exactly our challenge at this moment.

Curtin was conscious of his frailties and failings – but was a stronger person and a better leader because of it.

And - John Curtin's resilience, his conviction, his ability to heal a fractured party and unite a fearful nation can still inspire us and educate us eight decades later.

May the 18th was a hard night for all of us in this room, and for true believers around Australia.

I'm not going to claim the wisdom of hindsight. I was in awe of how hard Bill and our united team had worked, I was very hopeful we would win.

So - like everyone else – I've had to spend some time in the past few months reflecting on where we went wrong and there is no individual blame here, there is only collective responsibility.

I have refused to spend the tough days since the election reading long pieces of chin-stroking analysis on the inevitability of Labor's defeat from the very same pundits who – mere days before – had been writing about the certainty of a Labor victory.

I wanted to hear direct from the people of Australia - and so did Albo.

That's why Anthony made it a priority to visit the communities where sitting Labor members had lost their seats.

And I started my time as Deputy Leader in Queensland, the state which delivered the hardest hit to Labor's election hopes.

One conversation, in particular stuck with me. I was at an ALP branch meeting in Moranbah, in the electorate of Capricornia.

A third generation coalminer who was Labor born-and-raised, through-and-through told me of his inner angst at what would normally be a matter of fact putting a 'one' in the Labor square.

To the point where he laboured over the ballot paper in his hand for 10 minutes, just staring at it.

Because – he wondered to himself: *“Why would I vote for Labor, when Labor aren't for me?”*

It's telling that despite this man, whose relationship to Labor was akin to that of the tribal support of his footy team or in this case league club had felt absolutely and whole heartedly abandoned by the party he had always been loyal to.

He felt that in our clumsy attempts to walk the tightrope on the Adani project, and I was no exception to that clumsiness, we had turned against him, leaving him and other rock solid Labor voters as collateral damage while we agonized over every word during press conferences on what at its heart was the business case of a private mining venture.

We made him and other Labor voters like him feel that our party looked down on him.

A man whose job was better-paid and safer day-to-day because of his union...

...his family counted on Medicare...

...his children went to government schools

Yet he couldn't shake the feeling that his party, his tribe, his team had turned their back on him. The propositions and the rhetoric we surrounded ourselves with was as foreign to him as playing a game of league on an oval field.

But his loyalty and ultimately connection to our candidate in the seat – Russell Robertson - also a coal miner led him in the end to vote for us.

One of few we managed to secure, that was cast not out of hope but despair.

Because of his family, because he knew Russell, because he wanted to stay

loyal.

But the hard truth is that no political party which aspires to win government can pin its hopes for victory on loyalty, or identity, or the pangs of old affection.

In the end, it's always up to us – the movement and the party – to make the argument and put the case for a Labor Government beyond doubt.

And that work doesn't begin on the day the next election is called, it started on May 19.

So I didn't come here tonight to talk about when and where Labor went wrong, last time – I'm here to discuss what we must get right, next time.

We have to be prepared to ignore and avoid and look past the manufactured parliamentary tests, the stunts and the wedge politics the Liberals spend so much of their time constructing for us.

We know that sometimes that will hurt in the short term, sometimes it will sting our passionate supporters who might prefer a pyrrhic parliamentary victory.

But so be it, that is pain we will have to wear.

Because none of the people who count on Labor Governments benefit if we all die in the first ditch the Liberals dig for us.

Now I know – in the hard days of this winter – even for dedicated supporters of our cause government and victory must seem a long way off.

I can remember, back in 2004, good Labor people, searching for positives, telling me in all sincerity not to worry because John Howard was 65 and – when he stepped down at 70, we would be in with a show.

Within three years, we won government with 83 seats, a primary vote of over 43 per cent and an 8 per cent swing in Queensland.

Kevin's victory in 2007 was underpinned by a powerful Labor combination:

- a movement galvanized by the ideological warfare of Workchoices;
- 
- working people mobilized by concerns over pay and job security;
- young Australians passionate about action on climate and a step forward on reconciliation;
- And a powerful majority who wanted to see the dividends of national prosperity shared more fairly, people who understood that a strong economy and a fair society march in step.

Kevin and Labor seized the moment in 2007. We had an agenda and a message that landed in middle Australia.

So did Gough in 72, when he presented a program for a more modern and confident nation.

And he followed through, opening the doors of our universities to a whole new generation of smart working-class kids, making TAFE and vocational education a new priority for the Commonwealth Government.

Because in Gough's words, true choice in education must mean a choice between "systems and courses – not standards".

No doubt there were people who viewed all this with suspicion. Who thought tertiary education was a betrayal of Labor doctrine.

Perhaps it was the first occasion when conservative columnists thundered that the party had forgotten Ben Chifley was an engine-driver.

But for all that, millions more Australians understood Gough's breakthrough change in education for what it was: a true Labor reform that extended opportunity beyond the privileged few, that rewarded the hard work of young people with ambition – whatever their postcode or circumstance - and made us a smarter, more socially mobile, more productive and more prosperous nation.

Bob and Paul's magnificent legacy tells the same story.

After years of conservative neglect and complacency, their genius and courage turned Australia to face Asia, they modernized and opened our economy – and working in partnership with the union movement and the business community - they built a world-class social wage for Australia.

Hawke and Keating turned affordable health care and a decent retirement income from a rare privilege to a fundamental right.

Yet Bob and Paul also cut the top marginal tax rate from 60 cents in the dollar down to 47- because their priority was boosting productivity.

Again, counterintuitive to the purists.

Hawke and Keating were driven by a belief that Labor should always support policies which drive productivity and growth, which reward income-earners and in turn build a society that holds aspiration as not just idealism but as a legitimate pathway open to us all.

Hawke and Keating cut income taxes for the same reason we oppose cuts to penalty rates, for the same reason we abhor wage theft, for the same

reason we want to see pay and conditions improve across the nation, for the same reason we champion a better and more equal deal for working women.

Because we must always be the party of people who work hard, who contribute, whose efforts and sacrifice drive our economic success.

We won't win the next election simply relying on a big spending agenda nor running on the policies of the past in glossy brochures promising a solution to everything for everyone.

We will win it with a clear and persuasive argument about the kind of society a Labor Government will build. One that at its core provides a bedrock for growth and productivity.

And with it, we offer the Australian people a legitimate embrace of aspiration. We have, I believe, looked down at aspiration and yet through supporting aspiration we give people hope and we lay down the markers in our country to social mobility. Indeed aspiration has been at the heart of social mobility and this is a Labor idea because it is the key to building an egalitarian Australia.

The story of the Queensland coalminer in Capricornia, is clearly not isolated, we lost the election and suffered the worst primary vote in Queensland on record.

But the harder truth to reconcile is why the bottom quintile swung against us.

That reality can't be blamed on the barbed fence of a mining project.

That I believe speaks to where we sought to quarantine parts of our traditional base and offer handouts rather than hope.

They simply didn't feel we went to the election offering them the tools to move forward, but instead we wanted them to settle for a range of subsidies.

Yes unquestionably making cancer treatment not reliant on your income is a worthy and noble policy.

Yes affording dignity to pensioners so they don't have to suffer years without the dental treatment they need is the hallmark of a decent and caring Australia.

But those propositions were lost, because at our heart we didn't offer all Australians a root and branch growth and productivity agenda.

In the wake of defeat, it is easy for our opponents to recast themselves as the voice of the centre and their hubris ignores the fact that the political centre isn't a fixed destination, it's not a rigid set of communities or electorates or voters.

No-one has a mortgage on the support of the Australian people.

And winning-back the centre, winning a governing majority for Labor, won't be achieved by tacking one way or another depending on the political breeze or through insincere acts of triangulation, or assembling isolated blocs of voters with a tailored message for each one.

Labor wins when we build the strongest possible consensus for our plans and the broadest possible constituency for our policies.

Labor wins when we stake out the political centre for ourselves, on our terms with conviction and purpose – and with policies that create opportunity, build social mobility, share prosperity, care for the vulnerable and deliver reward for effort.

None of that is a matter of feeble compromise or acquiescence.

We will not waste the next three years lending false equivalence to the extremism of our opponents on the right by pretending the jury is out on the settled science of climate change.

We won't pretend that an aged care system where 16,000 Australians die in a year waiting for a place and thousands more live with the worst kind of abuse and neglect is an acceptable compromise, given the cost of providing better.

And we will never concede to the neo-liberal fantasy of an industrial relations system that is little more than the law of the jungle.

We will defend – with all our might – the people whose only hope is a Labor Government.

But we must actively seek to broaden the circle of our agenda, to include more people in the benefits of Labor's ethos, to rebuild connections with Australians who feel – for whatever reason – our party has turned away from them.

This is when Labor wins.

When we marry productivity-boosting reforms with fair reward for the working people who deliver our national prosperity.

Labor wins when we present a plan that manages the big changes – in

technology, in population, in the regional and global economy – a plan that makes these changes work for everyday Australians.

A society where advances in technology and science don't scare Labor voters because they mean a depletion of skilled jobs. Part of our job as the modern Labor Party is to change Australia's cultural relationship to science. Global markets mean we can't compete in old industries on price, but there's no reason why we shouldn't be leading on quality. We need to embrace the science that fires those industries, not as we scramble to deal with the aftermath of the car industry the Liberals decimated, but with our next generation.

Where we value it, and make it a priority for our kids to be enlightened by science and the limitless opportunities it affords us to innovate and prosper. Again, another pathway to aspiration.

And part of this is the celebration of big science that we as a nation are already doing. The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio telescope, based in part in Murchison W.A., is the largest science project in the world today. It will illuminate the heavens in an unparalleled way. And yet, who knows about it? Why isn't it on the front pages of our newspapers? Why isn't it firing the imagination of the next generation of Australians? And having them embrace science in a manner which will take Australia down the path of a smart, quality based economy.

Around the world, so many social-democratic parties like ours are grappling with the same elemental question:

- How do we convince people who feel that politics is at the heart of the problem...that government can be part of the solution.
- How – in the face of suspicion and cynicism and distrust of institutions – do we convince citizens that good, reforming governments can empower people to fulfill their potential?

It's a tough mountain to climb.

But if I had to choose any country and any party in which to take up that challenge, I would choose Australia and I would choose the Australian Labor Party.

And I would choose Anthony Albanese to lead that fight.

Because – unlike many of our counterparts around the world – we have a proof point for our story, we have the architecture of success to point to.

We don't need to rely on rhetoric or rallies – we have the record.

We are the party of jobs, productivity and growth: the successes of Australia's modern economy and the building of Australia's middle class are the creation of one great Labor Government and the fact that our nation grew through the Global Financial Crisis is the legacy of another.

And at the next election, we must win as the party of broad-based economic growth, high productivity, secure work and fair pay.

We must win as the party of advanced manufacturing and new industry, as the party with a vision for an economy which is stronger and fairer, in fact an economy which is stronger because it is fairer.

We must win as the party that will deliver the promise, dignity and opportunity of the true NDIS not a cut-rate consultancy.

And we must win as the party of Aged Care – for the sake of our older Australians, for their loved ones and for the caring workforce.

We are the party of the environment.

And for the sake of our economy and our farmers and our coasts and for the country our children will inherit in the future, we must win the next election with a plan to take real action on climate change.

And – never forget - we are the party of national security.

John Curtin and Ben Chifley's leadership helped win a war and their vision ensured this country became a worthy home for the brave men and women who had fought and sacrificed to keep it free.

Those two great Prime Ministers didn't sneer at the United Nations, they gave Australia a role in its creation, a voice in its decisions, a seat at the world table.

Because they knew that the future success of peace and prosperity depended not just on balancing the competing interests of superpowers – but on the constructive engagement of middle powers like ours.

And so we must win the next election as a party that still believes Australia succeeds from engaging with our region and from living up to our responsibilities as a good global citizen.

Our movement honours its heroes, we revere their names, we treasure the inspiration of our history.

But – always – our job, our calling, our mission is the future.

And –make no mistake – we must win the next election.

My colleagues and I, we know that, we feel that responsibility.

Like so many of you, I joined the Labor Party because we are party of government – we're not a protest movement, we're not a pressure group, we're not captive to a doctrine that says it's better to be pure than in power.

And if you believe in progress and equality and fairness and social democracy and you want to see those principles given life and form and expression in government, the truth remains only Labor can achieve that.

For our Labor team, the great pain of election defeat comes from the sheer fact that opposition is a position of impotence. You can only change lives by being on the Treasury benches.

Yes, we can fight this talentless, rudderless government in the parliament – and we will. One of the many talents of Anthony Albanese is he certainly knows how to take it to the Tories – whether it is at the dispatch box or as Australians will see when it comes to the ballot box.

And we will over the course of the next three years hold the Liberals to account, we will put their failures under the spotlight - we will absolutely make sure by the time it comes to electing an Albanese Government the choice will be stark and it will be one that Labor voters old and new make with hope; not out of the perseverance that comes with following a losing football club, season in and season out.

Our primary responsibility as a Labor Opposition is to become a Labor Government, as soon as possible.

Our goal tonight, tomorrow and every day forward must be the next victory, it must be a new Labor Government – and a new generation of opportunity, fairness and prosperity for all Australians.

I want us to win. I want Anthony Albanese to be the next Prime Minister of this country. I want this nation to be afforded the skill, talent and passion for making our country better than an Albanese Government will deliver.

And make no mistake, with your support, with your enthusiasm and with your hard work the next election is won, we absolutely will win.

Thank you

***ENDS***

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