LYLE SHELTON: … 2007 Make it Count. As well as our valued guests here at the National Press Club in Canberra who - we're delighted to have you with us tonight, and thank you for the great effort that you've made in coming here - we are welcoming many thousands of people who are watching the web cast live, all throughout Australia, and we welcome you once again to this historic event here tonight.

We have church people of all denominations meeting across various locations, everywhere from the Lightning Ridge Bowling Club up to the Sugar Reef Baptist Church in Ingham in Queensland, and just about everywhere in between. So it's really a terrific night.
It gives me great pleasure right now, without any further ado, to introduce to you the managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, Mr Jim Wallace, who will introduce the Prime Minister. Thank you.

JIM WALLACE: Thank you very much. Well, Prime Minister, denominational leaders, para and church group leaders. It really is a real pleasure to see you all tonight and we really are grateful for the great efforts that you've taken to be here.

And like Lyle, I'd like to extend my great thanks too, to those many people out there who are watching this in so many different parts of Australia - over 700, as Lyle said.

We estimate - and my staff keep telling me that I'm too conservative - but we estimate that that means there's at least 80,000 to 100,000 people who are viewing the presentations tonight.

[Applause]

Now, Lyle stole my thunder, because I was up in Lightning Ridge recently, and I really did appreciate the fact that there was a group of churches there that were going to get together in the local bowling club at Lightning Ridge, and so I'd just like to extend my welcome particularly to Lightning Ridge as well.
We really are very honoured that we have both our major political leaders prepared to speak to us tonight. And speaking first, of course, will be the Prime Minister, the Honourable John Howard. And it would be quite superfluous of me to run through the Prime Minister's accomplishments because he is our leader, he is our Prime Minister and, obviously, we know him well.

But Prime Minister, what I would like to say is that people listening to you tonight - this 100,000 people - may not agree on everything. But what I'm sure we can agree on is that you have most certainly stamped your character on the nation and you have most certainly stamped your leadership on the nation and we really do appreciate that.

Your Government's responsiveness, I know from my point of view, to the many issues that we've brought forward to you, has been very much appreciated and I would now like to invite you to address the assembled group. Thank you.

[Applause]

JOHN HOWARD: Thank you. Well, thank you very much, Jim. My fellow Australians, I think this is a wonderful initiative of the Australian Christian Lobby and I think it's a magnificent opportunity for me - and I'm sure it will be seen in the same light by the Leader of the Opposition - to address very directly to the Christian community of Australia, issues that you
are interested in and issues that are important to me as an individual and also important to me as Prime Minister and Leader of the Liberal Party.

In 2007, we celebrate the 200th anniversary of a remarkable event, driven by the deep Christian charity of a remarkable individual, William Wilberforce, and that is the end of the dreadful, evil slave trade.

William Wilberforce remains a shining example to people of all political persuasions in all countries who believe that Christian principle and compassion should be brought to bear in political life.

Australia has had a strange ambivalence in talking about the influence of Christianity as such on public life and on political parties. Certainly, there have been many histories written about the influence of particular churches on particular political parties but the broad interaction of public life and Christianity has almost drawn a strange awkwardness in the response of many people.

I remember as recently as 2004, when I addressed the parliament as Prime Minister on the eve of Christmas, and we have this custom - we call them valedictories where we wish each other well and ask everybody to go away and enjoy the season of goodwill. Some of the cynics call them hypocrisies
rather than valedictories but, be that as it may, we have this wonderful custom.

And I made a speech, and it was only in 2004, in which made what I thought was a fairly unremarkable observation, that all of the influences on Australian society and character, none has been more profound than that of the Judaeo-Christian ethic.

I would have thought that was self-evident. Whether you were a practising Christian or not, I would have thought it was self-evident yet it provoked a strange reaction from many commentators in the media. They said virtually, this is very strange that the Prime Minister is using this opportunity to talk about these things and it struck me then that we do have this strange ambivalence.

And, of course, we do live in an age where atheism has a particularly virulent form. We’ve had a plethora of books recently written by people such as Richard Dawkins and Hitchens in which decry, in a very militant fashion, belief in God or the relevance of Christianity to daily life.

Putting aside for a moment the absence of faith on the part of those authors, such an approach of course, is profoundly unhistorical because even if you have no Christian belief or not, as a matter of historic fact, Christianity has had a profound nurturing impact on Western civilisation and
therefore on the civilisation that we have inherited here in Australia.

I acknowledge, of course, that God is neither Liberal nor Labor, that there are people of good faith in all political parties. And I don't come here as Leader of the Liberal Party in any way to propound a superiority or a prior claim on the Christian religion by my party.

I do, however, state it to be the fact that my party and the National Party has, within its ranks, a very significant number of people who are extremely active members of various Christian denominations and they do bring to their deliberations, and bring to their decision-making process, those values and those principles.

And on issues that go beyond what are grouped as the moral issues, the conscience issues such as stem cell research and the vote on RU486 and other issues of that kind, they also bring to bear their Christian values and principles in so many other areas.

When I think of my own attempt at bringing together my Christian beliefs, and the practice of my politics, I think of two parables of Jesus that really bring it all together.

They are the parable of the good Samaritan which teaches us two things, that every individual has an
intrinsic worth of his or her own; that there is no such thing in our life as a disposable or an irrelevant individual; that everybody is deserving of respect and dignity; and also of course teaches us great compassion, and that our great moral obligation is to help the oppressed and to help the underdog.

The parable of the Talents, to me, has always been - it's always seemed to me, to be the free enterprise parable - the parable that tells us that we have a responsibility, if we are given assets, to add to those assets in a fair manner and that if we don't do anything to add to them that is not necessarily the right behaviour.

And I think in so many of the decisions that my party takes, and I take, I can bring to bear both of those parables.

My Government has now been in office for eleven and a half years. Now there are some in the community, I hear, who say that's long enough and are seeking to push us out. Now, that is the great democratic process.

I don't claim that we have been a perfect government. We have made our share of mistakes and although I believe very profoundly and very deeply that we have done many things to generate the strong and prosperous society that we now have, I acknowledge the enormous contribution of the energy and enterprise of millions of Australians
who have worked so hard and have such great optimism about the future of our nation to bring that about.

I am, nonetheless, very proud of the fact that we have a 33 year low in unemployment. And the greatest thing about the fall in unemployment is that the level of long term unemployment in Australia in the last 12 months has fallen by no less than 29 per cent.

The long term unemployed are the people that many of you here tonight, through the agencies of the Christian church, have come into contact with. They're people who've been out of work for more than a year. And I think it's a wonderful thing that that figure has fallen by 29 per cent in the last 12 months.

I think it's got something to do with the fact that small business is a lot more optimistic now about taking on more staff because they're not so troubled by the old unfair dismissal laws that we abolished more than 12 months ago.

We do have very strong economic conditions and we still, despite the rise of yesterday, have historically quite low interest rates and the outlook for the Australian economy remains very, very buoyant.
Now, this is important when you're looking at the social justice scorecard of the nation and of the Government because there's not a lot you can do to help the really underprivileged and vulnerable in the community unless you have the backing and the resources not only of a compassionate people but also the resources of a strong economy. So I think it is important to that underpinning and that help we give to the vulnerable in our community.

I want to deal head-on with two criticisms that are made of my Government and these criticisms sometimes come - and I take no offence at all at this - sometimes come from sections of the Christian church.

And the first of those criticisms is that we don't really care about the marginalised in our society, that we're indifferent to the vulnerable, we're only interested in the prosperous middle class and we really don't care very much about others and we're pretty indifferent to the poor in our society.

That's a charge that I not only take keenly but I fairly vigorously reject. I am especially proud of the fact that, contrary to many things that were said about me and my party eleven and a half years ago, we haven't destroyed the social security safety net, we haven't destroyed Medicare. We've, in fact, strengthened it and added a safety net to it and also very strongly boosted private health insurance. And OECD studies say that no country in the developed
world does better than Australia in looking after the most vulnerable 20 per cent of our society.

Our taxation system remains highly progressive, our tax welfare transfer system, on all the studies, has clearly been skewed towards the lower end of the income bracket.

I don't deny that the rich have got richer and that is inevitable in a prosperous country but they have not got richer at the expense of the poor getting poorer. The lower income brackets in our society have also enjoyed an increase in their benefits and in their incomes.

So I reject rather keenly that claim, not only by pointing to the benefits of a strong economy, but also pointing to the particular measures that we have introduced to look after the more vulnerable within our community.

I also want to take head-on some of the church criticism of our changes to the industrial relations system.

These have been highly debated changes and they remain highly debated. They do represent one of the great reforms to our economy of the last few years. It is my strongly held view that if those reforms are reversed it will be a bad thing for the Australian economy.
This country has been very good over the last generation in embracing major economic reform and I acknowledge that some of those reforms were carried out by the former Labor Government with strong support from myself and from members of the then Opposition. And it's doubly necessary therefore that we don't turn our back on those reforms.

We do have a safety net and a fairness test in our industrial relations changes. We have seen 365,000 more jobs created in the Australian community since WorkChoices was passed early in 2006.

We now have fewer strikes in Australia than at any time since 1913, the year before World War I broke out, and we have seen a continuation of the steady rise in real wages over the last eleven and a half years.

Of course, there is a debate in the industrial relations arena as to the appropriate role for the trade union movement. Contrary to what is said, I do not dispute for a moment the role of the trade union movement as a legitimate part of the social fabric and the industrial relations system of this country.

We support the right of people to join unions. We recognise that that is a fundamental right of association. We also support the right of people, free of coercion, to stay out of unions.
Our argument simply is that the unions should not enjoy a monopoly of the bargaining process in industrial relations and, on proper conditions, people should have the right, if they so choose, to bargain for themselves, or indeed, be represented by anybody they choose be that a union or be it somebody else.

In the time that I've been Prime Minister, as well as trying to, with the help of my colleagues, deliver good policy, I have, consistent with my respect for the secular nature of Australian society - secular in the sense only that we do not recognise or practise the establishment of any religion in this country, and we recognise in a proper fashion the separation of Church and State - I have, consistent with that, sought, on all occasions that might be properly available, to extend in a legitimate fashion the role and the influence of the Christian church in our society because I believe it is a force for the profound good of our nation.

I have never forgotten a meeting I had in - I think it was December 1995 with Harry Goodhew, the then Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, and John Lambert, the head of the schools activities of the Anglican Archdiocese of Sydney, and a former head of the Board of Studies in the New South Wales Education Department, when they asked me would we support a change to the then new schools policy.

And under the old new schools policy it wasn't possible to start a new school in an area, generally
speaking, that was already serviced by either a government school or a Catholic parish school. And, as a result, there were many folk who wanted to establish schools that were not able to secure government support.

And I committed myself on that occasion to the extension, to a change in the new schools policy, and it has laid the groundwork for the extraordinary expansion of many schools affiliated with Christian religions of all kinds in the years that have gone by since 1996. And I've seen something like 359 new schools opened in Australia, new independent schools, as a result of the change in that policy.

I am very strongly committed to freedom of parental choice in education. I say that as somebody who's very grateful for the education I received in the New South Wales public education system.

And having educated, along with my wife, our children in both the government and the private school systems, I believe passionately in freedom of choice in education. I'm very proud of the fact that the founder of my party, Sir Robert Menzies, pioneered and was more responsible than any other figure in Australian history, in ending the divisive sectarian character that beset education in this country so many years ago and brought justice to the non-government school sector, particularly the Catholic schools, through the introduction of direct government assistance to those schools.
And since then, we've seen a burgeoning of choice but it's not a choice that has undermined the role of government schools. And it remains the case that although only 67 per cent of Australian school children attend government schools, that 67 per cent receive 75 per cent of all government funding. So when you see occasionally those ads on television that suggest that we are indifferent to government schools, please don't believe it.

I'm also very proud of the other things that we have directly done to involve the Christian church in public policy. The creation of the new Job Network agencies, which is really something of a world first, has enabled the great welfare agencies of the Christian churches to be involved in a very direct fashion and at the coalface in providing surfaces.

The establishment of the Family Relationship Centres, the driving motivation behind that was to inject organisations like Centacare and Anglicare and many others, into the process of providing a shock absorber to people whose marriages or relationships have broken up and couldn't reach ready agreement on such things as custody and maintenance.

And also, the recent announcement and implementation of the School Chaplaincy Programme which has been so very widely supported throughout the country, and has enjoyed support not only from denominational schools but it also received very strong support, I'm pleased to
say, by government school communities all over the nation.

If I could move to several other matters, one of course is the duty of care that our society owes to children. I hope you will recognise that our intervention to help the indigenous communities of the Northern Territory is a practical illustration of the discharge of obligations that we have to the care and protection of children in our community.

Much has been written and said about that intervention and I know that not everybody agrees with it but it is based on a belief that the old approach was failing.

It is based on a belief that unless you can establish, in indigenous communities, basic conditions of law and order you have no hope of addressing in an orderly fashion issues relating to health and education, adequate nutrition and proper housing.

The sad reality is that in our prosperous 21st century society, the Aboriginal children of the Northern Territory and of many other parts of the country, were denied the basic right of any child and that is the ordinary innocence of childhood. And it would have been a terrible neglect of our duties if we had not done something about it.

Ladies and gentleman, I know that many of you share concerns about the easy access to potentially
harmful material and influences on the internet. The internet has brought enormous benefits to the way we live and work and communicate. At the same time it presents new challenges for families including the potential exposure of children to inappropriate online content or predatory behaviour.

As a government, we are committed to harnessing the great opportunities the internet offers while ensuring children are protected and Australian families have peace of mind when using the internet for education or enjoyment.

Tonight therefore, I announce a new initiative called *Net Alert: Protecting Australian Families Online*, which is aimed to do just that.

This programme will provide a range of practical tools to assist families including the best available filtering products, a special family support hotline, new internet safety officers to provide assistance to schools and community groups, and a public awareness campaign to empower parents to manage their family's online experience.

No single measure is foolproof. Tough laws and police enforcement are crucial and we have done a lot on that front. Part of this initiative includes increased resources for the Australian Federal Police to increase the capacity of its online child sex exploitation team to process complaints about illegal internet activity and to detect, deter and
investigate criminal behaviour especially targeting online predators.

A centrepiece of the new Net Alert programme is a national filter scheme, which will provide every Australian family with a free filter product to reduce offensive online content and to manage chat room, email and other web activity.

We will also be providing free filter products for all public libraries. The Government is also partnering with internet service providers to enable them to make available the option of a filtered internet service to those families who want this option instead of home computer based filters.

At the same time, of course, there's no substitute for traditional parenting practices. Talking to children, appropriate supervision and the like, they all remain essential to ensure each individual family can keep abreast of the latest technology and be confident that the risk to children and vulnerable young people are minimised.

This $189 million programme will ensure that Australian parents and carers have the support they need to protect their family based on their own values and their own expectations. The relevant Minister, Senator Coonan, will be making a more detailed announcement on this issue tonight and will be saying further things about it, as I will be, tomorrow.
Could I, before concluding my remarks, say a couple of things about what can loosely be called not only present, but also future issues, that are important not only to Christian communities but to the community generally?

We have as a prosperous nation a responsibility to maintain an adequate level of foreign aid to less fortunate countries around the world. I have to say that not only do you require foreign aid to boost the living standards of poorer countries but we also need to see dramatically lower levels of corruption, improved standards of governance and also, importantly, improved trade opportunities.

The developed world could do more to help the developing world by removing trade barriers than through the provision of foreign aid. But, having said that, I recognise that foreign aid is an important component of the contribution that we can make to the welfare of those countries.

In the current financial year we'll provide $3.2 billion in foreign aid and it represents the seventh consecutive increase in the level of that aid under this Government. And, in addition, we have a separate package of some $2.5 billion over five years to invest in growth, health and education programmes particularly within our own region. And we are committed to a doubling of the aid budget from 2004 levels by the year 2010.
You can't, of course, go anywhere in public life in Australia, today, without properly so debating issues relating to climate change and the current and future state of our environment. We, as a government, are very strongly committed to a balanced practical approach to climate change. We recognise that man-induced greenhouse gas emissions are having a harmful effect on our atmosphere and our environment.

And we need, along with all other nations, to make our contribution to reducing those harmful impacts. We owe it to future generations to do so but we also owe it to this and future generations to do so in a way that is consistent with continued economic growth in Australia and in a way that does not result in Australia, because we are a resource rich country, unlike many other countries, bearing a disproportionate share of the burden of adjustment.

We have already invested more than $3 billion in recent years in particular initiatives designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to encourage the use of other energy sources. We believe very strongly that all energy sources should be on the table including, as time goes by, nuclear power if there is an economic demand and an economic justification for it.

We think all of the energy sources, fossil fuels, appropriately cleaned up by clean coal technology and the like, renewables, nuclear power and all the
other sources of energy that are necessary to deal with the future needs of a growing community.

We are as a nation committed to introducing an emissions trading system by 2012. And after appropriate assessment of the impacts of various targets, we will be in a position to announce a target in conjunction with the commitment to introduce that trading system by about the middle of next year.

Jim, can I conclude where I began, in saying that this is a wonderful initiative? The culture of this nation, the values of this nation, the aspirations of this nation, the people of this nation, have been more profoundly shaped by the spiritual influence as well as the cultural influence of Christianity than by any other force that has been brought to bear on the Australian community.

Those influences have been profoundly for the good. Of course, there have been blemishes, as there has been, in any nation with any value system that has had an influence on its life. But whenever you see the marginalised, whenever you see the vulnerable, whenever you see those in our society that are in want or in need of companionship or friendship or support, you normally find an agency or some members of various denominations of the Christian church.
There is almost an automatic assumption amongst many Australians who have no association at all with any activity of the Christian church, that whenever there's a problem of that kind, there'll be somebody from the church or one of its agencies there to help. And it's because of the generosity of those people and their churches, and their agencies and the grace of God, that there are people available to provide that help.

I want to say as somebody who's had the greatest privilege that any Australian could have, and that is to be Prime Minister of this wonderful country, I want to say thank you to the silent toiling members of the Christian churches of Australia who day in and week in and year in and year out, go about their daily lives, living out in a practical fashion the exhortations of the gospels and to look after their fellow Australians and to provide them with comfort and hope and care when they need it.

It's a wonderful practical witness to their faith and to their religion. But the contribution it makes to the wellbeing of this country cannot be measured by the national accounts or cannot be measured by the gross domestic product. It can be measured by the incredible satisfaction in human sustenance and emotional support it brings to so many people in our community who are so desperately in need of it.

I wish you well and thank you for the opportunity of addressing you.
Applause

JIM WALLACE: Well Prime Minister, thank you very much indeed for that address and for your time and commitment to us.

We have a number of church leaders now who have been invited to ask questions, and the first of those is Archbishop Philip Wilson, the President of the Catholic Bishops Conference. Thank you, Bishop.

PHILIP WILSON: Prime Minister, what are the personal qualities opposed to the political qualities that you believe are necessary for authentic leadership? And what role, if any, has religious faith had in forming your leadership qualities?

JOHN HOWARD: Well, your Grace, a very strong belief in what you want to achieve for your country is the first requirement. Not necessarily in any order, but other requirements are extraordinary physical stamina. Public life, particularly in 2007, is physically very demanding.

I keep reading about how Bob Menzies used to take three weeks to get to a Commonwealth conference in London and he travelled by ship, you know, [indistinct] for that kind of opportunity these days.

My Christian beliefs have influenced me. I spoke earlier of the two parables, and I really return that, because I've always seen the parable of the Talents
as being that great free enterprise parable. The one that says you should use your resources wisely and you should invest them wisely and there's nothing wrong with that.

But I've also seen - along with that, I've seen the parable of the Good Samaritan as being very much one that's directed towards that great thing about Christianity and also that great thing about Australian society, that every person has an intrinsic value and an intrinsic worth.

And we're rightly proud of our egalitarianism. We're rightly proud of the fact that if you've got a new health product on the market and if you've got a new way of saving a life then that product and that way of saving a life has got to be available to everybody.

I mean, I admire the United States over many, many things but I don't admire their social welfare system because I think their social welfare system is too harsh and it lacks an adequate safety net. But I've got to say, just to even the ledger though, that I don't particularly admire the social welfare system of many European countries because I think their social welfare system is too paternalistic and doesn't do enough to encourage self-help and self-reliance.

I think you've got achieve a balance between caring for people who generally fall between the safety - between the cracks with a genuine safety net but, by
the same token, not have one that's so paternalistic that you don't encourage self-reliance.

JIM WALLACE: Thanks, Prime Minister. The second question is from the Right Reverend Bob Thomas, the Moderator General of the Presbyterian Church in Australia.

BOB THOMAS: Mr Howard, many people in the churches feel that while the conservative side of politics is strong on traditional moral issues it seems to lack compassion for the more vulnerable people in the society. But tonight you seem to have canvassed a wide range of issues and that may well put those fears to rest.

Perhaps you could elaborate for us some ways in which the churches could work more effectively with the Government to achieve these common aims?

JIM HOWARD: Well, Sir, I want to fully involve the churches in advising me and advising the Government and, where their agencies think it appropriate, participating in the provision of services.

One of the very first meetings I had when I became Prime Minister was a meeting in Sydney with a group of people that were dealing with the problem of youth homelessness and it included a number of church leaders. It began a process of consulting what the Americans call faith-based agencies to develop policy. Now, this was criticised.
I mean, there are a lot of people now who say they're all in favour of it, and I won't try and bring politics into it, but they weren't much in favour of it, many of them, back in 1996. And it was a fairly unusual thing to talk about a church agency running a job network and being a job provider. I know it caused a lot of debate inside the churches themselves, and it probably still does, and I respect that fact.

But I've always had the view that if you really want to get accurate advice about a social welfare problem, it's better to talk to an organisation like St Vincent De Paul or the Salvation Army, because they've had more practical experience at dealing with those problems.

And, with great respect to them, I'm not knocking bureaucrats, who a very dedicated group of people, the many people in a bureaucracy or indeed many members of parliament.

So I want to have the churches involved, not only to the extent they are now, but to an increasing degree. And I've tried to keep open lines of communications with the churches not only on issues like stem cell research and RU486 where it is true that the great bulk of the members of the two parties that I lead, the Liberal Party and the National Party, did take a conservative position, as indeed I did, in exercising my conscience vote.
And it's a principle of the Liberal Party, and I think generally the National Party, that on those issues people have a conscience vote. You can't impose a party discipline and you shouldn't try to. But exercising a conscience vote, the great bulk of my colleagues - not all of them - but voted in a particular direction.

There is one thing that your question prompted me to recall that I should have mentioned in my address when I was listing the things that I did specifically to promote a Christian view of society, and that is, the amendment to the Marriage Act that our Government introduced.

[Applause]

The amendment to the Marriage Act, which made it very clear that as far as we were concerned, and as far as the parliament was concerned - and it did pass through without objective - that marriage was a voluntary union for life of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others. Now, that is our view of marriage. It remains our view and it will always be our view of marriage and it can only be the view that a Christian society should have of marriage.

JIM WALLACE: Thanks, Prime Minister. The next question is from someone who's been very much involved with church work to the poor and that's Mr Peter Kell, the CEO of Anglicare in Sydney.
PETER KELL: Prime Minister, I note what you've already said about the care for the vulnerable and what you've said about industrial relations reform but my concern behind this question is about life balance. In a range of public policy areas the achievement of a reasonable work-life balance becomes more difficult. And I'm thinking of things like the cost of child care, working conditions, WorkChoices, employment security, housing affordability, family support issues; those kind of things.

There's a risk of growing inequality in the nation. What are you prepared to do in the next three years to make a fairer more balanced family life more achievable for Australians?

JOHN HOWARD: Well, thank you very much Mr Kell. The first and most important thing we can do is to continue to run a strong economy. Now, some might say, well, he would say that wouldn't he? But it's true. I hear a lot about working families. Well, you've got to have a strong economy before you can have families in work and we have to strive to maintain choice when it comes to the care of children.

I still believe very strongly that where parents want a situation where one of them stays at home fulltime for a while, when children are very young, they ought to be able to do so because I actually believe that that is a good form of childcare. Now, having said that…
[Applause]

But I also recognise that people want choice. There was a British sociology - a sociologist, rather, who said that you really had three groups of mothers in society. You had those who saw themselves as overwhelmingly home based, you had those who saw themselves as career oriented and those who sought to blend the two, and that third group was by far the largest.

What we have to do is to have policies where people can effectively choose. I would like to continue to promote that choice. I mean, we've done quite a lot and I don't want to bore you with statistics and everything, but the Family Tax Benefit system has given a much fairer deal to people who want to exercise the choice to have a person at home for a while fulltime and then part-time into the workforce. And either then going onto full-time into the workforce, or perhaps remaining part-time.

We also, of course, need to have adequate child care facilities. I think we need to be a more flexible in the future in relation to the provision of child care facilities by business and to encourage more businesses perhaps with a more flexible approach to provide more child care opportunities.

I'm not in favour of mandating paid parental leave on small business because I think it could result in
some unfortunate consequences for some people who could find themselves employed by smaller businesses that simply can't afford it.

But we'll continue to encourage the provision of parental leave and we now have a situation that paid parental leave is about 47 per cent for women and 40 per cent for men.

We do have the right to 52 weeks unpaid parental leave enshrined in legislation and we have, of course, recently increased the child care cash benefit and provided for the lump sum payment of the child care cash rebate.

The baby bonus, which has been a bit controversial in some circles, has proved to be extremely valuable for some low income families particularly having their first child, helping to cushion the transition from both parents being in the workforce with only one being in the workforce for a period of time.

I always think policies in this area are a work-in-progress. You can never declare victory in relation to the family work balance and go home. I think you always have to find different ways of responding to community needs. And it remains what I might loosely call the perennial barbecue stopper, one that does concern people.
But the key word in the workplace for this is flexibility. If we go back to a system that mandates rigidity, I think we'll have less satisfactory results.

JIM WALLACE: Prime Minister, the next question is from Pastor Keith Ainge, the secretary of the Australian Christian Churches.

KEITH AINGE: Prime Minister, we appreciate the fact that the Australian parliamentary day has also commenced with Christian prayers, as a reflection of the Christian heritage that you've spoken about. In the light of the fact the US Congress recently opened its proceedings with Hindu prayers, and the pressure that's been placed to remove the Christian influence in parliament, can you give us an assurance of any future government of yours, or for a future government of yours, that Christian prayers will be maintained for the opening of each parliament day?

JOHN HOWARD: Well I can unqualifiedly, yes. There'll be no change. I don't say that disrespectfully of other religions but the - you know, the predominant Christian - the predominant religious culture of this country is Christianity. And, I mean, I always find it odd that you have to demonstrate your tolerance by denying your own heritage.

[Applause]

It's always annoyed me immensely that some department stores in this country abandoned
nativity scenes because they said they were offensive to Jews and Muslims. None of the Jews and Muslims I know, and I know quite a number, have ever expressed any objection to me about nativity scenes in department stores any more than Catholics and Protestants living in Indonesia, would express any objection legitimately to the predominant religious practices of that predominantly Muslim country.

I mean, this is a form of absurd political correctness of which I've been, as you know, something of a critic.

[Laughter]

JIM WALLACE: We now invite Miss Carolyn Kitto(*) from World Vision Australia to ask a question.

CAROLYN KITTO: Prime Minister, Carolyn Kitto, World Vision Australia. It's been said that are no votes in aid and perhaps the fact that you've already raised that question tonight, indicates that there may be a shift.

 Australians have been engaged strongly in campaigns such as Make Poverty History, and the churches in Micah Challenge. And polls show increasing satisfaction with that aid, and a desire for Australia to respond to human need.

 We praise the increases of your government in aid, and yet it is still half of the 0.7 per cent of gross
national income which is the target for OECD countries.

What is your personal position on Australia's response to global poverty, and will the government be seeking to further grow its generosity to match where the rest of the world is heading?

JOHN HOWARD: Well, perhaps, I could better phrase it in answer to your question than I did in my speech. I think the long-term way out of poverty for areas of the world such as Africa, in particular - and bear in mind that what's really happened is that there has been a remarkable improvement in Asia, a remarkable improvement, and quite literally hundreds of millions of people have been taken out of poverty in many parts of Asia over the last 20 years.

But Africa remains the disaster area as far as aid is concerned and it's compounded by the extraordinary and terrible prevalence of HIV AIDS. But I believe the fundamental problem with Asia - with Africa is the absence of any structure of proper governance.

I mean, nobody can suggest that the catastrophe which is now Zimbabwe is in any way - is overwhelmingly due to the absence of aid from countries such as Australia. It's the corruption of the political process and the refusal of those countries that could have brought pressure to bear on the regime in Zimbabwe to change its practices which
is more responsible for the situation in Zimbabwe than anything else.

Now, having said that, I don't suggest that there isn't a proper role for aid. We have announced very significant increases. There is a greater interest in and support for this in the broader community and there are a lot of people inside the Government who, including - I mean, the two people most directly involved apart from me, are the Treasurer and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

They are working together very closely on this, and I know from discussions with them, both of them share a very strong commitment to further increases.

We support the UN 0.7 as an aspiration but we don't support, at this stage, a time-bound target to reach the goal. But we will continue to lift our aid towards the doubling figure that I mentioned in my speech and we've reached the goal of - we'll have 0.35 of gross national income by 2010.

I think you can be assured that there will be continued further increases but you can't see, if I may so respectfully, aid as being the sole solution. We've got to do something about governance and corruption in these countries. It's appalling, absolutely appalling.
And, I mean, the way in which the denial of food has been used as a political weapon in many countries in Africa, is the most appalling thing that I think I've seen anywhere. And the other thing we have to be conscious of is the obligation of the world to reduce their trade barriers.

I mean, if you freed developing countries of all the barriers against agricultural exports that would do wonderful things for their economies.

JIM WALLACE: Well, thank you very much Prime Minister. We very much appreciate that. In the job that I do up in the parliament, I'm able to be a spectator of this sport of politics but not actually too involved in it, I suppose, to affect my family. But I do know the incredible cost, personal cost, that politics actually demands of people.

Prime Minister, you've given us a great example. As I've said, you've provided great leadership to the country and we really do appreciate your commitment, your dedication. There's no job in politics which demands more, and thank you very much on behalf of all of us.

JOHN HOWARD: Thank you.

[Applause]

LYLE SHELTON: Well, ladies and gentleman I hope that everyone here at the National Press Club is enjoying
themselves here tonight, and as we hope that the thousands - the tens of thousands of people that are watching this live via the internet. We are back live here at the National Press Club for those who are watching the web cast, I trust you're settled in your various locations and ready to get back into it tonight.

We're here now for the second half of Federal Election 2007, Make it Count and I would to invite the ACL managing director, Jim Wallace, to introduce Mr Rudd. Thank you.

[Applause].

JIM WALLACE: Well, thank you very much again and welcome back also to not just our tens of thousands, but we understand, the 80 to 100 thousand people that we've got listening there.

We really, of course, have been privileged already and now we're very privileged again to be able to be spoken to and addressed by Mr Kevin Rudd. And Kevin, as I said, to the Prime Minister, I'm sure as we look at the 100,000 people out that they're not going to agree with everything that you say and everything that I would say.

But what I know we would agree with, is that we've all been very pleased to see your public affirmation of your faith and we're now very interested to see
how that might work out if a Labor Party were to be elected. Thanks very much.

[Applause]

KEVIN RUDD:

Thank you very much for that very friendly Christian welcome. And I welcome the opportunity to speak to this combined gathering of Christian churches not only in the nation's capital, but across the nation as well. And I thank the Australian Christian Lobby for making the effort and investing in the time and the technology to make it possible for us to speak to people right across this great country of ours tonight. It's good that you've had the Prime Minister here to speak and I thank you for the invitation for me to speak as well as the alternative prime minister of this country.

Because Christians have got as much right as anybody else to be informed about the way in which they will exercise their democratic right in a few weeks or a few months from now. Did the Prime Minister give you the date of the election? [Laughter]. If he did, I'll be outside. [Laughter].

I think it's worth recognising from the outset the significance of Christianity in Australia today. Let's look at the census data - 70 per cent of Australian's profess a belief in a Christian God and that is in an age where people have assumed decades ago that God was dead. Four million Australian's attend their local church monthly. Two million Australian's
attend their local church weekly. That's a lot of Australians and, therefore, those Australians have a right to have their voice heard even though I know that voices across the Christian churches often differ.

Australia is a modern secular democracy and this is a good think. Our parliament is the forum through which the views of the community, Christian and non-Christian, are ultimately sifted and that's as it should be, through a principle of separation of Church from State. But within that framework the Christian voice has as much right as any other voice to be heard. And I know through the Australian Christian Lobby and others that voice is articulated with strength, with conviction and from time to time with persuasion.

When you look at this country's history, Christianity is inseparable from its formation and the two centuries of our settled history. If you look at the evolution of our schools, of our hospitals, of our social institutions, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, School of the Outback - that's a pitch for the Presbyterian vote by the way - [laughter] - is that none of these great institutions which have shaped our history in this last couple of centuries were faintly possible without the active engagement of the Christian churches.

And so I think as a country we should be proud of our Christian heritage. We should be equally tolerant of diversity, proud and unapologetically
proud of the Christian heritage which has shaped so much of contemporary Australia.

And you look at Australia today, and I look at the Christian traditions represented here and I think of Caritas, I think of Anglicare, I think of Uniting Care, I think of the social justice arms of the Baptist Church, the Churches or Christ, the various Pentecostal churches which are represented here as well. I think of Lifeline, I think of World Vision, I think of St Vinnies and I think of the Salvation Army.

These are all household names across our nation and they are household names because the nations, believer's or not, value the work which is done and done in the name of Christ.

And so when I look to the future I see a country where these institutions and the belief which gives rise to these institutions, a belief in Jesus Christ, as being a part and a core part of our nation's future as well. So we should recognise without apology the role of our Christian heritage in shaping the Australia of today, recognise afresh the continued and vital contribution of these great Christian institutions to our life in Australia today and look forward with confidence to the role they'll play in the future.

Of course, others have helped shape our country as well from other religious traditions and from those
of non religious traditions and they are welcome in this great, tolerant and diverse country of ours, Australia.

I am often asked in gatherings such as this on questions of personal faith. Mine is a very garden variety personal faith for which I have made no apology these last 30 years or so that I've had it. Having personal faith makes you no better, no worse than any other human being. We are all conscious of the fact that we are flawed and failed human beings.

But for me, the question of personal faith also provides a compass point for my life. It also therefore helps shape the values which I hold to be true. It also therefore helps shapes the view I try to bring to the public space as well, not always successfully.

When I look at the core organising principle at stake here, what is it when it comes to Christianity and politics and there are 2,000 years of theological literature about this and occasional agreement among it.

My staffer, Tim Dixon here who is my economic advisor, had on his desk this [indistinct] called A Concise Compendium of Christian Political Thought [laughter] beginning with Irenaeus so it was an interesting read of the index at least and there were no pictures. [Laughter]
But the organising principle you can distil from these multiple traditions of Christian engagement with politics, if I can simply put it in these terms. Apart from looking after my family, my friends and being responsible for myself, as I should, I must be equally responsible towards and taking care of my community, my country, our common humanity and this great ecosystem called the earth, which we all share. And that to me is about it. That's where the principles come to. Looking beyond yourself always, and as St Francis said I think with eloquence which hasn't been really surpassed since then, it's in giving that you receive.

Now, the heard bit is how do you take those noble precepts and apply them to the public policy process? That is the hard bit. That's the complex bit. And I never challenge people who arrive at different policy conclusions from me as saying that they've got their underlying theology wrong. I'm not from that view. I do ask the question whether they've thought it through and I think that's important to ask.

So on the questions of policy which confront the nation today, let me just make some observations and then let's go to a discussion.

Work and family, housing affordability, education, climate change, foreign aid, foreign policy and the future of the family. Let me say some things about each of those.
Work and family. This is a core challenge for families across our country tonight. Most kitchen tables, dining room tables and sometimes those households which don't sit at either but sit in front of the TV as we do, a lot. The challenge is how do I find this precious commodity called time and how do I share that time with my family when the demands on my time are now so ravenous from the workplace? And that is such a core challenge for families today.

There is a parallel challenge as well which is given the enormous demands on working family's budgets, how do I make ends meet? Whether it's paying the mortgage, whether it's paying rents. Whether it's dealing with the challenges of rising petrol prices, rising grocery prices, the cost of child care, the cost of schools, the cost of health care. All these things going through the roof. And making ends meet and achieving a decent family life and a decent balance between work and family is so much the conversation I have as I walk through one supermarket after another across this nation.

There is no magical answer to this because there is always a limit to what the state can do and what government can do. But when I look at the laws which govern our workplace I simply argue this, that they've gone too far, that they no longer get the balance right when it comes to work and family. And I ask myself a very simple question, what do you do intelligently and practically about that?
And our response is when we look at laws which, for example, say I cannot plan ahead comfortably now in terms of what time I have available this weekend to go and play soccer or takes my kids to soccer, to take my daughters to Irish dancing or to take the kids, take the family to church on Sunday because these laws permit employers to change your shift and the time you're required to work with very, very short notice indeed. I don't think that's right because it ultimately impacts on the quality and predictability of family life.

Nor do I think it's right that laws in this country should enable people's penalty rates and overtime to be stripped away for nothing which they have been. I don't think that's right either. So many working families depend on those things to make ends meet.

Do I understand the parallel demands of our economy which is that employers and those in small business demand and expect flexibility in the workplace so that they can adjust their business and their business arrangements according to changes in the market? Well, I understand that as well. But you know something, we've got the balance wrong right now and it has to be made right. We've put forward alternative policies to do that, called *Forward with Fairness*.

We think that when it comes to penalty rates, overtime and conditions such as that, that working families should have confidence that they can't be traded away for zero as they have been – real
confidence. We believe that it's in the instincts of this country to have a fair independent industrial umpire and people have been concerned when that has been stripped away as well. I think it's very much in the Australian soul to have a view that there must be fairness and balance on such critical questions as work and family. And hence we've argued that our proposition on industrial relations, which has received support from some within the Christian churches, is the best way forward for the nation.

Housing affordability. There is nothing more basic in terms of being able to nurture a family than having somewhere to live. Affordable accommodation, affordable housing is core business, I believe, for the country and the community and therefore for government.

Tonight in Australia the Census tells us there are 100,000 Australians who are homeless. Ten thousand of them are children. We also know that when it comes to public community of social housing that there are now on the waiting list of the country, I think, 168,000 Australians. That's a lot of people. That's a quarter of a million people either homeless or on the waiting list for social or community housing.

And for those who are renting there are real problems in terms of the affordability of rents in many of our major cities at the moment. And I've run into families recently whereby various parts of
the family come together to form a greater economic unit across generations to be able to afford the rent. And for those first home buyers trying to enter the market a decade a new home was costing on average four times the average annual wage, a decade later it costs seven times the annual wage. That's a problem.

So what do we do about all of that? Part of our response as the alternative government was recently to convene a summit here in Canberra on housing affordability. And we did so with an open mind and an open heart about what we could do to make a difference in these areas. One of the areas that we moved on was the whole question of establishing a housing affordability fund, a half a billion dollar fund, to draw down the cost of new housing and new housing developments.

Does that solve all problems? No but its one step in the right direction drawing those processes down by up to $20,000.

We're also looking at other proposals. Tax credits for those who would invest in partnership with the community and charitable sector in affordable housing.

You know in the United States at present some 50 or 60 units of such housing are constructed each year off the back tax credits provided by the United States Federal Government in partnership with
community, church and charitable organisations. This is something we should explore for the future. And the deal is that the rents are charged on this accommodation, which is high quality and in quality parts of cities and across cities more generally, is that the rents are more affordable.

And for first home buyers, young people trying to enter the market, we're looking at other options there as well. So if you are concerned about the integrity of the family, having decent housing is, for us, absolutely critical.

In education, what's our vision for the country? I become concerned in a country such as ours, and as rich and as prosperous as it is, when we are not investing as much as other developed countries in our schools, in our technical colleges, in our universities. You know, between 1996 and 2003 we were the only developed country to go backwards in our real investment in universities. Across the rest of the OECD the average increase was something like 48 per cent. I don't think that's right. It's not sustainable for the future.

On early childhood education, what do you do with four year olds? The point at which you are doing the absolute best we hope across the country to instil pre-literacy, pre-numeracy skills and the culture of learning in young ones. And when they enter the school system their ability with literacy and numeracy as four, five and six years olds is probably the most critical determinant at that stage
of how they will go through the school system and whether go on to post compulsory school education as well.

According to the OECD, we come absolutely last on the table in terms of our national investment in early childhood education.

So what's my vision? Let's turn this country to the most education country in the Western world, the most skilled economy in the Western world. Let's make sure that each one of our kids whether they are rich or poor have the absolute best start in life. And to do so respecting totally parental choice, whether that is through government on non government schools. What's my vision for that? I want the best government schools in the Western world and the best non government schools in the Western world. That means the best Church schools and the various Christian traditions you represent here.

The key thing is the output at the end. They key thing is to make sure that we equip our young people with the skills necessary to survive and to compete and to provide for families in the future. That's education.

In terms of the specifics on education, let me just turn to a couple of examples. Skills and skills training in schools for those who have an aptitude for the trades. We have a proposal, two and a half
billion dollars, to fund the establishment of trades training centres in each of this country's 2,650 secondary schools - government and non government, state and private, religious and non religious. We don't discriminate.

What we want to see is for all those young people who have a natural aptitude towards the trades but who are not being sufficiently encouraged at present, to say to them hey, here is a state of the art 21st century trades training centre for you in the traditional trades and the non traditional trades, in information technology and graphic design and the arts.

But we need to invest in this to make sure it happens and this is not an inexpensive programme which we have recommended. Also for early childhood education we have committed to fund a half billion dollar programme for the nation so that every four year old in Australia, every four year old, has 15 hours a week for 40 weeks a year in play based pre-literacy and pre-numeracy. And for us the best predictor, as I said before, of how that young person's going to compete later in life.

As I said before, government and non government schools, this for us is a matter of parental choice. In my own electorate in Brisbane I have fantastic government schools. I think of government schools like Cavendish Road High School in Brisbane. I think of non government schools like Cannon Hill Anglican College. Or in my electorate, as it was
previous drawn, the Christian Outreach College at Mansfield. These schools are all doing great jobs and we need to help them do those jobs better.

Climate change. I describe it as the great moral and environment and economic challenge of our generation. From a Christian perspective we are custodians of the planet. We have a responsibility to ensure that those who come after us have a planet which is habitable. It is a profound question of our personal and community commitment, and through the community, governmental commitment as well.

For us the science is in. It is clear climate change is occurring. The ice caps are melting, the sea levels are rising and the planet's warming up and for these reasons we have to act. Our criticism of the Government on this is that for the last decade they have denied that climate change is occurring, as evidenced of non ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, as evidenced the absence still today of a national carbon target.

You can't be serious about bringing down greenhouse gas emissions unless you establish for this nation a carbon target. And you can't be serious about international cooperation, which is what counts, if you're not part of the wider Kyoto family. National and international action is what's necessary.
And what's my vision for the country in this area? Let's be part of the global solution, not just part of the global problem. And that mean's, for us, one of the earliest steps we would take in government would be to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Beyond that, what we intend to do is to have a national carbon target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 against year 2000 levels. And we would use that national carbon target as the basis on which to construct an emissions trading scheme.

We also intend to increase the mandatory renewable energy target for the country so that there's a greater future for solar, for wind, for geothermal, for other clean green renewable energies. And this, for us, is core business and I think there is a clear distinction between our approach and those who oppose us.

Our place in the world, foreign aid. When we look in our own immediate region, Melanesia, we look in Islamic South East Asia and we look more widely to the world, and poverty in the African continent. I always take a basic dictum which is that of John Wesley's. When asked: Where, Mr Wesley, is your parish? This is a pitch for the Methodist folk by the way [laughter]. We'll move away for the rest of the general denomination spectrum during the course of the evening. Mr Wesley, where is your parish? To which Welsey's great and famous response was: The world is my parish. And there's a great eloquence in his answer.
So when we look at poverty at home we must equally look at poverty abroad and what do we do about it. The world community got together at the millennium and agreed on the Millennium Development Goals. There are eight of them, and we must be committed to doing our part to realising those goals across those two billion plus people across the world tonight who live in poverty.

The Millennium Development Goals provide us with a framework for doing it. I congratulate Mr Howard for having increased our aid most recently but we need to go further. And that's why most recently I committed us, as the alternative government of Australia, to lift our aid commitment from 0.35 per cent of GNI, as of 2010, to 0.5 per cent by 2015, 2016. That is a fundamental commitment.

It has to be, for us, the basis upon which we can then engage in poverty reduction, social and economic development across our most immediate region. Many of the Christian denominations represented here have been active in Melanesia for a long, long time. Whether is Papua New Guinea or whether it's in East Timor which, of course, lies to the west and beyond what is classically defined as Melanesia, and then down into the Solomons, Fiji.

If you look at the most basic indicators of economic and social development these countries are, by and large, heading backwards and not going forwards.
It's not universal but, can I say, the drift is on big time.

Now, if we're serious about our neighbours we've got to deploy long term financial and human horsepower to make a difference. And that's the reason that I outlined in a recent speech to the Lowy Institute for increasing our ODA, Official Development Assistance, over that period of time to provide us with a long term planning framework over the next decade to act because it will be a decade-long plan which is necessary.

Unless you deal with the underpinning problems of economic and social infrastructure rebuilding universal education, rebuilding primary education, rebuilding universal health care and doing something about basic infrastructure like roads and telecommunications at the most basic level, then frankly we're going to be locked into a cycle of episodic and ineffective military interventions to try and restore order. And this, for us, is core business but also beyond Melanesia to do what we can within those restraints to assist in alleviating poverty beyond our borders.

More widely, again on foreign policy and our place in the world, I see a role for Australia. And my vision for this country is for us to be a creative and humane middle power actor through creative, humane and intelligent middle power diplomacy. When I look at the great causes of disarmament we need to be out there and active. When I look at
nuclear weapons proliferation, I look at the scourge which they could unleash on the planet. We need to be active and engaged. Once we were leaders in these fields, now we have become virtually silent and that needs to change.

When it comes to other challenges, like how do we deal with internationally displaced persons, we must also be active. We must also show our heart. Many of you know, for example, that our side of politics opposed the Iraq War from day one. I don't intend tonight to canvas all the reasons for that.

What I do intend to canvas, however, is this and that is the enormous humanitarian cost experienced by the people of Iraq. The casualty rate among Iraqi civilians ranges from 75,000 to 600,000 depending on who you believe, 600,000 being the figure of the British medical journal, *The Lancet*. The humanitarian needs of that community are huge because Iraqis are now embroiled in a civil war. The refugee outflow is huge - 1.8 million Iraqis have fled the country, primarily to Syria and Jordan.

And for the Christian community there is a particular dimension to this. Of course, we must be concerned with all, but one third of those fleeing Iraq, the UNHCR tells us, are from the Christian traditions within Iraq, whether they are Armenian Christians, Chaldeans, or Syrians and others as well from the wider Christian community - Mandayans as well.
This represents, I think, a huge challenge for us all. If you're going to go into a country and bust it up in a war you do have an enduring humanitarian responsibility to assist those who have become the victims of that war, including its refugee community.

It is not often discussed and debated in this country, the fate suffered by the Christian minority in Iraq since the war. It needs to be debated more because it's huge. And so if we form the next government of Australia I want to initiate a multilateral conference involving as many states that would participate in now we deal with the needs of that refugee community in Syria and in Jordan and beyond.

That means proper funding for the UNHCR. It means proper funding for the church based humanitarian organisations which are active in the field supporting those people living in terrible conditions in camps. It means doing what you can to facilitate their return to country in parts of the country where that's permissible. But the threat of violence being suffered on a daily basis by this Christian minority in the raging Sunni-Shiite civil war, that is Iraq, is terrifying.

On family, let me say this. Commitments have been made in the past in terms of the importance of family impact statement for government legislation. They've been made before by the Government and I will let the Government answer to the extent to which they've honoured those commitments.
If we form the next government of Australia I will have the Office of Work and Family and the Department of Prime Minister in Cabinet prepare a family impact statement for every submission to cabinet. We think that's important because when you're considering the impact of economic legislation, social legislation and other legislation and other non legislative submissions which don't involve changes to the law but changes in administration, you need a mechanism through which the impact on family is deliberated on consciously and well.

And we think that is a productive way ahead particularly given the dimensions of the challenges faced by families today and they are huge. So we would like to do our bit in ensuring that families are properly addressed in the deliberations of the cabinet.

Indigenous communities must also be part and parcel of our responsibility. I've never seen the business of opposition as being opposing for opposition's sake or opposing for opposing’s sake. I always take the view if you agree with what the Government's doing say so, if you disagree with what the Government's doing say so and give your reason. I think that's a reasonable way to go.

The Government's proposals most recently for the Northern Territory have been enormously controversial. They are not perfect, there are flaws in them, but given the dimensions of the data we've
received recently on child abuse and child sexual abuse in indigenous communities in the Northern Territory we concluded that we had no alternative but to act, and to act in conjunction, with the Government. We've put forward our own amendments, the Government rejected them.

But more widely for indigenous Australians we must also reflect on where we go long term right across the country, not just this particular proposal. And if we are to be a country which is addressing the needs of the future, indigenous Australians must be front and centre as well. This year we've commemorated the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum. There was an event held at the Old Parliament House.

There, I committed a future Labor Government to closing the gap. That is, a forward programme against fixed timetables for closing the gap when it comes to Aboriginal life expectancy, infant mortality, literacy and numeracy. Unless you start setting targets for the nation, then you don't realise progress in getting towards those targets. It just all then looks too hard. And to achieve those targets we have to commit resources and do it in creative ways, such as those also being embraced by Noel Pearson in Cape York, and we've done that. And the speech I gave on that day outlined the detail of the $263 million programme we've advanced for that for the future.
I've touch on some key areas of policy - work and family, housing affordability, education, climate change, our place in the world, the future of the family itself and how that's best deliberated on in government and the first Australians.

What's the unifying vision I have for this country? How can we be a country which has hard heads and soft hearts? Being hard headed and soft hearted, it's not a term unique to myself. It was the title of a book authored by Paul Kelly a long time ago. But I think that sums up so much of what the nation actually wants to be like. Australians are hard headed. We're always wanting to know whether something's going to work and that's what I think one of their great - one of our great and commendable qualities.

But we're also a nation which intrinsically has fairness engraved into our soul. We are by instinct, I believe, also a nation with soft hearts. And so we need hard heads on the core questions of the economy, strong economy. We need hard heads on the core questions of national security as Jim Wallace knows. He used be a Brigadier, often reminds me of that. [Laughter]. I usually address him as Brigadier. But when it comes to soft hearts, to always be out there, being mindful, of giving voice to the voiceless, creating a humane safety net, ensuring that all kids in this country get a decent start in life, and to have a view which says that compassion is not a weakness, it is one of the
greatest humans strengths and it should be extended by this community to the world at large.

That's my vision for the country's future and, as we know, from those who have written books in that book called the *Bible*, without a vision the people perish. Thank you.

[Applause]

JIM WALLACE: Well, Mr Rudd, thank you very much indeed. We have a number of questions and we had more questions than we had time in the last session. So what I plan to do is I'm going to invite Archbishop Wilson, the president of the Catholic Bishops Conference, to ask the question he did in the first session because I think it's a very relevant one, although its been in part answered, and then we'll move on to new questions.

Thanks, Archbishop.

PHILIP WILSON: Thanks very much, Jim.

Mr Rudd, what are the personal qualities as opposed to the political qualities that you believe are necessary for authentic leadership? What role, if any, has religious faith had in forming your leadership qualities?

KEVIN RUDD: I think the key thing with leadership is to know what you believe in and why. And the key thing
about leadership is, as I said before, not to oppose for opposition's sake but if you are going to oppose then to propose what you will do by way of the alternative.

I think leadership is also about admitting there are things that you don't know. I think leadership is about being fair dinkum about what you can fix and what you can't. I think leadership is also about recognising that you have finite knowledge and a finite capacity to fix all human problems.

And for me, my own way, in quiet prayerful moments in this place, Canberra, reflecting on what I can do constructively to make this a better and more humane country. And recognising that all those who sit opposite are not sons of the antichrist. [Laughter].

JIM WALLACE: The next question is from Mr David Perrin, the national president of the Australian Family Association.

DAVID PERRIN: Thank you, Mr Rudd. Mr Rudd, can I thank you for your personal support and for your party's support for the amendments to the Marriage Act which mean that marriage is now only between one man and one woman?

However, you may be aware that the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission have recently made a recommendation that the definition of de
facto marriage be extended to include homosexuals. And not only that, but the definition of parenthood be made gender neutral.

Would your party reject these attempts to undermine marriage?

KEVIN RUDD: I have a pretty basic view on this, as reflected in the position adopted by our party, and that is that marriage is between a man and a woman. I haven't read the HREOC Report to be quite honest. We've been engaged in a few other things. My understanding is there are two or three sets of recommendations in it.

One is for same sex marriage. Another is for civil unions. And a third is for what is described as a relationships register. Our party's policy in response to that is, we do not support the first which is same sex marriage. We do not support the second, which is civil unions. We are, however, prepared to embrace the possibility of relationship registers as they exist at the state level. And I understand that a number of the churches represented here have themselves put forward submissions on this matter as well.

Such relationship registers do not begin with a marriage ceremony, they are about the registration of relationships, same sex or non same sex, but those which exist outside of marriage.
JIM WALLACE: The next question is from the Reverend Professor James Haire the executive director of Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture.

JAMES HAIRE: Mr Rudd, I want to ask you a question about Australia's place in the world, particularly in relation to refugees. We have a long and proud tradition in this country of receiving refugees when after - at the Second World War Ben Chifley received a higher number of holocaust survivors than any other country in the world. But we've had problems in recent years so I want to ask you what measures your party would take to improve the processing and welfare of refugees who arrive on our shore by irregular means, whilst also protecting the security of Australia's borders?

KEVIN RUDD: It's interesting you mention Chifley and his then Immigration Minister Calwell, who changed the face of modern Australia through post war immigration policy. And your reference to the immigration of holocaust survivors is absolutely right.

One of the reasons why it was important for us to do that was the posture we took before the war, together with the rest of the collective west, who when convening I think in the late '30s, at a conference in Europe to discuss the Jewish question, Australia together with others turned its back on the request for safe haven. In fact, if you visited Yad Vashem, as I have in Jerusalem, the holocaust memorial it's - one of the confronting
thing as an Australian is as when you walk in, and I think the very first display - at least when I saw it a few years ago - is from the Australian delegate to the pre-war conference saying, and I paraphrase here, it is not for us to solve the Jewish question.

I think we should be mindful of our history and incorporate it into how we react differently in the future and post war governments have sought to do that.

But what it goes to is this. Why we have this thing called the Refugee's Convention is because we resolved that when anything like this ever happened again, that is like what was inflicted upon the Jewish people of Europe in the last World War, that we would have an international mechanism to act and deploy. And that has been why Australia initialled and signed and then, I think under Menzies, finally ratified that convention and since then we have taken many refugees as we should.

When it comes to the future I want to make sure that this country maintains an open heart. And that means that when it comes to things like mandatory detention that we do so for practical purposes like health checks, practical purposes like security checks, but that there is no such thing as indefinite mandatory detention. We must also make sure that people are processed within a reasonable and human period of time. That means resourcing it properly - 90 days.
It means also that we must maintain an effective and meaningful quota for the country when it comes to the refugees we take into this land every year. I think we're one of only 16 resettlement countries across the world, together with many in Europe.

We must continue to shoulder the burden. And I say this in conclusion to James's question, if we're seen to walk away from all of that it says something very bad about the Australian heart internationally. If we are seen to walk partly away from that it says something bad about us internationally. But even worse than that, if we as one of the initiators of the post war refugee convention consensus are seen to be fragmenting it at the edges, we also are part and parcel of fragmenting the global consensus and machinery for dealing with refugee challenges into the future. And I never want to be part of any such government that does that.

JIM WALLACE: The final question for the evening is from Pastor Dale Hewitt the national leader of the Apostolic Church in Australia. Thanks, Dale.

DALE HEWITT: Mr Rudd in - I guess, in light of the recent application of anti-vilification laws in Victoria, what guarantees can you give the Christian church that freedom to preach the gospel will be protected by a Rudd Labor Government even if that gospel is unacceptable or perhaps, you know, even offensive to other groups that have different views? I'm asking this really to discover from you whether the Labor Party has any plans to initiate a Bill of Rights
or even, you know, some kind of racial or religious tolerance-type policy federally.

KEVIN RUDD: As you know, across the Christian and wider religious community this is a vexed subject - arguments in all directions. I'm acutely conscious of the vilification cases in Victoria. I'm acutely conscious of this country's long and proud tradition of freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of religion. These things have been around in this place every since the King's Dominion Governors allowed Irish Catholics to celebrate mass, Archbishop in the early days of the penal colony. I discussed this recently with Cardinal Pell and - well, not that recently.

So how you deal with this in the future is a very, very complex legal question. I'm acutely conscious of what happened in the 80s when a constitutional referendum was proposed concerning freedom of religion and the entrenchment of that constitutionally and how it sank in a blaze of constitutional and referendum-based non glory.

Therefore, when it comes to better protections for the future I would simply prefer to be frank with you, we don't have a magical answer to this. I am concerned about any incremental erosion of basic freedoms in this country because it's part of who we are as Australia.
So if there are better forms and better mechanisms for protection available through the law in the future, can I say this? We will do so in complete consultation and partnership with the Christian community on the way through.

JIM WALLACE: Well, Mr Rudd, thank you very much for your time. I know everyone very much appreciates your giving us in what is a very busy time - I know we're not into the campaign yet, but I know that you're working at a million miles an hour.

KEVIN RUDD: Yes, we are. Where have you been Jim?

[Laughter]

JIM WALLACE: And I do want to say too, as I said to the Prime Minister, that we are very much aware, and certainly those of us who are close to politics, very much aware of the incredible drain that politics has on you personally. The great challenges it is to family life and we do really appreciate the commitments you make on our behalf. And we appreciate too that you're putting yourself up as being will to take the biggest share of that in the event that you are elected prime minister, so thank you very much indeed.

[Applause]

JIM WALLACE: Thanks very much, ladies and gentlemen.
Now, I received severe criticism from some people during the break because I - well, maybe it wasn't me. It was probably Lyle. I can blame somebody else for this - didn't mention Tasmania.

So all of those of you out in Tasmania, we really appreciate the Tasmanian church being there [laughs].

I do, though, need to just quickly wrap up and say that finally I want to thank everybody who's here tonight, once again. Your being here tonight is very clear evidence that the Christian constituency is a thinking one and a committed one and that's what we need to prove.

And in the same way, I want to thank the people in the churches out there. Thank you very much indeed.

I also must thank my own staff who worked incredibly on putting this together and particularly David Yates.

[Applause]

Now we know too that there was a lot of prayer put up during the break by churches right around Australia, and being believers and knowing that ultimately God is in charge, it's God to whom we owe everything we do and, of course, we owe the
glory for all that’s done. I think we can be well assured that heavens have been moved tonight.

So, God bless you, and thank you very much.

[Applause]

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