

STATEMENT – 11 May 2012

I did not hear Michael Kroger's Radio Interviews this morning as I was Chairing a Post-Budget function for the Liberal Party where over 800 guests attended to hear Joe Hockey respond to the Budget. That excellent speech should have been the story of the day.

Since I have been deluged with media requests for a reply I will go to the factual matters. I will not reply to the attacks on my character, other than to say they are false. I have been elected to Parliament seven times and every aspect of my career and life has been scrutinized for decades. People can form their own judgements.

Since I voluntarily retired from Parliament I have not sought to return to Parliament. I have not sought Mr Kroger's assistance to do so. I think the events of this morning indicate why I would not repose a confidence in him. And most importantly of all Mr Kroger holds no position in the Kooyong Electorate. What possible influence would he have? The Liberal Party is run by a membership not by factional bosses. I was the longest Deputy Leader in its history. I know how it works. I do not need to go to Mr Kroger for assistance in relation to its affairs.

In the lead-up to the recent Senate pre-selection Mr Kroger contacted me a number of times asking me to intervene with Senators Fifield and Ryan to preserve the position of Senator Helen Kroger. I declined to do so. As far as I am concerned I am out of politics and had no intention of intervening in the Senate pre-selections. The 400 hundred or so delegates are quite capable of making up their own minds. I did not ring a delegate. The task is to get all three Senators elected and this is quite achievable. I understand Mr Kroger was not happy with a piece in The Age on the issue. I did not speak to the journalist.

Peter Reith alerted me on the afternoon of Wednesday that the 7.30 Report was preparing a story that would canvass allegations against me. As is the case, I denied the allegations when they were put to me very late before the program went to air. It had been extensively briefed and it was made clear who was the source of the story.

I have since seen suggestions that I might be involved in a pre-selection battle in Corangamite. I make it clear now that I know some of the candidates but I will not support any one against any other. That is a matter for the delegates. They are perfectly capable of making a good decision without the intervention of me or anyone else from outside.

Since leaving Parliament I have done many fundraisers in different states for the Liberal Party – far more than my business commitments here and overseas really allow time for.

Michael Kroger was an excellent President of the Victorian Liberal Party in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He stepped down 20 years ago.

The time has come for a new generation. I am proud to have supported talented capable people who will carry its fortunes for the decades to come – people like Kelly O’Dwyer and Sophie Mirabella and Josh Frydenberg and Tony Smith and Senators Fifield and Ryan. I am proud of their achievements.

I frequently speak to Tony Abbott and advise him as he requests. We had a private dinner in Melbourne recently to discuss positioning for the Budget. I regularly speak to Joe Hockey and other senior MPs about policy matters. I want to see Tony and Joe become Prime Minister and Treasurer of Australia. I know what a tough job they will have to get Australia back to where it was.

I wish Michael Kroger every success in his business life and his personal life. I do not want to spend time responding to his personal attacks. I hope he will cease them. I have too many positive business and personal interests to attend to.

Finally to all those members of the Liberal Party and MPs who contacted me this morning I cannot return all your calls. I thank you for your support. I value the friendship.

Peter Costello