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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
RADIO INTERVIEW
ABC RN BREAKFAST
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SUBJECTS: Gladys Liu; Liberal MPs and Ministers under scrutiny; the Prime Minister's lack of judgment.

MACDONALD: Richard Marles, Deputy Labor Leader, he is with me in the Parliament House studio this morning. Good morning to you.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Good morning, Hamish. How are you?

MACDONALD: Very well thank you. Does Gladys Liu have some explaining to do on this?

MARLES: I think she does have explaining to do on this issue. And it's obviously not the first issue that's been raised in relation to Gladys Liu. But I also think –

MACDONALD: Why on this issue does she have to explain anything?

MARLES: Well there is the role that she has played in providing introductions for this company but obviously the company itself is in the centre of a police investigation around money laundering. I think all –

MACDONALD: But there's absolutely no suggestion that she had anything to do with that or even any knowledge of that.

MARLES: Well then that explanation can be provided. But I also think it's important. Greg Hunt is part of this as well. He was the Minister that was –

MACDONALD: But there's not even an allegation that she knew anything about that.

MARLES: Well I think it's very important that the Government provide an explanation as to what

has happened here. I mean this is a company which has provided a significant donation to the Liberal Party, more than a hundred thousand dollars. And there is a criminal investigation into money laundering in and around it. In those circumstances I think it's very important that the Liberal Party, the Government, Greg Hunt who was the relevant Minister at the time, and Gladys Liu provide a clear explanation about this.

MACDONALD: But is it simply the association with China? I mean is that what this boils down to?

MARLES: Well I think it's – I actually think it's as much to do with the criminal investigation in relation to money laundering, as the ultimate ownership of the company. That's where there needs to be an explanation here. And whether or not there is anything to see here, can be completely cleared up by Gladys Liu providing that explanation.

MACDONALD: It's been reported that the firm's Chinese backers made a donation to gain access to the Government. Just a few weeks after the donation was made the then Environment Minister, Greg Hunt attended an event with the company in Melbourne. A spokesperson for the Minister says his appearance was not tied to the donation. Do you accept that assurance? Because I think people listening this morning will say well; the donation was made- and there was a meeting.

MARLES: Well I think it's important that we hear from the Minister himself about that. I mean, raising money is obviously a part of the political process. But we are talking about a company which was the subject of a significant criminal investigation around money laundering and –

MACDONALD: But just to bring it back to that question; because surely that's something that would happen on your side of politics as well, donations would be made, meetings would be had.

MARLES: Of course.

MACDONALD: That's the deal isn't it?

MARLES: Well that's not the point though –

MACDONALD: Well that's the question.

MARLES: But why this is a matter of public interest, why this is being reported in the newspapers today is because of the criminal investigation which surrounds this company. It's in those circumstances that I think it's important that both the Government; Greg Hunt and Gladys Liu provide an explanation.

MACDONALD: Do you think the Australian public should just accept that people who make large donations to the major political parties will secure meetings with them?

MARLES: Well, it's important that the process by which people access Government is transparent, obviously –

MACDONALD: So if money is handed over then it's still okay?

MARLES: Well explain that question –

MACDONALD: Well if a donation is made and subsequently a meeting happens, that's okay as long as it's known?

MARLES: And it should not be connected. I mean, in the sense that, you know people obviously make donations to political parties. We're not making that criticism and it's absolutely right that people make donations to the Labor Party. It's also true that companies speak with Ministers –

MACDONALD: Do you think that's though part of the reason why so many people just don't trust politics now?

MARLES: Well fundraising, political fundraising, is a part of politics. And if you're asking me to defend the practice of political fundraising at large I'm happy to do it, and I'm not –

MACDONALD: Well it's the fact that the fundraising often seems to be somehow linked to the fact that people get access.

MARLES: It is absolutely essential that the decision making of Government is free from the question of fundraising. It's also the case that in a democracy getting messages out is important. And there are lots of companies and lots of individuals who seek to make donations which I actually applaud in terms of the democratic process. That is the clean statement about what fundraising is and the role that it plays in Australian politics. That is not what's going on here. Yes, fundraising forms part of this story. But the reason that this is in the newspapers today and the reason that we are saying there needs to be an explanation, is not the fact of fundraising per se, but it's the fact that the company concerned is at the centre of a criminal investigation. Now in those circumstances there is an explanation that's required.

MACDONALD: These revelations about Gladys Liu come at a tricky time for the Government. They're defending Angus Taylor, George Christensen, Ken Wyatt over a range of different matters. On Angus Taylor, if police don't find any evidence of wrongdoing on his part or that of his office, is that the end of it?

MARLES: Well I don't think it's the end of it at all. I mean there are two points to make here. One is there is still a real question about Angus Taylor's misleading of the Parliament. Now that's a serious matter.

MACDONALD: Specifically what?

MARLES: Well, Angus Taylor has asserted that he downloaded a report from the City of Sydney website and it is on the basis of that report that he sent a letter to the Lord Mayor of Sydney. Now it's pretty clear that, that report was not downloaded from the City of Sydney website in the terms in which he quoted it. And that's the issue here. I mean that report on the City of Sydney website both prior to and after his downloading did not have those figures in it. So there's a real question about the misleading of Parliament and that's a very serious matter from a Minister. And that's not a criminal issue but it's a major issue in terms of a Minister performing his or her duties. But the second issue here is we're talking about a live criminal investigation, whatever its outcome, where the Prime Minister of Australia rings the New South Wales police commissioner about it and that is an investigation in respect of one of his Ministers. And what we now have learnt this week is that is a call that was made with Australia's first law officer; the Attorney-General present. And rather than making it clear that this was inappropriate both the Prime Minister and

the Attorney-General doubled down and said there's nothing to see here. You know we've got Geoffrey Watson-

MACDONALD: Well if they're saying there's nothing to see here. What are you saying there is to see?

MARLES: I think the idea that anyone would think it is appropriate that a Prime Minister of Australia rings a police commissioner about an active criminal investigation into one of his Ministers and that that is fine. I mean that is astounding.

MACDONALD: So, seriously doubt whatever the findings of that investigations are?

MARLES: It raises a whole lot of questions. And this is the point that Geoffrey Watson has made, who is a former adviser to- barrister assisting ICAC in New South Wales. That it raises questions of pressure, we're talking at the Prime Minister.

MACDONALD: But do you genuinely think the New South Wales Police Commissioner felt pressured by the Prime Minister because of that call?

MARLES: Well it's also a matter of perception here.

MACDONALD: Sure, but I'm just asking you. Do you think that the New South Wales Police Commissioner was pressured or felt pressured?

MARLES: I can't answer that question because I'm not the New South Wales Police Commissioner but what I can say is this; the idea that we think it would be appropriate in our society to have police having to field questions from the Prime Minister of Australia about what investigations they're doing and that that can be done in absence of pressure you know at large, I think is patently ridiculous. This is a deeply inappropriate phone call, there's no question about that. Malcolm Turnbull's made that point, David Epp's made that point, Geoffrey Watson has made that point. This is one where the Prime Minister made a huge mistake in making that phone call. But the judgment, the lack of judgment goes further because rather than putting a hand I'm saying; okay, I probably shouldn't have made that call; he and the Attorney-General have now doubled down, says a lot about both of them.

MACDONALD: On Angus Taylor though multiple scandals, questions about where this document came from. Now questions about things including in his maiden speech relating to feminist author Naomi Wolf. Does this man have a problem with the truth?

MARLES: Well I think it is clear that this man has a problem with the truth. And you know we've seen, I mean as I said at the outset what we've got, whatever the outcome of this criminal investigation is a misleading of the Parliament which still stands. I mean Angus Taylor has not cleaned that up. I mean this is obviously an accident prone Minister but who is engaged in serious accidents. And there is obviously now a question around Angus Taylor going forward. Now ultimately that is going to be a matter for the government in terms of how they deal with that. But it shows a serious lack of judgment on his part. But look I mean the decision to have Angus Taylor in the ministry that's ultimately a matter for Scott Morrison but where this buck stops is that Scott Morrison's desk, right. And it's ultimately his judgment, it's his judgment which is in question. And in seeking to defend your Minister, seeking to deal with this situation, you as the Prime Minister think it's appropriate to pick up the phone and phone a friend and ring your friend,

a person he's on Melbourne radio described as on his best friends and talk about a live criminal investigation. That is a serious error of judgment from our Prime Minister.

MACDONALD: To be clearer I think both of those individuals since distanced or qualified what the quality of that relationship is.

MARLES: But the point is that the Prime Minister articulates that in public and all of this is now relevant in the context the phone call that he makes. Clearly we need to have a system of government in this country where the police are able to do their work, free from having to talk with politicians about live investigations.

MACDONALD: Are you saying that we don't have that?

MARLES: I say that's exactly what the Prime Minister did. That's exactly what the Prime Minister did. He rang up and asked about a live criminal investigation into one of his Ministers, thinking that that was the way forward in terms of how you deal with this issue. I mean it is a massive error of judgment on the part of the Prime Minister and he doesn't have the humility. He knows it, let's be clear. He absolutely knows he's made a mistake here. He does not have the humility to stand up in front of the Australian people to say, got it wrong. Instead he's doubling down with stubbornness and obstinacy.

MACDONALD: Isn't he standing by a Minister?

MARLES: There is one question about standing by your Minister. But if the only way in which he feels that he can do it, by engaging in a deeply inappropriate act, well then that's not standing by the Australian people.

MACDONALD: Richard Marles, thank you very much.

MARLES: Thanks Hamish

MACDONALD: Richard Marles is the Shadow Defence Minister and Deputy Labor Leader.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.