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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS AM AGENDA
THURSDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2019**

***SUBJECT/S: Medevac; Australia's reading, maths, and science scores plummet;
Government's reforms to the Australian Public Service; Labor; The Presidents Cup.***

KIERAN GILBERT, HOST: Welcome back to the program. Joining us now, the Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Thanks so much for your time. The Government's been adamant that the Medevac legislation was undermining the border protection regime and national security then, more broadly. They've got rid of it. That is a significant legislative win for them to finish the year.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well, firstly the claims obviously rubbish. I mean it's patent rubbish. And it's rubbish because you've had more than 900 people who have come here from Manus and Nauru under medical transfers via Peter Dutton before you have any Medevac legislation at all. So the idea that the 180 odd, I think, who have come under Medevac somehow equals an undermining of our border security in the context of what's already happened is ridiculous.

GILBERT: There's a difference though because the Government says when it's done under that status quo regime that they've got the capacity to return those individuals. Under Medevac, because of a flaw in the way it's designed, those people won't be returned.

MARLES: Well and then the obvious question which comes from there is well how many of the 980 have been returned. The reality is they've been bringing people by the hundreds before Medevac even came into being. But look, the real question now is, you've got Jacqui Lambie saying there was a deal and she doesn't want to talk about it. You've got the Government denying there was a deal. So exactly what's going on here? And I think, the lack of transparency about this has characterised the way in which the Government firstly has gone around about border protection from the day it came to office. But I think that's filtered into the way in which they've governed since they came to office. I mean obviously if this is as significant as the

Government claims, then it's obviously in the national interest for us to understand the terms on which this legislation is passed, and the Government should come clean about what deal have done.

ANNELISE NIELSEN, HOST: The way that Jacqui Lambie was phrasing her speech in the Senate was focused around the fact she was satisfied that her concerns have been met. So is it possible that the Government really did just sit down with her and talk through her concerns, and say the legislation actually matches that so we don't need to do a deal?

MARLES: Well, Jacqui Lambie is making it clear herself that there are matters that she can't talk about or won't talk about and that's precisely the lack of transparency which needs to be rectified, and frankly it can only be rectified by the Government itself. This is an important area of policy. It's in the national interest. There is an obvious interest in it being transparent for the Australian people. The fact of transparency has nothing to do with national security itself. In other words, you can be transparent and maintain national security. It's only ever been a media strategy. It was that back in 2013, has been ever since. This Government should come clean and actually tell us what's going on.

GILBERT: The Government's adamant that its policy hasn't changed, that's what the Prime Minister's said, Mathias Cormann has said it –

MARLES: But something's happened. I mean evidently something's happened. How did they get the vote? And that's the question that the Government needs to answer and Jacqui Lambie needs to answer. And they need to come clean and actually explain the terms on which Jacqui Lambie has now shifted her vote.

GILBERT: But if it is New Zealand as we expect it is, in terms of focusing on that trying to get those people resettled there, that has always been on the table for the Government. So arguably that hasn't, that's not some new addition, it's not like they've just brought in another third party nation. This New Zealand option has always been there if the Government can stop a backdoor entry into Australia.

MARLES: Well let's be clear about that, I mean, I think that is what we need to understand; whether or not the Government has finally gone down the path of pursuing the New Zealand arrangement. Yes, The New Zealand arrangement has been there since the days of Prime Minister Gillard. This Government has actually obstinately refused to pursue it, in fact what has now changed is that the Government is willing to pursue an arrangement with New Zealand in respect of people on Manus and Nauru, well, and we've obviously been arguing that now for that for some time, let's hear about the terms of it- and let's see whether that actually is what's going on. I mean, I think what we've got here is a Government that's very coy about the fact that it's moving down a path that frankly it's been resisting doing for six years and it doesn't want to be upfront with the Australian people about it.

NIELSEN: Now there's another story this week, it got a bit buried by all the Senate fracas but we've seen our education rates really drop in Australia, in particular in science. This is something you're quite passionate about, you have a degree in science–

MARLES: I do, I do –

NIELSON: And pure maths. I can imagine how awful that would have been.

MARLES: No, no, that was fun. The world of Fourier Transforms is a wonderful and magical world. But it's hard to imagine more core business than the question of our educational rankings and making sure that Australia, going into the future, is able to take up the technology of the future, and that we've got kids who've studied and pursued science- and pursued it well, and know that it's being taught well, so that we can take up the jobs of the future. Now I actually think, you know as a nation we probably need to change our cultural relationship to science and haven't much more front and centre in the way we see the world. But this Government is a million miles away from actually doing anything about that, and the fact that we are seeing our rankings slipping so severely under this Government, such that you know, on the current projections that came out from now OECD by the time we get to 2030 will be in the bottom five countries in respect of maths within the OECD. I mean this is a major concern for Australia going forward.

GILBERT: Is it all about additional funds, or is it about making our teachers better equipped. What's the solution?

MARLES: I think it's both Kieran, it's obviously about funding and this Government-

GILBERT: But we've been spending increasingly - increasing amounts every year.

MARLES: Well this Government, you know, slashed what was proposed back in 2013 in terms of the Gonski reforms. But I think it's also the way in which it's taught, but I think there are big questions it's about getting kids interested in science, it's about celebrating big science, which we do in this country, with for example the Square Kilometre Array telescope which is probably the biggest scientific project in the world today, based in Western Australia and South Africa and Murchison, but who knows about that? And this Government is not really doing anything to pursue a scientific agenda both in terms of encouraging kids to pursue science, encouraging people or teachers to teach science, and as a result what we're now seeing is that we're slipping down the rankings in a way which is genuinely alarming.

NIELSEN: Is it just that we've kind of gotten away from traditional teaching methods? Like I know when I went through school we didn't have grades because they make you feel bad if they weren't the right number and everything, and that wouldn't have stacked up in your generation. Is it just the fact that we're not focusing on the right things in the classroom and the culture around that?

MARLES: Look, I mean I think we need to be making sure that we as a nation are teaching, I suppose at the cutting edge of what is modern teaching practices. But ultimately, you know what I think it is, we need a Government which has intent and purpose around this. Both in terms of specifically science and maths and encouraging students down that path and having better quality but in relation to education in general. I mean when you look at the region in which we live the way in which it is embracing technology and the way in which it's embracing science and maths, education the prospect that Australia is falling down these rankings at this rate ought to strike alarm into everyone. And frankly this is a Government in respect of all of that which is asleep at the wheel.

GILBERT: There were reports today that the Governments going to provide its response to the Thodey Review on the Public Service, with quite a major consolidation. Five public service chiefs to go, according to reports in the AFR and The Australian today- emerging this morning. What's your reaction to that and are you concerned if there were to be further cuts to the public service?

MARLES: Well obviously the public service has a very significant role to play and there needs to be stability within the public service. I only know what has been reported and I've seen those reports. Again, I think it's really important, particularly at this time given all the challenges that we're facing that the Government is managing the public service in a way which maintains stability and ultimately maintains morale and you know we'll see whether those reports emerge in terms of being, in terms of whether or not that's actually what's going on in morale.

GILBERT: And on morale, do you feel on another matter, that Labor given the very great disappointment that you had only a few months ago, well a bit more than a few months ago now, but you lost the election this year. You were meant to win it, most people thought you were going to win it. How are you finishing this year? Has it given you some encouragement that you can rebuild and be competitive for the next one?

MARLES: Oh absolutely. And look there's no question that what happened in May was a huge shock for us. It was an extremely difficult moment. I mean a historically difficult moment really for our movement. And there has naturally and understandably been a whole lot of grief and soul searching in the aftermath of it. But we've- you know- we've picked ourselves up, we've dusted ourselves off. I think anyone looking at how we're operating now, you know we end the year with a spring in our step. Frankly to get to that point within six months of what was a really devastating result, I think is a fantastic achievement. And you know whatever has happened to us doesn't take away from the fact that this is a government without an agenda. This is a government which has got no idea how to deal with the major challenges that our country is facing. I mean we talk about slipping down the education rankings but be it the economy, be it dealing with the drought. This is literally a government which is surprised to find itself where it does and has no plan to deal with all these challenges. Now I think the Australian people can see all of that and I actually feel very confident that if we're presenting which we certainly will be as a competitive alternative at the next election that stands us in good stead.

GILBERT: And it would be remiss of me not to ask you about a major event in your hometown. We're both golf tragics.

MARLES: We are golf tragics.

GILBERT: The Presidents Cup next week. President Trump won't be there but you will be there.

MARLES: Well, I hope to drop in. This is one of the biggest golf event as you know that we will see in Australia for many years. We go in as significant underdogs. I think Adam Scott is the only player on the international team which has ranked above any of the Americans, in terms of their world ranking so. But in terms of David and Goliath stories, you know fingers are crossed for that contest.

GILBERT: Let's hope so. Let's hope for an upset. Thank you. Good. And enjoy it next week, I certainly will be. Talk to you soon.

ENDS

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