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SUBJECTS: Easing of restrictions in Victoria; Anthony Albanese's vision statement

KIERAN GILBERT, HOST: Let's go live to the Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles. Mr. Marles, thanks for your time as always. We'll get to the speech by Anthony Albanese, today's Fifth Vision statement because there are some interesting elements to that but I want to start with the Andrews Government. Very cautious, very slow start to easing restrictions and still parents; we've got no detail- as a parent of kids at school in that State, can you see why some families are frustrated?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Oh, I can understand why people are experiencing frustration at this moment. And you're right, I have three children at home who are currently going through home schooling, so I am brushing up on my year ten and year seven maths to try and help them as they go through it. But I also understand where Daniel Andrews is at. I mean it's really important that we get this right. The worst possible outcome here is that we move in a way which sees this disease get out of control again. And were that to be the case and there were to be a need to go down to a more general lockdown in the way that we've just experienced over the last two months, that would be an absolute disaster from a health point of view but from an economic point of view as well. So this is a path that we only ever want to have to walk once. And I can understand the caution on the part of the Andrews Government in making sure that we get it right the first time.

GILBERT: Do you think he's been rattled by this Cedar Meats, that abattoir where, just at the time we're talking about easing, we've seen a spike- an outbreak at that particular facility?

MARLES: No, I don't think it's about that case specifically, I think what that case highlights is that we are likely to see outbreaks in what is going to be the new normal. But it's really important that we get the overall level of the disease in the community as low as possible, so that there are as few of those outbreaks as possible. And the infrastructure that we're putting in place, you know, the case tracing, the ability to respond in a kind of a localized lockdown way- that that's able to cope with whatever is ultimately there. But the precondition here is that we need to be making sure that as few people as humanly possible have active cases of covid-19 in our community. And the way we do that is to make sure that there is time for those who have the disease to recover and for those active cases to resolve, so that when we are ultimately easing restrictions there are as few of these cases around as possible.

GILBERT: We spoke a couple of weeks ago when this was just emerging, it was really upon us this threat and the cases were rising. Are you pleasantly surprised at just how extraordinary the achievements been here by our governments both at the State and Federal level?

MARLES: I'm definitely pleasantly surprised, there's no doubt about that. I was anxious as I think a lot of people were through the community that we might see something far worse from a health point of view than has actually emanated. And really that is a testament to the magnificent actions of the Australian people in collectively working together towards a common cause- and that is looking after one another's health. And really, people have been fantastic. But it's why it's so important that the gains that have been won over that period of time are not lost by getting it wrong with this end of the process. I mean, we do need to get the economy back up and running. We all understand that. We do need to go through a process of easing restrictions. But it's really important that we walk this path very carefully and very cautiously because it's a path we only ever want to have to walk once.

GILBERT: The Labor Leader Anthony Albanese gave- as I said- his Fifth Vision Statement. This was in a speech to Caucus today. He says, the Prime Minister's talk of SnapBack to what came before foreshadows a return to the Liberal's traditional agenda. And he says, marketing slogans won't ease the ongoing burden of this pandemic or hasten recovery.

This speech is the most political that we've seen the Labor Leader since the crisis. Is that a risk to be taking the gloves off, right now, at a time when people want a sense of national purpose?

MARLES: Well I think there's a sense of national purpose. But I don't think speaking truth is about taking the gloves off. I think it was really important that Anthony Albanese spoke in the terms that he did- and put down the marker that this speech represents. I mean, we think that the world after the coronavirus crisis is over- or suppressed- is going to be different to the one that has been before. And Anthony is right; there's not going to be a SnapBack to what we saw before. But what that world looks like is not inevitable. And now is really the time to be thinking about that. Now, we want that world to be a whole lot better and we see Government as playing a really important role in making sure that we have a resilient economy. I mean, the frailty of the economy going into this crisis has been revealed by the crisis. We need to make sure that we continue to be- or once again are a country which makes things. Again, I think we've seen a frailty in the economy as a result of the very significant level of deindustrialization that has occurred since this Government came to power back in 2013. And with all of that, we need to have an economy which is providing people with secure jobs. Again, we've seen within the economy over the last six years a rise in casualisation and underemployment. And it's really important that we are working towards a future in this country where there are good, secure jobs. Now, that requires this moment of really reimagining what Australia looks like to put our economy on a track which will make it fit for purpose for the 21st century. And this is really the beginning of that process from the point of view of Labor's thinking about it. That's the marker that Anthony wanted to lay down with this speech. And in that sense, it's a very different way of thinking about things to the government.

GILBERT: Yeah, I guess that's reasonable but is it politically smart at the moment to be going back in to the fray, in terms of the political attacks? Like you know, talking here the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government doubled the debt, economic growth below trend, then saying Christian Porter was declaring that casual workers wouldn't need the support during this crisis because of the loading they receive, from let them eat cake, to let them use their loading. I mean, fine to make those criticisms but to launch into the political spray, isn't that a SnapBack in itself? And doesn't it carry risks when people want bipartisanship?

MARLES: What our country looks like in the aftermath of the coronavirus crisis is going to be a contested space. And there is nothing inevitable about the outcome of it. Now, having a Government as we've got right now which sees its principal argument about what that

world should look like has been Government getting out of the way, is just not going to cut it; in terms of imagining the kind of future for Australia which provides the secure jobs, which sees us become a country which makes things again. And that we have that kind of resilient economy that we need, and which has been laid bare in its failure by virtue of this crisis. All of that is going to be a contested space and we intend to contest it. We need to do that from the point of view of the future of this country- and every citizen within it. And it's in fact our job to do that. Now, that doesn't mean that- I mean, this is a thoughtful process. And it's very important that we are speaking truth in that. And if some of it is uncomfortable for the Government then so be it. But if this kind of cry for bipartisanship actually means that we stop having a debate about our future, well then that's not going to be a positive thing for the country either.

GILBERT: When we look to the speech and major announcements; obviously we're well out from the next election- I'm not expecting huge policy commitments in every address that the Opposition Leader gives. But is it fair to say that you will be a smaller target, than last time? I mean it seems quite obvious that that's where you're heading. That you will be a small target at the next election.

MARLES: It's not the phrase I'd use. But the review that Labor undertook in relation to last year's election was handed down last year. And the point was made in that about the volume of policies that we announced, the ability- or perhaps the inability for those policies to be digested in the context of the lead up to the election. I mean, these are all important lessons that we want to learn from 2019. We will certainly take them forward. But it's not about making ourselves a smaller target. I mean, we will absolutely have a vision for the country. What Anthony did in his speech today was lay a really important marker down in terms of developing that vision. And it is going to be telling a story to the Australian people about how we see Australia in the future as a country which is economically resilient, which does make things, which does have a much better embrace of science in the process. And with that there are more secure jobs that are being created throughout the labour market. And that Government, critically, has an important role to play in leading that process. They're really the markers that Anthony wanted to lay down, today. And we will be telling that story. And in the process, I don't think that makes us a small target but we will certainly be very focused on telling the story, and learning the lessons from the last election- as was articulated in the election review last year.

GILBERT: Finally on to the row with China; these tensions which we've seen bubbling away- not just over this crisis but since really the Turnbull Government's foreign

interference laws- and so on, which didn't go down well. And there has been this review into barley exports- it is about one per cent of our total exports to China, according to Chris Richardson from Deloitte Access Economics. But nonetheless it's a \$600 million export. What do you make of this shot across the bow from the Chinese Government?

MARLES: Well certainly if that were to transpire, it would be a very poor outcome in terms of Australia's exports to China. And really, it is a matter for the Government to make sure that it manages this issue and that it does so in the context of properly managing the relationship with China. I mean, this is a very complicated relationship but one which requires a lot of thought and a sense of purpose about where we're going- and what we see from the relationship. Our economic relationship with China is obviously critically important. And so it's very, you know, it matters greatly that the Government manages this issue specifically.

GILBERT: And on the criticism that the Chinese Communist Party- and we've seen that's continued via the Ambassador, but out of Beijing as well on this investigation. Do you want them to dial down the rhetoric now, to see us through the eye of the storm when it comes to this crisis? And hopefully have more support when it comes to the G20 and other international groups.

MARLES: Obviously the diplomatic row that we have seen play out is unfortunate. It would be good from both the point of view of China and Australia were this not to be in place. Now, that is not to say that we don't need to have a clear sense of how the coronavirus ultimately originated. That is a really important matter for China and it's a very important matter for the world and we all have an interest in seeing that. But it does matter that the relationship is on the best footing that it can possibly be on. And it's to state the obvious that the diplomatic row that we've seen in the last few weeks is unfortunate. And the sooner we are past that the better, I think.

GILBERT: Richard Marles, thanks very much for your time. And on a brighter note; being a golf tragic- you're looking forward to hitting the links this weekend, I would have thought?

MARLES: Well there are a lot of serious matters that have played out over the last few months but yes, Kieran that will be one issue that I will be giving a lot of attention to this weekend.

GILBERT: Yeah good for good one's sanity; following- chasing a little white ball around a

paddock. Thank you Richard, I appreciate your time as always. Talk to you soon.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.