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E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS – FIRST EDITION
TUESDAY, 26 MAY 2020

SUBJECTS: State borders; The Prime Minister's NPC Address; China.

PETER STEFANOVIC, HOST: Joining me now is Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles. Richard, good to see you. Thanks very much for joining us. So just on that what do you make of Clive Palmer getting involved? He's going to the High Court now over Western Australia. That's on the back of Pauline Hanson interfering in Queensland. What do you make of their involvement?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well border closures were put in place as a part of physical distancing and I think we all understand the role that that's played in in keeping us safe from this virus. Obviously, you know, all of us want to get back to normal as quickly as possible but we've got to be doing this in a way which is safe and measured because if we do it in a way where we see the virus come back again, well then that's what's going to be really bad for the economy. I mean, I think the thing here Peter, we're watching Governments fight each other over the question of whether or not borders should be reopened and when what you would hope is that this is being done in a cooperative manner. And frankly this is a failure of leadership on the part of the Prime Minister.

STEFANOVIC: Well how can Queensland expect extended Federal Government support if it keeps its border locked?

MARLES: Well ultimately the judgments about when it is time to ease this particular measure- in terms of community safety and getting our economy going- needs to be made by the people on the ground but it has got to be something which is done cooperatively with Governments around the country. And frankly, when I look at what's going on in the High Court today, when I look at all the squabbles going on between the Governments right now what I see is a Prime Minister who is missing in action. I mean he touts his credentials in terms of cooperative federalism. Where is he on this most fundamental point?

STEFANOVIC: But surely you would prefer to see Australians fly within Australia, rather than going to New Zealand, which is being touted?

MARLES: Of course but what we've got to do with this measure is we need to do with all the physical distancing measures; is make sure that we are pulling them off at the right time, so that we only go through this process once. But again, this needs to be done with leadership from our Prime Minister. And the fact that we've got Governments in Australia- including the Commonwealth- squabbling over whether or not borders should be open or shut says, everything about the failure of Scott Morrison's leadership.

STEFANOVIC: To be fair to Scott Morrison he doesn't run the borders, it's the Premiers who do that.

MARLES: I don't- that's not clear to me at all. I mean, I think I think the fact of the matter here is we're talking about borders within our nation; physical distancing measures which are going on in Australia. We need national leadership from our national leader, and he's gone missing in action on this question.

STEFANOVIC: But what I'm saying is this is Anastacia Palaszczuk's call, right, to reopen the border? It's not Scott Morrison's call.

MARLES: Well I think we'll find out whose call it is in terms of what's going on in the courts right now. But if it was all being done cooperatively, between the Governments of Australia and the Commonwealth then we wouldn't have to worry about this. And the fact of the matter is we've got a Prime Minister who's missing in action.

STEFANOVIC: But you've got to acknowledge it; you know tourism- and I single out Queensland here because it is the tourism state. You've got businesses that are on its knees at the moment when it comes to tourism. There are claims this morning of forecasts in Far North Queensland that unemployment could reach 18 per cent- this is in the tourism sector. So surely it's on the Premier to reopen that border and get that traffic going again, to help these businesses regardless of what the PM does?

MARLES: I think it's on the nation. I think how we get out of this crisis is a national issue and it involves cooperation at all levels. And you know, we see this time and again with Scott Morrison, he likes to be there on the good days but when things get tough it's then a matter for some other Government- it's not his business. The fact of the matter is as we get through this issue, we need national leadership. Yeah, Cairns is part of Queensland, it is part of the nation as well. And critical sectors within the economy- obviously we want to see them back on their feet and we want to see them get going and if we could wish away all the physical distancing measures safely we would do it tomorrow. But this virus has hit and we need to be doing this in a safe way so that we only ever have to do it once.

STEFANOVIC: Okay. Well just on the Prime Minister; he'll be giving a key speech later on today at the National Press Club. There's already suggestions that it'll be trades and skills that will form a part of this speech, and his view of how this economy can recover. First of all what are your thoughts on the attention that is being placed on trades and skills now.

MARLES: Well I think trades and skills are clearly going to be really important in terms of getting the economy going again- and its right to have a focus on that. But let's not forget that this is

coming from a Prime Minister whose government over the last seven years has cut \$3 billion from skills. This is- I mean since the Abbott-Morrison-Turnbull Government came to power we've seen 140,000 less apprentices and trainees in Australia today. So it's kind of extraordinary coming from this Prime Minister to be focusing on this issue, given the vandalism that he and his government have wrought on the entire sector over the last seven years. And I think Peter, this is a critical point in terms of you know when we hear about how the Prime Minister seeks to frame this; he talks about wanting to get this economy out of ICU. The fact of the matter is the economy barely had a heartbeat before we came into the COVID crisis, it was already really sick. You know we had the lowest wage growth on record. We had a government which had doubled the debt. We had an economy with anaemic growth, and that set the conditions for this economy going into the COVID crisis. So what we've got to hear from the Prime Minister today is how he's going to get more Australians working when we are facing unemployment figures now which are the worst since the Great Depression.

STEFANOVIC: The Mitchell Institute though says the Federal Government's share of funding when it comes to vocational training has actually increased from 26.5 per cent in 2006 to 38.2 per cent in 2018. So doesn't that signify that again, it's a problem for the states?

MARLES: Well what I can tell you is, since 2013 we've seen a Government here cut \$3 billion out of skills and training. I mean, that is the record of the Abbott-Morrison-Turnbull Government when it comes to this question. So they have wrought a whole lot of vandalism on the economy already since they've been in power. Yeah, we do need to turn that issue around, no doubt. Whether or not we're going to be seeing that occur from a Government who's been hell bent on doing the opposite for the last seven years; well you know we'll wait and see. But we actually need to hear a plan from the Prime Minister today which is more than a couple of word slogans. We actually need to- what is the substantive plan to get this economy back into a place where Australians are working again?

STEFANOVIC: Would you support cuts to company tax rates? Or are you still along the lines of investment allowances as being a better option?

MARLES: Well again let's see what this government- what the Prime Minister says today. Our predisposition is always to take things as they come. I mean, this is a Government or a Prime Minister who was seeking to put in place tax cuts five years down the track- it was always our view that it's a bit hard to predict what happens in this world, and the last six months have certainly borne that out. So let's see where we get to and let's say what the Prime Minister actually announces.

STEFANOVIC: Just finally- and I'm sorry I'm taking up so much of your time- Richard Marles, just finally one more question; there's been some comments overnight from China's Commerce Minister that says, quote; China has been cautious and restrained in its trade remedy measures, only launched one trade remedy investigation in almost 50 years compared to 100 probes into goods from China by Australia. I mean is that even right?

MARLES: I don't know the exact figures there but I think what we want Peter, is obviously to see the trading situation with China get better. And it's really important again that we see leadership from our Prime Minister on this. I mean, when it comes to our relationship with China we don't see a lot from our Foreign Minister and too often seems to me- sadly- that the relationship between this government and China is being led by the fringe elements of the government.

STEFANOVIC: Do you support Joel Fitzgibbon's comments that Australia had been demonising China?

MARLES: Well, I think what's important here is that we are doing everything we can to get the relationship with China to a better place-

STEFANOVIC: But do you support those comments?

MARLES: And honestly our relationship with- our relationship with China matters. And what we have seen- I think this is the point that Joel was referring to- is a whole lot of comments made from fringe elements of the Government which have tended to fill the space which has been created by, you know we don't hear from Marise Payne and we don't hear much from the Prime Minister, in relation to this critical relationship. Now, it's obviously critically important that Australia makes its voice heard, in our own national interests and we've got the courage to do that when it differs from Chinese action. And that is the case when it comes to the need to have an independent inquiry around the origins of the coronavirus. But it's also true that there hasn't been a lot of ballast in this relationship over the last three years. And too often we see comments from the fringe dwellers of the Government rather than the senior ministers. And I think that's been one of the problems here. Again it's a failure of leadership on the part of our Prime Minister.

STEFANOVIC: Richard Marles, we're out of time but I appreciate your time this morning. Thanks for joining us.

MARLES: Thanks Peter.

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Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.