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SUBJECT/S: The Government's extension of the instant asset write-off; the Government child care snap back; Mathias Cormann facing the Senate Inquiry; Social distancing; Weekend protests.

PETER STEFANOVIC, HOST: Well the Government will extend the instant asset write-off scheme for small businesses until the end of the year. So businesses with a turnover of less than \$500 million will be able to use the scheme to write-off multiple assets, worth up to \$150,000. Well joining me now, live from Canberra is Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles. Richard, good morning to you. Thanks for joining us. First of all what's your reaction to this announcement today?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well this is a move in the right direction. But the idea that this was going to stop at the end of June was always ridiculous. So it's good that the Government has seen sense here and that this has been extended through to the end of the year.

STEFANOVIC: Why do you think it's ridiculous?

MARLES: Well it would be, I mean given the state of the economy, given what small businesses are experiencing, given the extent of- or the decrease in private investment, I mean there obviously needed to be an extension of this program- we were calling for greater support when this was originally announced. But look it's a good step in the right direction and so the Government deserves to be applauded for it.

STEFANOVIC: Okay. Just on to child care; free child care basically ending now, that was the announcement yesterday. What are your primary concerns with this?

MARLES: Well, I mean this really has been a stuff up from day one in terms of how the Government has sought to give relief to the child care sector. I mean there's lots of child care centres in my electorate which have really been, I think, firstly struggling to understand what the Government's trying to bring in here. But for a whole lot of them, they've been put in worse situations from the start. Now we've got this announcement. And what's clear from this announcement is that for child care workers, Jobkeeper is now going to come to an end in July, now that's months before the time that was originally promised by the Prime Minister. It's unclear whether this transition package which has been announced with it is going to support employment, so whether those same child care workers are going to be able to continue to be supported in their work in the sector. And we've got to remember that you know the child care sector obviously is critically important for the economy but it's been helping those essential workers- teachers, those working in health- who have been so important in terms of getting us through this really extraordinary period. So you know, this raises a whole lot more questions than it answers. And I think it's not surprising that the child care sector is up in arms as a result of this announcement.

STEFANOVIC: Well I mean the Minister has said it was done with consultation with the sector. But despite that, are you suspecting that there will be mass drop outs?

MARLES: Well I think what there will be is mass confusion, as there has been from the moment that the original relief was put forward in respect of the child care sector. And certainly those who I speak to in the sector have been struggling with the Government's relief package from the outset. Many of them have actually been worse off as a result of the relief package that's been put in place. And I don't think this is going to make it any better. I mean this is a critical part of the economy which obviously provides a critical service to people throughout the economy but particularly to those essential service workers. The Government has got to get this right. And ending Jobkeeper for child care workers in July is a complete breach of faith, given what the Prime Minister had undertaken in relation to the continuation of Jobkeeper for all workers through until September.

STEFANOVIC: There will be transition payments that will be in place though to cushion the blow and the Minister said this morning that that will maintain demand. So why are you so unsure about that?

MARLES: Well because the Minister is unable to give an undertaking that what that transition payment will do is be connected to employment. So whether or not it ultimately supports those workers in places is unclear. And the Minister has not been able to give that

clarity. And so I think that's the issue here. There's uncertainty for those who are working in the sector, there is uncertainty for those who are operating child care centres.

STEFANOVIC: Yeah. So your concern is it's the jobs, it's the job side of things and then so once people all of a sudden have to stump up this extra cash to go to child care centres. And is it a concern for you that child care centres will artificially inflate prices to make up shortfalls?

MARLES: Well, I think child care centres are doing it tough. It is a concern for me about whether- how child care centres will continue to manage their situation going forward. As I say, I have spoken with a number of child care centres in my electorate- they've been really struggling through this period notwithstanding the relief package which for a whole lot of them has made things worse rather than better. I don't think this is going to add clarity for them in terms of how they navigate their businesses through this extraordinary period of time. So it's both the child care centres and the workers who are in them. And obviously you then have got to think about the consumers because this is the provision of a really important service within our community.

STEFANOVIC: Well Dan Tehan says it's not set and forget and it will review it. Does that give you some comfort?

MARLES: Well it'd be better if the Minister and the Government was getting this right from the outset. Sure but better to review it than to forget it, I guess. But what would be even better than that is to get it right at the outset.

STEFANOVIC: What sort of heat are you expecting the Finance Minister to get in to at the Senate Inquiry today regarding Jobkeeper?

MARLES: Well, I think there are questions that need to be answered here. I mean, look if we are talking about the child care sector, this was a commitment to provide Jobkeeper through for all those who were on it through until September. Now literally within a matter of days, there is an announcement which is making it clear that for a group of workers, they're not going to be paid Jobkeeper after a date in July. And that's a complete breach of faith.

STEFANOVIC: Just before you go, I just want to get your thoughts on borders. Richard, I mean even in your own State there's a bit of confusion about what people can and can't do- what they can be fined for. You've got the Mornington Pier- a pier on the Mornington Peninsula where fishermen were told to basically get off because they were crowding it. But then you've got these protests that take place on the weekend and it's not just in Victoria, it's nationwide that they take place. So, is it quite right that people are accusing State

Governments of double standards?

MARLES: I think we've got to see all of this in context. Look, let me be clear in relation to the protests; in the lead up to last weekend I had enormous concern about there being mass gatherings in the context of a pandemic. And I certainly exercised my voice in the lead up to the weekend in that way, as a lot of people did, as State Premiers did. I think we all had concerns about the public health impact of protests of this kind occurring. Having said that, I understand what the protests were about. Like it's a pretty serious issue. You know, if you are born indigenous in this country your life stands to be materially worse than those of us who were born non-indigenous. So you know, I find it hard to engage in judgment in relation to that. I think we do need to have some sensitivity about that. Obviously it isn't the same as going fishing. And I do think that we need to be managing these social distancing measures in a way which is in accordance with medical advice and doing so in a way which has caution obviously, because whilst we do want to open up the economy and we want to open up recreation- and you know people should be able to go fishing at a point in time. It's also really important that we only ever walk this road once. And I think what we're seeing in New Zealand is the benefits that that economy is going to reap by virtue of having managed the transition very carefully and prudently- and now they're in a place where they can declare themselves COVID free and that's going to allow them to open up their economy much more widely than we would be able to at this moment.

STEFANOVIC: Those MPs who protested, should they have to self-isolate?

MARLES: Look I think ultimately that's a question for them. And it's a question for them taking the relevant medical advice. I mean, ultimately the question you ask- and I understand the context in which it is asked, it is ultimately a medical question and so it needs to be based on the medical advice which those MPs should acquire.

STEFANOVIC: Okay, Richard Marles, appreciate your time this morning. Thanks for joining us.

MARLES: Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.