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E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS – AM AGENDA
THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2020

SUBJECTS: Qantas jobs; COVID-19 in Victoria; China.

ANNELISE NIELSEN, HOST: Joining us live is Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles. Richard Marles, thank you for your time. Firstly, we have had this breaking news about Qantas this morning, 6,000 jobs to go. Should the Government be stepping in with some assistance for the airline industry?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well we're a country which is very dependent on aviation. And this is obviously terrible news. It is a very significant threat to thousands of aviation workers in this country. Already our other airline is in difficulty. So I think it's really important that we're hearing from the Government immediately this morning about what their plans are in respect to this situation. As I say, we are a country heavily dependent on aviation and the government needs a plan.

NIELSEN: Would you support a bailout of Qantas if it came to that?

MARLES: Firstly, we need to take this a step at a time. I mean, this news has literally broken in the last few minutes. What I think really is important is an acknowledgment on the part of the Government that we are a country which is heavily dependent upon aviation. And it's incumbent upon them to communicate with the Australian people about what their

plan is for this situation.

NIELSEN: Now the Federal Government is offered ADF personnel to Victoria. It looks like that offer's been taken up. But do you think this is a move by the Federal Government to put pressure on Daniel Andrews about those restrictions trying to highlight perhaps that they don't think that it's been managed too well in Victoria.

MARLES: No I don't think that's what's going on at all. I mean, these are requests from the Victorian Government. I mean, the ADF have been involved in COVID from the get go- they've had a taskforce which has been headed by Lieutenant General John Frewen, and it's been involved in dealing with the coronavirus around the country, at the lead of various state based emergency response centres and that's the same in Victoria, they entered it with case tracing, with helping make PPE equipment, with logistics. And I think what we're seeing here is in circumstances where there is a rise in numbers in Victoria, a request being sought and now being fulfilled by the ADF to help. And I think that's completely appropriate.

NIELSEN: Why do you think Victoria has seen a second wave and nowhere else in the country has?

MARLES: It's a really good question and it's one where we need to get an answer to it. I think it is a reminder of how vigilant we need to remain. Short of eradicating the disease altogether, as long as it is in the community at any level then it has the potential to flare up again and particularly if people become complacent. Now, I don't actually think that is what is happening in Victoria, I think the Victorian Government has been acting very well in relation to corona from day one and I think they have been a leader, if not the leader, in the country in terms of encouraging a proper systematic response to this. And by and large, actually it's been the Commonwealth criticising Victoria for doing too much- or, you know, not being quick enough to ease restrictions and Victoria have been quite steadfast in being cautious about the way in which it's been going about its business. And I think what we're now seeing bears that out. I suspect that the kind of increase in numbers that we've seen of Victoria could happen elsewhere. And I don't think this is just a cautionary moment for Victoria, I think it is for the whole nation.

NIELSEN: One of the issues that the Health Minister Greg Hunt has singled out and it was backed up by the Chief Medical Officer Brendan Murphy, was the Black Lives Matter rally saying that, it's hard to ask people to adhere to those physical distancing restrictions when

they see 10,000 people go out to the city and ignore them. Do you agree?

MARLES: Well in the lead up to that rally it was my view, and a view that I spoke about publicly that whilst this was a very important cause and one that we all sympathise with, the global pandemic has affected our lives in every way and that includes our ability to give expression to our voice as a community. And so you know, it was my view that that shouldn't have happened. But you know I understand it. I think the reality is now, moving forward it's really important that people are vigilant about coronavirus, that we understand that it hasn't been completely eradicated from our communities and so long as that is the case there is always the potential for it to flare up. I think this is a really important message to be bearing in mind as we head into school holidays, when people might be thinking about getting out and about more or in engaging in travel. We've still got a long way to go to defeat this thing and it's important people keep focused on that.

NIELSEN: But do you agree it undermines the Government's message, if thousands of people are allowed to gather in a city at the same time they're told it's illegal. So someone sitting at home says, 'why can't I have my family over for a significant religious or family event?' 'Why can't I open my business and get my livelihood back?'

MARLES: Well I agree. It was my view that that demonstration shouldn't have happened. I didn't go and were there to be a call for another one, whilst I completely support the cause that people are supporting in these protests, I wouldn't be engaging in them in the midst of a global pandemic. I mean, there is a public health imperative. So I absolutely agree with that. But you know, it has happened and I understand the circumstances in which it's happened. And I think, if we are all being honest it has been a very vexed issue. But my view about it has been clear from the outset, as has Anthony Albanese's and I think leaders across the country, that we just have to be mindful, no matter what the issue that we are dealing, we are going about our lives right now in the midst of a global pandemic. That is going to impact every way in which we lead our lives, including engaging in protests. So I absolutely think that. And that's why it's so important that people, as we go forward, remember that this is out there. That we need to remain vigilant and we need to be thinking about our physical distancing. And so long as the disease exists at any level within our societies, if we take the foot off the break, it will inevitably flare up, increasing numbers that we have seen in Victoria are a reminder of that and that's why we need to be completely vigilant about it.

NIELSEN: Now there's been a lot of reporting about a divide within the Labor Party on how

to handle the relationship with China. A lot of this is focused on this 'Wolverines Group', that's a pro America alliance of a number of MPs, including Labor MPs, Kimberley Kitching and Anthony Byrne. Do you think it's okay for Labor MPs to be a member of the Wolverines?

MARLES: Look, I think you're going to have a wide range of views in relation to an issue as complex as our relationship with China and I think that's fair enough. I think it's completely healthy, to be honest. And how they want to describe themselves is their business. But actually, you know, the lack of clarity about a position on China lies with the Government. I mean debate is important but what we need to have is an authoritative view about the way we as a country are going to go about our relationship with China. And that view needs to come from the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister. And the truth is that both of those people have been pretty silent, I mean, the Foreign Minister is literally in hiding on these questions. We need to understand what is the guiding principle that the Government is working on, in terms of its relationship with China. Now, we would have no idea of that because Marise Payne is simply not out there telling us. Between Marise Payne and Linda Reynolds there is no description of the way in which Australia is seeking to go about its strategic policy and this is an enormous failure. Marise Payne doesn't think it's her job to explain to the Australian people what Australia should be doing in relation to all this. And so as a result, you've got a void which I actually think is being filled by the more extreme voices on the Government side. I think that is where the issue lies in terms of how our country is managing our relationship with China. Frankly, we need to be hearing a lot more from Marise Payne and a lot less from George Christensen.

NIELSEN: The Government's defence of this is that they say the Liberal Party is a broad church, that they allow different points of view and they're happy for backbenchers like Andrew Hastie to be a member of this group. So why not have the same approach from Labor? If you were given the option would you join the Wolverines?

MARLES: Well I haven't. And people can have the views that they have and what they call themselves is their business. It's fine to have a broad church, that's not the point here. The point here is we need a clarity of voice from our Foreign Minister. In the absence of that all you get is, you know, voices on the edge like those of George Christensen, now he should not be the person who is guiding Australia's relationship with China. The person who should be doing that is our Foreign Minister and what we hear from the Foreign Minister is, she doesn't want to engage in megaphone diplomacy. That's fine. She shouldn't. She doesn't want to engage in arguments with Labor, that's fine. She doesn't have to. But there

is an obligation on the Foreign Minister to actually speak to the Australian people about foreign policy. About what is the guiding philosophy that this Government is bringing to bear in terms of its relationship with China. We don't hear about that. So it's not about a broad church, it's about a clarity of voice from our Government. And right now we've got radio silence. And I think that is the fundamental issue here and that's what needs to be addressed.

NIELSEN: Deputy Labor Leader Richard Marles, as always thank you for your time.

MARLES: Thanks Annelise.

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