

**RICHARD MARLES MP
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY
SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
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SUBJECTS: Victorian cases of COVID; Jobseeker; Defence; Australia's Future Submarines.

ALLISON LANGDON, HOST: For more we are joined by Tourism and Trade Minister, Simon Birmingham, and Deputy Opposition Leader, Richard Marles. Gentlemen, a very good morning to both of you.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Good morning, Ally.

SIMON BIRMINGHAM, MINISTER FOR TRADE, TOURISM AND INVESTMENT: Good morning, Ally.

LANGDON: So Simon, borders are tough for the PM to argue right now. Why would anyone open them to Victoria?

BIRMINGHAM: Well Ally, look our priority is first and foremost on getting these issues in Victoria sorted. It's incredibly disappointing and concerning that Victoria has found itself in this situation. Every other state and territory has successfully managed COVID so far, and we are giving all the resources we can as other states and territories are also giving to Victoria to try to help the Victorian Government get on top of this and make sure that this does not become a serious outbreak that spreads elsewhere.

LANGDON: I mean Richard, I'm sorry that it is your state but this whole thing has been

a monumental stuff up, hasn't it? Everyone is pointing fingers but the buck stops with who?

MARLES: Well, there is a judicial inquiry which has been set up Ally, and there will be answers that come from that. I think one of the points to make here, though is that so long as the virus exists in any form within the country, it can obviously flare up pretty easily and that is the lesson that we are seeing place out in Victoria. It is important to understand what mistakes have been made, if they have been, and to make sure they are not replicated. But I think the other point to make is, we have to be really cautious in terms of how we move forward with the easing of restrictions. And we have to be that from an economic point of view, because we want to make sure this is a process that we only go through once. And certainly there has been a lot of criticism around the country, and indeed in this segment of Annastacia over the last month, and her decisions around the border start looking a lot better in the context of what is playing out now. We need to be very careful around Australia in terms of how we ease restrictions because this can easily flare up and that is what we are seeing in Victoria.

LANGDON: Do we seriously need a judicial inquiry here? Shouldn't it just be obvious? The buck stops at the top, doesn't it? This stops with the Daniel Andrews Government and there are calls this morning that the Health Minister should go.

MARLES: Well, I think in terms of the calls from the Victorian Opposition, like, they have been one out around the country in terms of being politicians first and Victorians second. At a moment where we need national unity, and that is politics not as usual, they have been breathless in their partisanship over the last couple of months. The fact of the matter is, Jenny Mikakos as the Victorian Health Minister and the Victorian Government over the last few months, as Governments around Australia have, have been doing a really good job in a very difficult situation. I don't think there is anything obvious about the way in which this disease operates. That is part of how this has played out around the world. And I think making sure we get these lessons right is important and a judicial inquiry in this context is exactly the way to go so that we understand exactly what has happened here and make sure it doesn't happen again.

LANGDON: Simon, boosting JobSeeker by \$200 a fortnight, it will cost the budget \$4 billion for six months. We have to increase it, don't we?

BIRMINGHAM: We have made decisions about JobSeeker, JobKeeper right through to nearly the end of September. And we have been very clear in relation to JobKeeper; there is a review process under way. We are looking at all of the different factors there to make sure we get the economics of this circumstance right. These are the most challenging

economic times that a government has faced in Australia's peace time history. We are going to work through it carefully but we have also been clear we will have more to say in terms of what the outlook looks like post that September period within the next month. And that is going to give everybody certainty about how we are going to continue to apply different settings or what we are going to do to keep helping the economy through these incredibly challenging times.

LANGDON: Well, I mean clearly we can afford it, we are about to spend \$270 billion on Defence.

BIRMINGHAM: That is very important investment in our long-term national security. These are the different pressures that as a Government we are weighing and we are trying to get that balance right, to ensure that Australia's sovereignty, security is protected with investment in the type of Defence structures that we need for the future, but equally looking at the immediate priorities around first and foremost COVID-19 and the health issues, but alongside that the economic issues that of course have got so many Australians out of jobs, out of work at present and our priority is about how do we get them back into those jobs and get the economy functioning as quickly but also as safely as we possibly can. And sadly these sort of situations we are seeing in Victoria, which I am amazed Richard Marles is describing as a good job, but these sorts of situations are threatening that and that is why we are offering support of our Defence Forces and other agencies of Government as are States and Territories, Labor and Liberal, are all offering to help the Victorian Government to get on top of this.

LANGDON: Yeah, how confident are you we will get on top of this? We have already seen outbreaks in New South Wales and the Top End?

BIRMINGHAM: Australia has done an incredible job so far, aside from this spike that is occurring again in Victoria. So we have demonstrated before that we can shut this down. I am sure we can do it again. The fact that you have got State and Territory Governments, the Federal Government, all of us putting partisanship, or parochialism aside to chip in to try to help Victoria get on top of this gives us the best possible chance. We have just have to hope that we see no more of the chronic failures we have seen around hotel quarantine- or the like, happen in Victoria again in the future.

LANGDON: I mean come on, behinds closed doors the Prime Minister must be furious?

BIRMINGHAM: Of course we are all frustrated and would deeply wish this had never, ever occurred but our priority has got to be on helping them to fix the problem. This is a risk and

a threat to other States and Territories. That is why we are working so hard to make sure we get on top of it in Victoria, trying to do so by the targeting of the hot spots first and foremost, because that way we can try to, again, get Victorians back into their jobs in the communities where it is safe to do so but really try to stamp it out in the communities where it is clearly running rife.

LANGDON: Richard, your former leader, former PM Kevin Rudd, he has said that the Government has botched the submarine program, that they didn't build up their cyber defences fast enough. Do you agree they have been asleep at the wheel?

MARLES: I certainly think there is a whole lot of questions that need to be answered in relation to the submarine program. I mean, this is the single most expensive purchase that Australia has made in any context since Federation. Right now in terms of its timing, its cost, the level of Australian industry content every one of those indicators is going in the wrong direction. What we saw announced this week was an important step. You know, we do need to be building and boosting Australia's defence capability, but what translates the big thoughts into action is the way in which you do the operationalising of this. That is the Future Submarine Program, is front and centre in that. And right now the Government has got a whole lot of explaining to do about how we are going to get our Future Submarines in the water in a timely way. This is a Program which has slipped by ten years in the last seven. This is a Program which five years ago was costing \$50 billion, today it is costing \$90 billion. This was a Program where they said 90 per cent of the work would be done in Australia and right now they are sending hull fabrication work to France. At every level it is going in the wrong direction and this more than any other capability is how we change our strategic circumstances for the better. So I do agree with Kevin, I think the Government has a whole lot of explaining to do around the question of Future Submarines.

LANGDON: Alright, well we have a by-election tomorrow in Eden-Monaro. Good luck with it gentlemen and thanks for joining us this morning.

BIRMINGHAM: Thanks

MARLES: Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.