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E&OE TRANSCRIPT
TELEVISION INTERVIEW
TODAY SHOW
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SUBJECTS: Extension of Jobkeeper; Victoria dealing with COVID, The door remaining open to more spending

KARL STEFANOVIC, HOST: Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton and Deputy Leader of the Opposition Richard Marles join me now. Morning lads.

PETER DUTTON, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS: Morning Karl.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Morning Karl.

STEFANOVIC: Thank you for your time. Peter, \$15 billion on JobKeeper. That's an expensive about-face?

DUTTON: It is but when we're talking about hundreds of thousands of workers that would otherwise be without assistance, we had no choice. And obviously nobody wants to see the situation, the second wave in Victoria, but the reality is that we need to put in place measures that will help people through what is a very, very difficult period ahead.

STEFANOVIC: Is it that it now? I mean, I gather these figures are based on Victoria coming out of this on September 15. Are you going to keep the account open?

DUTTON: Well Karl, I think what we've demonstrated is we're able to respond as the circumstances change. Nobody really picked the failings around the hotel quarantine arrangements in Victoria. It hasn't happened in other states and it's resulted in this consequence now. And so, from a Federal Government perspective, how can we help Victoria? Well, those businesses that had reopened, that re-employed, re-stocked and are now closing, and

those people are out of work can't be left hanging. The Prime Minister, the Treasurer, I think have made the right decision and we will adjust it if we need to as circumstances change.

STEFANOVIC: Richard, it's a lot of debt. Do you support it?

MARLES: Well, I've been saying for some time that the idea that JobKeeper was going to stop on a drop-dead date in September wouldn't survive contact with reality. So, it's good that there is an extension in the eligibility which will allow some of this to continue. We're still worried about some of the other aspects of the wind-down of JobKeeper over the next few months beyond September. Ultimately the test here is about employment. We are seeing massive unemployment around the country, and a wage subsidy, JobKeeper, which the government wasn't going to do originally, is about trying to keep people in work, and the ultimate test here is whether these measures enable people to continue to be in employment in what is just the most difficult time.

STEFANOVIC: In terms of Daniel Andrews, Pete, yesterday he admitted he's accountable for the quarantine fiasco which claimed dozens of lives. It has cost the country dearly.

DUTTON: It has, and you just have to feel for these businesses, small businesses, that you know, Karl- I mean, they paid a few hundred thousand dollars for a fit-out to their shop, maybe more, a lot more. They've put money back into restock. They've re- employed staff. They've opened and now they have to close and this really is a devastating blow. I hope that the Victorian Government now is able to calibrate with some of the arrangements that they've put in place, because for distribution centres, for workers in abattoirs, etcetera there was great difficulty. So let's hope that they can work through some of those problems, particularly around child care in Victoria as well has been an issue. So we just have to help the Victorian Government as best we can and help people get out of this dire situation.

STEFANOVIC: I don't think this is helpful but there are some saying he should go. What do you think?

DUTTON: I think the Premier addressed yesterday and the day before the issues that have come up in Victoria. There's some commission of inquiry that's under way down there. I think, at the moment, the most important thing is for Victoria to get back on its feet, for people to get back into jobs and that's what we're focused on.

STEFANOVIC: In terms of big businesses, they were lining up, Richard, to smash Dan Andrews. They were saying it was all very confusing and it was all going to be very costly. There's no medical reason for the border closures, we know. Isn't the health of Victorians paramount, though?

MARLES: The health of Victorians is absolutely paramount. Let me say about Daniel Andrews; I mean, he is governing through the most appalling of circumstances, but he's standing up every day. He's taking the heat. He established a judicial inquiry into the situation here almost instantaneously. And he's made it clear that at the end of the day he will take responsibility as the Premier of Victoria. Now, that's leadership, and in a really tough time. And what we hear from the Federal Government is - I think we've heard it this morning - is a pretty clear attempt to say "this is all Victoria's problems, it's got nothing to do with us." The fact of the matter is there is a whole lot of aspects of the way in which government occurs in this state which are federal responsibilities, aged care being one. That is where this crisis will be most lethal

in Victoria. I don't hear the Prime Minister standing up every day and taking the kind of responsibility that we're seeing being taken by Daniel Andrews in relation to aged care, for example. This disease has got in there, and we should be hearing from the Prime Minister in similar terms.

STEFANOVIC: Pete, you're going to leave the door open to bail more out, aren't you? You're going to leave the door open for us to go into more debt to try and get us through this.

DUTTON: Well, the answer is "yes", Karl, because the circumstances are just quite remarkable. And we're seeing in countries around the world that don't have economies as strong as ours, that don't have a budget as strong as ours, really regressing quite quickly. So for us, the saving grace at a federal level is that we have over the last six years or so, really put the budget back into order. And we're in a strong position to deal with this. But as I say, our most important priority is to defeat the virus, to make sure that we can help people get back into jobs, and we want to provide that level of reassurance, and the Prime Minister's doing that through his leadership.

STEFANOVIC: Okay. Peter, Richard, great to talk to you again. Thanks so much. See you next week.

DUTTON: Thanks mate.

MARLES: Thanks, Karl.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.