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Transcript
Inside Canberra, ABC Brisbane
with Madonna King and Senator George Brandis
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E&OE

Subject: Climate change policy; President Obama's visit, clothes choices; personal trainers; smoking.

KING: Well Canberra is certainly awash with politicians this morning as the second day of parliament resumes, and the battle over your vote on the issue of climate change, among other things, will continue.

So if the election was held now, would you vote on the environment or not?

And if you would, is it Kevin Rudd's emissions trading scheme that will win you over, or do you prefer Tony Abbott's new Coalition plan, announced yesterday?

Let's go inside Canberra with Opposition Attorney General Senator George Brandis. Good morning Senator.

BRANDIS: Good morning Madonna.

KING: And his good friend, Minister, Dr Craig Emerson, good morning Dr.

EMERSON: Good morning Madonna. The other partner in the odd couple.

KING: Yeah, is all that hot air warming up Canberra this morning?

EMERSON: Well I was out playing touch footy at seven o'clock. There was an enormous demonstration of bipartisan support for the greatest game of all, but there - you're right, there are politicians all over the place. And we're back into the swing of things.

It's a bit strange, after having a break, to sort of see everyone back again. And it's pretty intense here - I think that would be fair to say, George.

BRANDIS: Yeah, I think that's right, it's a lot of anticipation this year of course.

KING: Well George Brandis, without using any of your big words that the rest of us don't understand.

EMERSON: No diaphanous, George.

KING: No diaphanous. And I'll be making a note of it if you do. Can I give you a minute or so to explain in simple terms your party's policy, announced yesterday - on climate change - by Tony Abbott?

BRANDIS: Yeah, sure. The policy is one for direct action based on incentives to give businesses and farmers and industry incentives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To do that, the co... the centrepiece of the Coalition's policy is the creation of an emissions reduction fund which over the first four years of its life will provide \$3.2 billion of incentives to businesses to move to a more carbon efficient means of production.

Now that's - this doesn't involve... unlike the Labor Party scheme, it involves...

KING: Forget the politics, just...

BRANDIS: It - well, it involves no new tax, it involves no increases in electricity prices, it involves in fact no increase in the cost structure at all. What it does is, it provides incentives to businesses to move to more carbon efficient means of production.

KING: Dr Craig Emerson, you'll get your turn in just a moment, but a couple of quick answers, Dr George Brandis. How are you going to fund it?

BRANDIS: It'll be funded from the budget, and what parties do before a federal election is that they lodge with the Federal Treasury under the Charter of Budget Honesty Act, an Act of the Howard Government, they lodge costings for their promises, and costings for those programs that they would abate, or cut back, in order to offset those costs.

And we'll be doing that as we would in the ordinary course of events.

KING: So you're not telling us at this stage how it will be funded.

BRANDIS: Well you can't look at these things in isolation.

KING: No, I'm...

BRANDIS: The Opposition will be going to the next election with a full suite of policies across the whole range, and those will include

expenditure commitments in some areas, they'll include expenditure reductions...

KING: No, but I'm just talking...

BRANDIS: In other areas.

KING: I understand that. But at this stage we know, and for the want of a better word, an emissions trading scheme, or taxes, the Opposition will put an impost on people.

You're not saying at this stage how yours will be funded.

BRANDIS: It'll be funded out of the Budget from savings in other areas which will be announced closer to the election.

KING: How much will it reduce carbon emissions by?

BRANDIS: Our assessment is - and this is an assessment, I should say, that has been supported by industry and external experts in the last 24 hours, since the policy was announced - we think that will reduce emissions by at least five per cent, the five per cent target by 2020.

KING: How do you make business do it?

BRANDIS: Well this is the big philosophical difference, I guess, Madonna, between the Government's scheme and the Opposition scheme. We provide incentives. The Government impose taxes and penalties. Now we expect that businesses will, as businesses always do, to an incentive based system, want to reduce their costs by, (a), moving to more - a more efficient, low-carbon mode of production, and (b), take advantage of those incentives.

I mean, the entire tax system is - well, not the entire tax system - but large elements of the tax system are based on providing incentives to change conduct in particular ways. It's a very commonplace approach to public policy. And we are confident that the incentives that we are offering to business will be sufficiently attractive to them to encourage them to make those changes.

KING: Have you got Malcolm Turnbull on board to support this?

BRANDIS: Malcolm Turnbull indicated yesterday that he would be voting for the ETS that he was largely responsible for negotiating last year. That's his right in the Liberal Party. There's no doubt that there were different views about this last year. We've got past that. But given Malcolm's strong public espousal of the previous scheme, it was hardly surprising for him to stick to his guns on that. And we expected that to happen. And we respect his right of conscientious disagreement.

KING: Dr Craig Emerson, you've allowed George Brandis to have a go and explain it there. Is this a lot more politically palatable than Kevin Rudd's and your government suggesting which essentially is a tax?

EMERSON: Well Madonna, the starting point of this is Tony Abbott's declaration that climate change is crap which he confirmed again on ABC television - that is, that he said that. It is his belief, and according to Senator Minchin who knows how to count, it is the belief of more than half the Coalition MPs, so it's no surprise that he's produced a climate change con job, the features of which are that there are no - there is no cap on emissions, there is no overall limit on emissions. It slugs ordinary taxpayers rather than applying the polluters-pay principle. It should be the polluters who pay for this. It will mean higher taxes.

KING: Just go back a step...

EMERSON: I'll explain.

KING: ...how does it slug ordinary citizens?

EMERSON: I'll explain. It means higher taxes as confirmed last night on Lateline by Barnaby Joyce. When he was asked where the money's coming from he said I'm waiting for the Government to reveal the Henry Tax Review. The Henry Tax Review is exclusively about tax. If he was looking for budget savings, he would look in the budget...

BRANDIS: [Interrupts] I think you're drawing a long bow at that one Craig.

EMERSON: ...but he's looking in the Henry Tax Review. In other words Barnaby Joyce has split from Tony Abbott who said, just over the weekend when there was speculation about higher cigarette tax, he said; no it won't be new taxes. Barnaby Joyce said last night; yes there will. He'll be at the National Press Club today and he can explain this rift between himself and Tony Abbott where Barnaby Joyce is clearly indicating that it will be taxpayers who are slugged for this climate change con job.

BRANDIS: Craig, you seem very on the back foot this morning, if I may say so...

EMERSON: I reckon Barnaby's very much at odds and on a back foot...

BRANDIS: I watched Barnaby's Lateline interview with Tony Abbott.

EMERSON: ... with Tony Abbott, and Abbott will be pulling his hair out.

BRANDIS: I watched Barnaby's Lateline interview too Madonna and I'm sure many of your listeners [indistinct] - he never said that there would be increased taxes. In fact the Coalition has specifically, categorically, flat out ruled out the possibility of increased taxes.

EMERSON: [Interrupts] He was asked where he was going to get the money from and he said I'm waiting for the...

KING: All right...

EMERSON: ...release of the Henry Tax Review, not a budget...

KING: Craig Emerson...

EMERSON: ...that is a tax policy.

KING: All right, doctor - sorry, Senator George Brandis, aren't you going to open yourself to be an easy target though until you actually outline specifically how you will pay for it?

BRANDIS: Well we've said that we'll be committing \$3.2 billion to this, by comparison for example, with the \$40.6 billion that the Government's scheme would cost over the equivalent four-year period, so this is a scheme I should hasten to point out which is about 14 times less expensive than the Government's scheme...

KING: All right so...

BRANDIS: ...but...

EMERSON: Which is incorrect. Listeners beware, incorrect.

BRANDIS: ...the costings across the whole and savings, across the whole range of all the departments will be produced by the Opposition as oppositions always do before the federal election...

KING: Yes okay you've already made that point, you've already made that point. Can I ask this question and it's from Richard, He says that Tony Abbott's ETS may be okay for five per cent but could you ask Senator George Brandis how they will manage 10 per cent or 15 per cent or indeed 20 per cent?

BRANDIS: Well we're not making that commitment. Five per cent is a minimum, it may be more but we're committing to a five per cent minimum and while I have the microphone Madonna, I don't want to let the spin doctor on my right here get away with it...

EMERSON: Dr Emerson to you.

BRANDIS: Dr - spin doctor Emerson. Let me - you are a doctor, you're a doctor of economics...

EMERSON: Yeah, a doctor of economics.

BRANDIS: And a doctor of spin. I can...

EMERSON: I didn't [indistinct] - great big con job.

BRANDIS: I can categorically and absolutely assure your listeners that there will be no increased taxes to fund the Coalition's alternative.

KING: So can I just ask this then. How do people listening this morning - how do they decide between the - Kevin Rudd's ETS, Tony Abbott's direct action as their calls this morning, how do you actually decide which is the better approach? If there is one big point of difference, Dr Craig Emerson, what's the point of difference from your point of view?

EMERSON: Well their plan is unfunded, the taxpayers will pay rather than the polluters and they have no cap.

KING: George Brandis, can you be as succinct in terms of what is the biggest difference between Labor's plan and your own plan?

BRANDIS: Our plan unlike Labor's is direct, it is simpler, it will cost no jobs, it will not involve a great big new tax.

KING: Okay, I wished you'd summed it up in that way both of you earlier and we could have moved on then. Let's move on to parliament...

BRANDIS: You gave us a minute before.

KING: All right I - no, I think that's probably a fairly good summary of both and I'd love to hear from you at home in terms of whether climate is the issue that you would go to the polls on or whether this is a sideshow and if it is the issue, whether you support one of these plans over the other? Parliament's resumed. How do Tony Abbott and Kevin Rudd stack up as parliamentary performers against each other?

Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Well I think Tony Abbott will be pretty direct and forceful, so it should be in a robust parliamentary democracy, I welcome that.

I think the debates in the parliament will be at times heated. I hope that they will be robust, because I think through robust debate your listeners and other people around Australia will get a greater appreciation of the understand - and understanding of the differences between the two parties...

KING: Is that politic...

EMERSON: ...and there are big differences.

KING: Is that politic speak for saying he's a great parliamentary performer?

EMERSON: Well, I don't know that Tony is a great parliamentary performer, but I'm not going to use the opportunity to run him down.

He makes mistakes and then he apologises for his mistakes. I think people - all people make mistakes, but he seems to be getting into this habit of saying, well, I shouldn't have said that, I shouldn't have said this, I shouldn't have said that climate change is crap, but it was a - to a different audience.

And he was asked last night, well are you just tailoring your message to different audiences? And that is what's going on.

KING: George Brandi...

EMERSON: He said that he will oppose the Government at every opportunity.

KING: All right. George Brandis. How do you think Tony Abbott stacks - stacks up against Kevin Rudd?

BRANDIS: Well, he's a much more authentic person. I mean, you know, one of - the big differences between...

KING: But you're going to say that, aren't you?

BRANDIS: Well, that's because I believe it. I know them both very well. I've known Tony Abbott for 30 years, and I can tell you, Tony Abbott, what you see is what you get. He is plain speaking, he is direct. He doesn't, unlike Kevin Rudd, hide behind a fog of bureaucratic language. He is an authentic, dinky-di Australian.

KING: There's a...

EMERSON: Who changes his position all the time.

KING: There's another debate in federal parliament over who's the best performer between Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. Is his deputy giving him a run for his money, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Julia Gillard is discharging the responsibilities of Deputy Prime Minister, Education Minister, Industrial Relations Minister with great expertise. I think the My School website demonstrated that. But...

KING: You're not answering my question though. Who's the be...

EMERSON: Well, I'm saying, she's a really good performer. And guess what, we've got a team.

KING: Who's the best performer?

EMERSON: We have a team.

KING: Who's the best performer of Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard?

EMERSON: Well, I think they are both equally good, but in somewhat different ways.

BRANDIS: [Laughs]

EMERSON: Julia Gillard obviously...

BRANDIS: Ah, Craig [laughs].

EMERSON: ...presents a partic... every personality is different. I mean, this is the point Madonna, and your listeners want to know this, or want to be reassured.

KING: I think they want you to answer the question.

EMERSON: We are not cardboard cut-outs. We are not cardboard cut-outs of each other. To compare two people and say one is better, across the board than the other, frankly is absurd.

Kevin is very strong in some areas; Julia is strong in other areas; Wayne Swan is strong; Lindsay Tanner is strong. It's a team.

KING: All right.

EMERSON: And it's a cohesive team.

KING: Just a quick answer would be fine.

George Brandis: Malcolm Turnbull or Tony Abbott the best performer?

EMERSON: [Indistinct]

BRANDIS: The problem with your team, Craig, is they all hate each other [laughs].

KING: George Brandis: the choice between Tony Abbott and Tony - and Malcolm Turnbull in terms of parliamentary performers, who's got the upper edge there?

BRANDIS: Ah gee, that's a hard one because they're both...

KING: Just a quick answer.

BRANDIS: They're both very good. I think Tony Abbott has tremendous cut-through.

KING: Yes. Okay, I think you're both avoiding the answer there.

Barack Obama coming to Australia. Is this is a big boost for Kevin Rudd six or seven months out from an election, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Look, I don't think it will matter very much. I mean, there'll obviously be some very nice photos of Kevin Rudd and President Obama together and that'll dominate the news for a couple of days.

But I don't think that it'll be terribly politically important in the long run, in terms of the optics.

But you know, it's an important event that President Obama is coming to Australia, and the Opposition welcomes his visit. It's a visit that he was bound to make in his first term, given the greater priority for - of East Asia and the Pacific in American foreign policy these days, and it's a great thing he's coming.

KING: Can I ask you about this morning's dilemma, and it's that we do each day, and you always give very good and salient advice: personal trainers using parkland, free parkland. Do you think they should pay?

For example, an ice-cream vendor would have to pay if they're using up parkland. Or do you think you politicians talk all the time about obesity and we should actually be encouraging boot camps and personal trainers to take their clients to the park?

Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: My guess would be that if they become in any sense an impediment to other users of the park then possibly they should pay. But if they're just going along and you know, part of the crowd, or the joggers of the place, it doesn't particularly bother me that they've got...

KING: But if they're earning...

EMERSON: ...people running up and down stairs.

KING: But if they're earning an income, taking classes, do you think they should pay?

EMERSON: My view, for what it's worth, is only if they get in the road. Only if they, in effect, use up some of the open space which is common property.

KING: George Brandis?

EMERSON: If they've got a couple of people running up and down a hill it doesn't particularly bother both me.

BRANDIS: It's a good question. It's an example of what philosophers call the free rider problem. My...

EMERSON: That's an economics term, too.

BRANDIS: Is it?

EMERSON: Mmm.

BRANDIS: My view is a bit like Craig's. It all depends how invasive they are. I mean, if for example at one end of the scale you had a commercial trainer who actually set up a tent and was running a commercial operation...

EMERSON: And excluding people...

BRANDIS: ...from - on public parkland, there ought to be a fee for that. If they were merely, in a way that didn't get in the way of other people, conducting exercises but weren't actually running their business from there, I wouldn't have such a problem.

KING: We've heard in the last week all sorts of claims on how much people's wives help their husbands get ready. In some cases our political leaders' wives lay out their clothes. Do you both pick what you wear?

BRANDIS: I pick what I wear.

EMERSON: I pick what I wear and I buy what I wear, usually from a DFO or Lowes and...

BRANDIS: [Laughs]

KING: It's the ABC [indistinct].

BRANDIS: Craig. I won't...

EMERSON: No, we're not allowed to advertise on the...

BRANDIS: ...state the obvious remark.

EMERSON: ...ABC. Where's Sirro?
[Laughter]

KING: That's right. And just a...

EMERSON: [Indistinct]

KING: ...last one to leave you with, and it's a bit out of left field, but smokers feel they're being discriminated against after the Federal Department of Health and Ageing introduced a ban on employees taking regular smoking breaks.

They make the point that some people stand around a coffee machine or a water bubbler for ten minutes and talk about the office gossip. What's wrong with them going outside for five minutes, having a smoke, and it makes them more productive?

Do they have a case, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: I think they wouldn't be going out having a smoke for five minutes once a morning. I think it'd be more common, more frequent than that.

I have to say that I don't have a lot of support for cigarette smoking. I think it's a terrible problem for the country and for people's health. And so the gradual tightening of rules on smoking is something that generally, I would support.

KING: George Brandis?

BRANDIS: I'm a bit more sympathetic to the smokers' point of view, and I say that as somebody who's never smoked, at all, in my entire life.

EMERSON: You used to smoke a ...

BRANDIS: No, no.

EMERSON: ...a pipe, didn't you?

BRANDIS: No, no, no.

EMERSON: Oh.

BRANDIS: I've never smoked any - at all in my life. But I really get annoyed when this kind of - at this nanny state mentality that people are being hectored from engaging in perfectly lawful activity. Now if it's, you know, a nuisance to other people, for example smoking in restaurants, fair enough.

But if it's not activity that gets in the way of other people's going about their daily lives and it's lawful, then I really think that the Government is sort of - should take a bit of rest of telling people how to live.

EMERSON: [Indistinct]

KING: George Brandis, Craig Emerson - yes, you had something Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Oh well, I - it - look, to an extent I agree with that. But if people are just taking time out equivalent to the time that you take to have a chat around a water cooler, or a cup of coffee, fair enough. But if they're outside often because they're addicted to smoking, I think there's an issue.

BRANDIS: I think you've changed your mind in two answers. I think you must be a bit of a...

EMERSON: No, no.

BRANDIS: ...policy weathervane, Craig.

EMERSON: No, no. I'm just saying. If they're - if they are out and therefore not being as productive as their colleagues and the colleagues have to take the load for that, I think that's an issue.

KING: I'll let you both continue to argue out that point. Craig Emerson, George Brandis, talk to you next week.

BRANDIS: Good to be with you, Madonna.

EMERSON: Righty-o, thanks Madonna.

KING: That's Dr Craig Emerson and Senator George Brandis, Inside Canberra, back at the same time next week.