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Transcript
2CC BREAKFAST WITH MARK PARTON
Wednesday, 24 February 2010

E&OE

Subjects: Government insulation scheme, Tony Abbott.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson usually talks to us around this time and he's on the line right now, morning Craig.

EMERSON: G'day, how are you Mark?

PARTON: Yeah not too bad. I was having a yak to an old friend of yours, well I use the word friend loosely, in Scott Driscoll...

EMERSON: That's very loose language.

PARTON: Scotty, for those who missed it is the head of The Retailers' Association and he's flagging the fact that hardware retailers are considering a class action because of the fact they're holding onto so much insulation gear and there's no way they're going to be able to sell it. I might just play a tiny bit of what Scott had to say earlier...

DRISCOLL: I'd love to see Craig actually start to deal with the facts. I've debated Craig on Brisbane radio recently and Craig wanted to be more critical of me personally for raising these issues about the Government and he may well try that with you again I suppose but scrutiny is going to continue. Craig and his Government need to understand that they've had a pretty good, clear run for the last two years. It's now time to ask some

serious questions so I put it to Craig that he really needs to start dealing in facts, and really needs to start actually giving over some answers as to where he's going to stand up and be counted for small business.

PARTON: So that's Scott Driscoll, two things Craig; you can have a whack at Scotty if you want, A.), but B.), what have you got to say to those small businesses, to those hardware retailers who are hanging onto all this stuff, that there's no way they can sell now. Are they going to be compensated?

EMERSON: Well I have been talking of course with Peter Garrett and his office about these matters. Peter is convening a meeting with industry this afternoon so I can advise your listeners of that. We're conscious of the issues of course, so he's moved pretty quickly to arrange that meeting with industry, following suspension of this program or its replacement with the new program by the first of July. So we're picking up that point. Obviously we were going to do that, irrespective of the urgings of Scott Driscoll and I think it's reasonable that we have that meeting.

PARTON: So do you think it be premature for retailers to band together and start talking about class actions?

EMERSON: Oh look I can't give them legal advice. I think that the fact that Peter has convened this meeting so quickly is evidence of the good faith that we want to display towards the industry, so that meeting will take place. Scott has got a legitimate role to play in national debate on these issues but I just wish he'd take a little moment to point out that he's a lifetime member of the National Party, he's three times run for the Coalition parties in Queensland for elected office, he said publicly in an opinion piece that he's dedicated... "I long for the day, we see the Nationals and Liberals retake the government benches". So my only point about Scott is, yes he can participate in national debate, but he probably shouldn't put...

PARTON: ...Put everything on the table...

EMERSON: ...himself as some objective guy. In fact one of the rival retail associations, the National Retailers' Association, has advised the media that they're about to institute some sort of legal action for deceptive and misleading conduct. That's their words not mine.

PARTON: Well we'll watch that with great interest. Those on the other side are talking about a change in mood from the electorate and they're suggesting things are swinging back the other way, they're suggesting it's happening more than what the polls are

suggesting. I wanted to share with you that there's a poll up on our website at the moment which is 'If a federal election was held tomorrow which party would you vote for?' Now you have to temper this with the knowledge of course this is commercial talk radio which does tend to swing towards the right. But, nevertheless, 64 per cent of those who voted suggested they would vote for the coalition, 21 for Labor and 14 for Greens. It's a bit decisive on that forum isn't it?

EMERSON: Without being in the slightest bit complacent, here in the ACT the two seats are held by Labor with a substantial majority. But we have to earn and continue to earn the support and respect of voters here in the ACT and you do that by governing in the interests of the community, in the national interest. I think it's just inevitable this year, Mark, that there'll be polls out every second day and we could spend ... and I understand that they're interesting to people ... but we could spend all our time diagnosing the polls, picking through the entrails, the old chooks' or goats' entrails and diverting our attention to that instead of what we were elected to do which is to govern in the national interest.

PARTON: What can we expect in the House today?

EMERSON: Probably more argument, more of a blue. Tony Abbott is of that style, he was a boxing blue from Oxford University. I think he might have a bit of a glass jaw himself though when it comes to criticism of him. He often goes over the top and then says "Well, you know, I'm sorry for having said all of that", so he is a bit of a risk in the way he behaves but that's the nature of the engagement. It's a head on direct engagement in the chamber, and I quite like that. I played a game of rugby on Sunday. We only went down three tries to two, us old blokes against the NSW Law Society. I thought we'd get a crowd of about 5,000 watching politicians and lawyers beat the crap out of each other.

PARTON: You're an old warrior. I like it, with less emphasis on old and more on warrior. Do you think that maybe there is a fear from the Opposition side, which I'm sure is not a fear of yours, that they've got to pick their fights a bit more carefully, in terms of we almost see Tony being critical on absolutely everything that comes from your Government like. What's an example? The money being spent on Indian journalists coming to Australia, which I think is money well spent, because I think the bigger battle here is the battle of perception, rather than what goes on on the ground.

EMERSON: Well I think that diagnosis is right, and Tony Abbott has confirmed it very soon after he was elected Opposition Leader. He said that essentially they will take a position of grubbing up

the Government, or dirtying up the Government, I think words like that, but more importantly went on to say "We will oppose the Government as much as we can". Now...

PARTON: It's working for them...

EMERSON: Well I think in the parliamentary democracy of course, we have an adversarial system. It's called an adversarial system, the Westminster System, in our parliamentary democracy. That's okay. But I think the Australian people do expect an Opposition to be constructive where the policies are good and sound, rather than try to score political points and rather than try to block them in the Senate like they are with the means testing of the private health insurance rebate. They're saying Labor's spending too much money, and when we put up initiatives to save money they oppose them in the Senate. So I think it's just Tony's style, as I say, a toe-to-toe slugger in the ring and if Labor is there he's going to try to whack us but that's fine, but he also should think about the national interest.

PARTON: Well we look forward to more of that action today, thanks again for your time on 2CC Craig, we much appreciate it.

EMERSON: Righty-o Mark.

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