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Transcript  
SKY NEWS AM AGENDA  
Tuesday, 23 March 2010  
Kieran Gilbert interviews Dr Craig Emerson and Mr Scott Morrison MP

E&OE

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*Subjects: Upcoming debate between PM Rudd and Tony Abbott, Health reforms, Stern Hu, Border Protection policy.*

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**GILBERT:** Now to our panel - from our Sydney City studio, the Shadow Immigration Minister Scott Morrison, good morning Scott.

**MORRISON:** Good morning Kieran.

**GILBERT:** And with me here in the studio the Small Business Minister Craig Emerson. Craig Emerson thanks for your time and first to you, is this a risky move, allowing the Opposition leader the same platform, the same billing as the Prime Minister so early in this election race?

**EMERSON:** Well the Australian people deserve an opportunity to examine not only our health plan but Tony Abbott's. It's a bit sad listening to Peter Dutton, who's the Shadow Health Minister, wanting to talk about everything other than health. This is an opportunity; in fact Tony Abbott has an obligation to unveil his health plan today. He was Health Minister for four years so he's not starting from scratch and there's an obligation on him in this debate to unveil that plan.

**GILBERT:** But as Peter Dutton said it's not - is it really the forum for him to do that? He gets five minutes at the top...

**EMERSON:** I reckon they'd give him an extension of time. If Tony Abbott said I need 10 minutes to give a summary of the plan, here's the document...

**GILBERT:** But why should he run by your schedule?

**EMERSON:** Well it is an election year. Now remember Tony Abbott said his job as Opposition leader is to oppose. How about coming up with some alternative policies? In this late breaking development to which you referred, I can confirm that the Liberal Party has taken down that bodgey graph that they were waving around including Peter Dutton and Tony Abbott on the news last night, pretending that this increase in health funding actually in fact included \$500 million, half a billion dollars of Labor Government funding. How can you trust these people when they are prepared to bodgey up a graph, to show it around on the news, to show it around in the Parliament and when they get caught out they rip it off the website?

**GILBERT:** Scott Morrison, obviously the Government's strategy's clear, they want to get the focus of the political debate onto health. They see that as a strength. Is Tony Abbott falling into a trap with this and particularly in the context of not having, in concrete, his own alternative?

**MORRISON:** Well Tony Abbott is happy to take up the debate with the Government on whatever issue it wants to talk about. Tony Abbott is not shy of a debate; he's not shy about the political context and exchange and combat of ideas. That is Tony Abbott. So if the Government wants to have a debate today on health well we'll have a debate today on health. I know the Government does not want to talk about border protection, it does not want to talk about home insulation schemes, it does not want to talk about bungles in education spending and cost blowouts. These are things they don't want to talk about but today we'll talk about health. But I put this question to Craig. I mean he's talking about expenditure cuts, maybe you'd like to explain to the people today why \$350 million has been ripped out of a mental health program which was funded by the Coalition Government to \$1.9 billion. I mean if the Government wants to throw around these sorts of accusations they need to be accountable for their own cuts and their own ripping of expenditure out of important health services.

**GILBERT:** Okay, your response?

**EMERSON:** Well how about we actually rely on the budget papers?

**MORRISON:** No, no answer my question Craig; I've put a fair question to you...

**EMERSON:** How about we rely on the budget papers...

**MORRISON:** You want to talk about budget cuts...

**EMERSON:** ...and these are the budget papers.

**MORRISON:** ...why did you rip \$350 million out of a mental health program?

**EMERSON:** These are the budget papers. You've had your go, my go now.

**MORRISON:** Well I'm waiting for an answer.

**EMERSON:** Would you stop interrupting please?

**GILBERT:** Out of the mental health program specifically, that's the question though.

**EMERSON:** Well what I'm saying here, now, is that these are the budget papers that Tony Abbott says are a lie...

**MORRISON:** That's not the question Craig, what about mental health?

**EMERSON:** ...that's a billion dollars - that is a billion dollars coming out of the public hospital system. John Howard had...

**MORRISON:** You don't have an answer do you? You're not going to answer it.

**EMERSON:** ...John Howard - will you just butt out for a second pal?

**MORRISON:** Well I'm asking a question Craig. We're talking about mental health.

**EMERSON:** Are we ready?

**GILBERT:** Well...

**EMERSON:** The previous Howard Government had a health spending profile. When Tony Abbott became the Health Minister he ripped \$1 billion out of it. That is a direct photocopy of the budget papers.

**MORRISON:** So you're not going to answer the question? Okay, well I suppose we can just take [indistinct], fair enough.

**GILBERT:** What about the question on mental health though that Scott's putting?

**EMERSON:** Well we've overall increased funding for health. There's been a 50 per cent increase in funding for health. Now Scott knows that.

**MORRISON:** I'm asking about mental health Craig.

**EMERSON:** Well health is health. I mean if there's a 50 per cent increase in funding for health under this government, I reckon that's a pretty big increase in funding for health...

**MORRISON:** Well tell me about the mental health program you've ripped \$350 million out of.

**EMERSON:** ...including half a billion dollars - including half a billion that Tony Abbott dishonestly claimed as his own. Now that is his great big lie.

**GILBERT:** Okay.

**MORRISON:** No answer, fair enough.

**GILBERT:** Let's - let's - I did speak to the Health Minister...

**EMERSON:** A 50 per cent increase in funding in health is a very large amount.

**GILBERT:** Okay, I did speak to the Health Minister on that issue. She made a similar claim to Craig Emerson earlier this morning. Let's recap a bit of what Nicola Roxon had to say and we'll get Scott's response.

**[Excerpt of Interview]**

**ROXON:** Obviously you've been following, and others have, the billion dollars that Mr Abbott pulled out of the system when he was in government, and embarrassingly for Mr Abbott the graphs that he's been waving around that have been shown on your news for the last few days actually includes a \$500 million or a half a billion dollar investment from the Rudd Government that Mr Abbott is actually trying to claim as his own.

**[End of Excerpt]**

**GILBERT:** There's obviously conjecture about the numbers here Scott, but isn't the legacy of the Howard years a neglected hospital system in many parts of this country?

**MORRISON:** Well I think the legacy of, you know, a decade of Labor governments at a state level, and let's not forget, \$180 billion was provided in GST revenue to the states over that period of time. I mean these are the people who are responsible for our hospital system and what we see, particularly in NSW and

Queensland, drawn out on a daily basis is a legacy of absolute failure.

**EMERSON:** There you go, washing your hands of public hospital funding.

**MORRISON:** There was real - there were real increases - real increases in funding over the period of the Howard Government and on top of that we gave them \$180 billion in GST revenue. Now what Craig won't talk about is the \$2 billion extra we're going to pay this year in interest repayments on their debt and the \$20 billion we're going to pay over the next three years on interest payments on debt. Now if there's going to be a pressure on the budget for health it's going to be because of this Government's burgeoning debt which is going to cost us \$2 billion this year alone.

**GILBERT:** Okay, I'll get you to answer that in - as part of this...

**EMERSON:** Sure.

**GILBERT:** ...but I want to put to you the - get back to the focus of what we are here about, and that's the debate...

**EMERSON:** Yeah.

**GILBERT:** ...Tony Abbott is seen as a better communicator than Kevin Rudd. Is Rudd vulnerable to that?

**EMERSON:** The Australian people will make their judgement as a result of the debate itself today. This needs to be a debate about substance, not opposition for opposition's sake. And what we've just heard from Scott Morrison is the laying of the ground work for further cuts to health funding by a - if there were to be an Abbott Government.

**MORRISON:** That's ridiculous.

**EMERSON:** Because he's just saying the states got all this money through the GST, they can deal with the public hospital system, we've got...

**MORRISON:** Oh, so they mismanaged it Craig.

**EMERSON:** You said they've got all this money...

**MORRISON:** Yeah and they mismanaged it. They put it up against the wall and failed people in hospitals.

**EMERSON:** ...basically there's no need - there's no need for the Commonwealth to increase public hospital funding. Our 50 per

cent increase in public hospital funding, our health plan are there for all to see, they are there for all to see and it will be for the Australian people to make a judgement today. But Tony Abbott has to do three things: explain why he ripped \$1 billion out of the public hospital system; he has to put forward his alternative health plan; and he has to explain to the Australian people why he bodgied up a graph that they've been putting on the national television news that includes half a billion dollars of Labor spending in a very dishonest move. How can you trust these people?

**MORRISON:** Right...

**EMERSON:** How can you trust them?

**GILBERT:** A quick response Scott.

**MORRISON:** I look forward to your explanation on the mental health today too Craig.

**GILBERT:** Okay, well obviously health is a big issue in the United States at the moment as well. We saw the US President yesterday secure a big win with the passage of his healthcare reforms through the Congress. Let's hear how President Obama responded to that good news for his administration.

**[Excerpt of speech]**

**OBAMA:** What this day represents is another stone firmly laid in the foundation of the American dream. Tonight we answer the call of history as so many generations of Americans have before us. When faced with crisis, we did not shrink from our challenge, we overcame it. We did not avoid our responsibility, we embraced it. We did not fear our future, we shaped it.

**[End of excerpt]**

**GILBERT:** Obviously a crucial win for him in his first term, but the parallel is for your Government Craig, if you don't get your win here on health reform, it would be an enormous setback. Your emissions trading scheme hit a hurdle at every point and now the health reform also looks like it's got a problematic path. You need to get this support don't you?

**EMERSON:** Well I think what we've seen there is a president of a progressive political party in the United States recognising the need for health reform in the United States. You've got the leader of a political party, the Australian Labor Party here in Australia recognising the need for health reform in Australia and he is joined by the vast majority of the Australian people.

**GILBERT:** In the politics it's crucial for Rudd to get this win isn't it?

**EMERSON:** Well, let's think about the politics, let's think about the politics. Kevin Rudd has put forward a very substantial and detailed health plan. We will work...

**GILBERT:** But if it remains a plan...

**EMERSON:** Well, we will work...

**GILBERT:** ...what's it worth?

**EMERSON:** ...with each and every state and territory, irrespective of the political persuasion of those states and territories. We're working with the Barnett Liberal Government constructively on a range of issues, including in my own portfolio. If a Liberal Government is formed in Tasmania, of course we will work with them. But they will understand this basic fact, the Australian people want health reform.

**GILBERT:** Okay.

**EMERSON:** And they don't want Tony Abbott ripping money out of the public hospital system and bodgeying up graphs...

**GILBERT:** Okay.

**EMERSON:** ...to try to pretend that he's increased funding in the year when...

**GILBERT:** Scott...

**EMERSON:** ...we put in half a billion dollars.

**GILBERT:** ...Scott Morrison, will the federal Liberals put pressure on the state colleagues to block this in the end, because if you've got the WA Liberal Government and looks likely a Tasmanian Liberal Government as well, is there - there's obviously that temptation for you to lean on them to block this?

**MORRISON:** I believe both of those - and should we have a Premier in Tasmania, but also a Premier in Western Australia - they'll make their own judgements. They know how to run their states. Certainly in Western Australia they've been proving that and they'll make their own judgements. But I'd say this about Kevin Rudd's plan. I mean it's been now two and a half years and what he's come up with is a plan. We were supposed to have a solution in place by middle of last year. But there are - a) you've highlighted, I think, the key point is can he actually get

agreement to his plan? If not, then he's just charging at windmills and this is all just a stunt for the election, it's a plan for the election, not for hospitals. The second point I'd make is when it actually comes time, if he gets agreement - and that's a big if - he has to implement that plan and if you go by what's happened with home insulation, if you go by what's happened with building the education revolution schools program and the cost blow-outs there, if you go by how they run their border protection regime, this government plans a lot but implements very, very little. You've got to go from the talk to the implementation.

**EMERSON:** And you obstruct a lot...

**MORRISON:** It all turns to custard.

**EMERSON:** ...in the Senate.

**GILBERT:** Okay, I've got to...

**MORRISON:** And that's what we see - and that's what we see with hospitals.

**GILBERT:** ...I've got to interrupt.

**MORRISON:** That's what we saw with state governments, the Labor state governments.

**EMERSON:** Why do you oppose [indistinct] plan?

**GILBERT:** All right. Let's just pause...

**EMERSON:** You oppose Labor's health plan...

**GILBERT:** Look, can we...

**EMERSON:** You're just an obstructionist mob.

**GILBERT:** Let's hit the pause button. We'll be back straight after the break. Stay with us.

**[Advertisement break]**

**GILBERT:** Welcome back to AM Agenda and our panel Scott Morrison and Craig Emerson. Let's look at the issue of Stern Hu. He's, of course, facing bribery charges and other charges in a Shanghai court. He's a former Rio Tinto executive. Craig Emerson, Stern Hu has pleaded guilty apparently. Likely to spend time in jail in China. Should the Government have done more in this case? It seems a really secretive legal process over there. Could the

Government have done more to get involved and observe this process?

**EMERSON:** Well we did as much as we possibly could in terms of consular assistance to Stern Hu and also to his family. And our requests of the Chinese Government have been basically to bring the trial on in an expeditious manner and to be transparent in the trial process. So I think we've done as much as we possibly could. Let the justice system now take its course. I understand that that's going to happen now, sooner rather than later in terms of this particular trial. But let's just see how it all unfolds now.

**GILBERT:** You've obviously got to be careful given that it is the Chinese legal system ...

**EMERSON:** That's right.

**GILBERT:** ...not to offend, but this is one man's, you know, human rights of course.

**EMERSON:** Of course it is, but your point is absolutely right. We don't have in all countries the same legal system as we have in Australia. That's just a fact of life. And I, therefore, don't think we can expect to have the same system running around the world saying this is our system. But people are entitled to basic justice. They're entitled to legal representation. We would like to see transparency in all of these processes. And let's just see how it goes. It will take its course, I think, in the next few days.

**GILBERT:** Scott Morrison, it is a secretive legal system in China. Should the Government have done more to secure access to Stern Hu and to this trial?

**MORRISON:** Well I think if we go back to when all this started last year, there was a lot of commentary at the time about how slow the Government was to make contact. The Prime Minister hadn't made, you know, direct contact himself; it was some time before the Foreign Minister actually sidled alongside someone at a conference, a mid-ranking Chinese official. There was some delay there. Now, as my colleague Greg Hunt said last night on Q&A, things had improved since then. But I think what the issue here is, the issue of expectation. I think the Government, when in Opposition, raised a lot of expectations about the Prime Minister's credentials in China. I don't think those expectations were delivered on in this case sadly for Stern Hu. And I think we've got the situation where they were pleased to talk big and tough about David Hicks and people wearing orange jump suits, but when it came to Stern Hu, in this case, I don't think he got that same level of enthusiasm, particularly at the outset.

**GILBERT:** Okay. We're going to have to keep it brief for this final issue, the ongoing boat arrivals. It is your area of responsibility Scott. There's been 26 now this year. Is the Coalition really in a position to be too critical, particularly given the Foreign Minister of Indonesia recently said that your approach would be counter-productive and unwelcome?

**MORRISON:** Well he made that comment in relation to one issue which was the issue of turning boats back. Now these issues are always a matter of a working relationship with the Indonesian Government when we turn boats back, when we were in government that was done with the understanding and knowledge of the Indonesian Government. But our policies also relate to the introduction of a temporary form of visa as well as an absolute commitment to universal offshore processing, which is about to end under the Rudd Government. And since the Government rolled back the border protection regime they have inherited, we've had now 94 boats arrive. We've had well over 4,250 people arrived. There are 10 beds left on Christmas Island and the next boat that arrives, the house full sign goes up. Now this is a government that is in border protection denial. This is a government with a Prime Minister who I'd say is a border protection sceptic. They're not serious about the issue. They deny they've got a problem. They blame everyone else except themselves and the Australian people are awake to it.

**GILBERT:** Craig?

**EMERSON:** Well the number of arrivals now is much smaller than the number of arrivals in the early part of the 2000's when there were again push factors; that is, when there are a lot of people leaving their homelands because of national conflicts. That's being repeated now. The numbers arriving now are much lower than at that time. We are in an election year, it's all right - I understand why a Coalition or an Opposition would criticise. I understand why they would do that. But sooner or later, and I would urge sooner, the Coalition has to say would they put the kids back behind razor wire? Would they bring back...

**MORRISON:** We took them out, you know that.

**EMERSON:** ...would they - would they bring back...

**MORRISON:** Don't repeat that [indistinct].

**EMERSON:** ...would they...

**MORRISON:** We took them out.

**EMERSON:** ...would they bring back the Pacific Solution? Would you bring back the Pacific Solution? Would you bring back temporary protection visas? You seem to allude to it there. I look forward to the announcement.

**MORRISON:** That's our policy Craig.

**EMERSON:** You are going to...

**MORRISON:** We said we'd be reintroducing...

**EMERSON:** ...bring back temporary...

**MORRISON:** ...temporary protection visas.

**EMERSON:** ...temporary protection visas. All right. Well that's good that that's announced.

**MORRISON:** You've got to keep up.

**EMERSON:** Temporary visas coming back. You said some sort or form of visa. Now you've confirmed that the temporary protection visas are coming back. Thank you for that.

**GILBERT:** All right gentlemen, as always, appreciate your time. Craig Emerson, Scott Morrison, we're out of time, but thank you as always. And that's all for this edition of AM Agenda.

**END**