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TONY JONES: Good evening and welcome to Q&A. Answering your questions tonight: the former Labor Environment Minister now political lobbyist Graham Richardson; Tasmanian Greens Leader Nick McKim, whose party secured a record 21 per cent of the vote in the recent state election; Peter Costello's successor in the seat of Higgins, Kelly O'Dwyer; spin doctor and commentator Sue Cato; and the Minister for Small Business, Craig Emerson. Please welcome our panel. Okay. Remember Q&A is live from 9.35 Eastern Time. You can join the Twitter conversation with your comments and send your questions by SMS to 197 55 222 - you can do that right now - or you can go to our website at abc.net.au/qanda. But let's go straight to our very first question, which comes from in the audience tonight. It's from Teri Mrena. There's Teri.

TERI MRENA: Earth Hour is described as a call to stand up, to take responsibility and lead the way towards a sustainable future. Who on the panel switched off their lights for Earth Hour and why?

TONY JONES: Okay. Let's start with the former Environment Minister Graham Richardson. Did you...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Guilty. I don't think I did.

TONY JONES: You didn't even have your hand hovering over the switch for a couple of minutes while you worked out whether the footy was more interesting?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: No, actually, I'm not even sure I was here. In fact, I'm sure I wasn't at home. But...

TONY JONES: You weren't on the planet?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: No, I was on the planet, but I don't think I was at home, but the lights were on. I'm confessing, the lights were on.

TONY JONES: Lights were on, someone was home. Kelly O'Dwyer?

KELLY O'DWYER: Look, I didn't do anything particularly special for Earth Hour. I actually think that while symbols are important, it's actually quite critical to try and actually do the right thing every single day of the week. So I try and do my bit for the environment every day.

TONY JONES: You don't take the contrarian view of some of your colleagues that, in fact, that period should have been celebrated by turning on all your appliances and all of your lights and celebrating human achievement hour...

KELLY O'DWYER: Look, I...

TONY JONES: ...as one of your Liberal senators suggested.

KELLY O'DWYER: Look, I didn't do either. I just went about my normal business as I normally would on a Saturday night.

TONY JONES: Nick McKim?

NICK MCKIM: Yes, Tony, I did. Look, it's interesting you say about human achievement hour, because I think people that say there's some dichotomy between sustainability and human achievement actually are missing the point here. We actually need innovation and human achievement to get us out of what is a massive sustainability crisis so, you know, this is a false dichotomy here and we should embrace sustainability and we should embrace innovation and human achievement. I think you can do both and, in fact, we have to do both.

TONY JONES: Was anything achieved by Earth Hour?

NICK MCKIM: Look, I think symbolism is important. I think it allows people to feel part of something bigger than themselves and feel part of a solution, rather than being made to feel part of the problem, which often happens in debates around things like climate change, so I think it is important, yes.

TONY JONES: Craig Emerson? Oh, sorry, Kelly, you want to come in?

KELLY O'DWYER: I was just going to say Clive Hamilton who was my opponent in the Higgins by-election; he thought it was very tokenistic. He actually thinks Earth Hour isn't worth doing.

NICK MCKIM: Clive's certainly entitled to his view.

KELLY O'DWYER: Mm.

TONY JONES: Well, we'll just go along the panel. I'll go to Sue Cato first and then to Craig.

SUE CATO: Okay, well, I have to admit I was in a pub in The Rocks and right, actually, on the edge of the Harbour Bridge.

TONY JONES: Did you at least stop drinking?

SUE CATO: Can I tell you I did, but that was only because I couldn't find the glass because the Harbour Bridge was turned off. But, no. No. Look, it's fantastic. I'm actually a big fan of Earth Hour. Anything that gets the planet, and lots of the planet, to stop and think for a moment about an issue, whether it's - you know, some people can call it tokenistic. Some people can say it's meaningful. To me it's a moment that we, as the world, can actually stop and have a think about what's going on and how can that be bad?

TONY JONES: Craig Emerson, did you turn off your lights?

CRAIG EMERSON: True confessions, I did, but that was mainly because there was an excellent game of rugby union on and a great game of rugby league and it just looked a little bit better in the dark.

TONY JONES: You turned off the lights but not the tele. Is that what you're saying?

CRAIG EMERSON: I didn't turn the tele off.

TONY JONES: All right.

CRAIG EMERSON: You've got to draw the line somewhere. You've got to draw the line.

SUE CATO: I trust it wasn't a great big plasma screen?

CRAIG EMERSON: No, it wasn't. It was only a little screen (inaudible)

TONY JONES: Did you even think about it? I mean, did it cross your mind that you should do that and you decided not...

CRAIG EMERSON: Look, I think on the serious side of this, without going down a trip down memory lane, in 1990 we spent a lot of effort getting people around the table. Ninety different organisations, conservation groups, business, to launch a strategy for ecologically sustainable development and I think we have lost momentum over that period and we need, always, to be vigilant and to integrate. I think pretty much as Nick is saying that (inaudible) integrate economic development and environmental protection. They're not necessarily rivals. They don't need to be rivals and we should not be saying to the next generation that we're going to send you the environmental bill for the sort of damage that we needlessly do. Of course we need economic development, but there are so many instances of wanton destruction of the environment that are unnecessary, so let's integrate economic development and the environment.

TONY JONES: So next time you'll record the rugby, will you?

CRAIG EMERSON: Yeah, I'll record the rugby and then watch it an hour later once the lights come back on.

TONY JONES: All right. Okay, we've actually got a few people with their hands up in the air. Now, let's go right up to the very back row.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is simple. Where is the ETS? Someone seems to have turned off the lights on that one.

TONY JONES: I'm going to take that as a comment, because we'll come to that one later. You're watching Q&A, the live and interactive forum where you get to ask the questions. Our next question comes from Alex Van Vucht.

ALEX VAN VUCHT: The recent Tasmanian election showed that both major parties drifted too far to the right to be palatable for the mainstream. With ongoing support for Afghanistan, warfare quarantining, as well as tough posturing immigration, is the Federal ALP following suit and vacating the political field for the Greens to move in?

TONY JONES: Let's start with Nick McKim, because you're talking about trying to start a new style of politics in Tasmania. Could it actually gravitate to the Federal arena?

NICK MCKIM: Well, I think what we saw in Tasmania is a situation where certainly the Greens' vote has grown. It's a record Greens' vote in Tassie and obviously we're really pleased about that. I think the reason it's grown isn't so much about a change in what the Greens have done, although we made deliberate decision to campaign in this election on issues that maybe we haven't focussed on so hard in the past. But ultimately I think personally my view is that there are Federal implications from the Tasmanian result, and I think that's ultimately because there are more and more people in Australia that are actually hearing and understanding what the Greens are saying and, interestingly, Ken Henry was reported in the print media today as saying that we've been blindsided by our arrogance in relation to the way we've treated the environment. He mentioned water and he mentioned forests and some other environmental issues. And what I think is actually happening is that more and more people are realising that without a healthy environment you don't have healthy people, you don't have healthy communities and, for that matter, you don't have a healthy economy and I guess ultimately, Tony, you know Bill Clinton said "It's the economy, stupid." Well, no, it's not the economy, stupid; it's the environment, stupid. And if we don't have that environment, we don't have the rest.

TONY JONES: Graham Richardson, let's hear from you. I mean, have the two major parties missed the boat here and is there a danger the Greens are going to pick up the votes as they did in Tasmania that are out there for those policies?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I think you just heard why the Greens in Tasmania did so well. They're better led and they're better organised. They did very well. Labor was seen as having been not terribly competent in its last couple of terms and it's been there a long, long time. The Liberals were seen as uninspiring. When you get that combination, the Greens vote goes up. But you've watched in Tasmania before. It's been up before. This isn't the first hung parliament. It won't be the last under that stupid system. That

Hare-Clark system. It's...

NICK MCKIM: It's a beautiful system.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I wish I had - I wish I had an hour to discuss that but that's...

CRAIG EMERSON: They're still counting.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: That is another story.

CRAIG EMERSON: They're still counting.

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah.

NICK MCKIM: They are.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: But I think, you know, you've got to be a bit realistic. I don't think there are a great many Federal issues or anything that the Liberals or the Labor Party have to worry about terribly coming out of that election.

TONY JONES: Well, the Finance Minister, Lindsay Tanner, disagrees with you. He wrote this week that Labor should ignore the Greens' showing in Tasmania at its peril. That Labor is the Greens real target, not the conservatives. Do you not agree with him?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Lindsay's got particular concerns about the Greens, because when the preference the Liberals in Melbourne it gets very close, and I can understand Lindsay having a view that self-preservation is always a good idea and Jack Lange always said that you can back self-interest as the one horse in the race that's always trying. And I understand Lindsay and I wish him well, but I don't think there are great Federal implications. If you look at the Greens' vote nationally and you look at it over the last few elections, it's not doing much.

NICK MCKIM: That's true. That's true.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I don't believe it will do a whole lot this time. It may improve a bit, but I don't believe there's going to be some massive swing to the Greens, no.

TONY JONES: Kelly O'Dwyer, let's hear from you.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, look, there was a very good result for the Liberals, actually, in Tasmania. A seven percent swing toward the Liberals, and I think that demonstrates that there is a very strong strengthening in the Liberal branch. In fact, I think it suggests that Tony Abbott is doing incredibly well. It also suggests that there's huge disenchantment with the ALP. When you saw a swing to the Greens of five per cent and a negative swing against ALP of about 12 per cent, it demonstrates that people are basically sick of a do nothing government, and I think that that has real implications for Kevin Rudd. I think people want to see more action and less talk.

TONY JONES: You're not at all concerned when you see the tiny percentage or relatively small percentage that the Liberals actually got of the overall vote?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, look, there are some unique factors that also play in, and Graham's mentioned them. The Hare-Clarke system, which, of course, is a very different voting system to the rest of the country. When you actually do have a direct comparison, and I think that the Higgins by-election is actually a pretty good example, where you had a mainstream candidate: you had myself standing in the Higgins by-election. You also had a Green.

TONY JONES: It's funny you should say the Higgins by-election is a good example.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, you had a Green.

TONY JONES: It's a very dissimilar sort of organisation.

KELLY O'DWYER: But except you had a Green as the main opponent there in that particular example and, of course, the Greens thought that they were going to get a huge swing toward them. They actually predicted that they would win the seat. They thought that they would not only get their own vote, but they would get all of the ALP votes and the results were quite different. In fact, far from the Greens doing particularly well, there was a positive 3.2 per cent swing towards the Liberals.

TONY JONES: Let's go to Craig Emerson and Sue Cato.

CRAIG EMERSON: The Green vote in Tasmania was a strong vote. Twenty-one cent is a strong vote and I think it consists of two groups of people. One, those who are very committed to the environment and those who were lodging a strong protest vote against a

Labor Government that had been in power for a very long period of time. I'm not sure that that then means that the two major parties (inaudible) - they still got 10 seats each, I think. It's pending the outcome of the Hare-Clarke system. It only is rivalled by the Modified d'Hondt system which is used in Canberra. It's a little more complicated but I think they might have abandoned that one, it was complicated and they couldn't work out a winner. But...

TONY JONES: What do you think about the Federal implications? The questioner was going to that issue.

CRAIG EMERSON: Look, I just genuinely can't see Federal implications. Graham was talking about the Green vote nationwide. I think it's been pretty stable. I don't think that there is a big resurgence in support. I think to compliment Nick, if I might, he put forward a set of propositions that related not only to the environment. He actually used the word "compromise" and it wasn't a dirty word, whereas the Green party in the past have regarded the word "compromise" as a dirty word. Now, what Nick is saying is, "Look, let's campaign across a range of issues that are not just environmental issues: health, education, and good on you. Congratulations for the result. Whether it'll transfer Federally, I'm not quite so convinced.

SUE CATO: Let's hear from Sue Cato.

SUE CATO: All right. So we've heard from the Labor Party, and, Graham, I don't know what to call you anymore. Just "legend".

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Graham.

SUE CATO: Graham. So legend.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I get called lots of things.

SUE CATO: But Labor Party, Greens and Liberals. Can I put my hand up for the Tasmanian economy? I mean, we've now got a hung parliament. We've got the Greens who, if you look at - what is it? The $300 million Walker Development and the pulp mill. You're against that. How do you actually create...

NICK MCKIM: We might come to that a bit later, I hope.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I hope we do.

SUE CATO: I mean, I suppose I look at people in Tasmania who actually also want to be employed. And while - can I tell you, I'm probably Greener than a lot of my comrades. I mean, the simple fact is people have got to be employed in Tasmania and in this last campaign, you know, you guys were campaigning on other issues, but what happens now to the economy of Tasmania with a hung parliament where there are no decisions being taken.

NICK MCKIM: Well...

TONY JONES: Okay, we've actually got a - I'm going to interrupt there, because we've got a question that picks up on some of these issues and it's from Lorraine Bower.

LORRAINE BOWER: It's to Nick McKim. You've said you want to work with either the Liberal or Labor Party and you're prepared to compromise in the interests of good governance.

NICK MCKIM: Yes.

LORRAINE BOWER: But surely there are issues that can't be subject to compromise, like the pulp mill and like the continued destruction of our native forests when we have actually plantations to spare in Australia. Where will you draw the line on compromise?

NICK MCKIM: Well, thanks, Lorraine. I've made our position very clear on this. I mean, the Tasmanian people, when they voted a little over a week ago, they didn't give a mandate to any one party to implement all of our policies. That was very clear. In fact, they voted and gave a mandate, if anything for us to work constructively and cooperatively together, and we've said, "Let's actually deliver the stability that the economy and the business community wants, the stability and the accountability that the Tasmanian people want, and let's do that via the mechanism of a negotiated arrangement between us and one or the other of the parties or, for that matter, between the Labor and Liberal Parties, because they are obviously natural allies in policy terms. Now, I can't predict how those negotiations will go and, interestingly, there are no negotiations at the moment, because the Labor and Liberal parties are refusing to discuss things with us. And, interestingly, Labor is going to give away government if David Bartlett sticks to what he said during the election campaign. I mean, it's extraordinary. Most political parties will crawl over broken glass to find and hang onto government. Labor has said it's going to give away government and ultimately Labor then will be supporting a Liberal - this is how bizarre politics gets in Tasmania. Labor will support a Liberal government and in my view, in that case, the governor is going

to need assurances from the Labor Party in relation to guaranteeing supply, guaranteeing not to vote confidence in a Liberal Government except in extreme circumstances. So we've got a very, very interesting situation ahead of us. In terms of compromise, it's very difficult to hypothesise, because I just don't know how negotiations will go. They're like a conversation or a dance. I mean you just can't pre-empt them.

TONY JONES: But, Nick McKim, there are obvious questions and two of them were raised by our questioner there. I mean, the pulp mill. Are you prepared to compromise on that? For example, are you prepared to say, well, the pulp mill is okay, provided it only uses plantation timber? Are you prepared to go that far in terms of compromising?

NICK MCKIM: Well, look, the parliament has already dealt with the pulp mill. We didn't support the pulp mill legislation. Our policy will remain the same as it's always been. We don't support the pulp mill and I think our position on logging of high conservation value forests is very well known.

SUE CATO: Nick, can I ask a question? What is a high conservation valued forest because I've not heard that...

NICK MCKIM: Oh, it's a forest that's been scientifically assessed as having high conservation value.

SUE CATO: I haven't heard that technical term. Okay. Interesting.

NICK MCKIM: It's able to be scientifically assessed. But look, ultimately it's a very fluid situation, Lorraine, in Tasmania at the moment, and the point I made earlier is I think very germane to where we go from here in Tasmania and that's the Labor Party is going to give government - advise the governor that the Liberal Party should be commissioned to form a government and in that case, rather than the governor and the people of Tasmania looking to the greens to give assurances about stability, it's actually the Labor Party that will have the moral and the constitutional responsibility on it to prop up the Liberal Government, because that's what it's intending to do.

CRAIG EMERSON: There's a bit of history behind that decision, if I could just add. Bob Hawke described me as the midwife of the Labor Green Alliance that was put together around 1988 and I was very proud at the time, getting Michael Field and the Greens together. It was a disaster. It was an unmitigated disaster, because at that time the Greens would not compromise even on non-environmental matters and it absolutely destroyed Labor's

standing to the point where they went to an election. Now, what I'm hoping, Nick, is - I used the word "compromise". Everything I've seen of you suggests that you're prepared to do that. If you are, then it is possible to achieve stability in the government of Tasmania...

NICK MCKIM: Yes, it is.

CRAIG EMERSON: ...whoever forms government, so long as people all take responsibility for creating a stable government, economic development and environmental protection at the same time.

KELLY O'DWYER: Can I just...

TONY JONES: Let's...

KELLY O'DWYER: Can I pick up on that?

TONY JONES: Yes, you can.

KELLY O'DWYER: Because I think there's one additional point just in relation to the stability, and I suppose the question goes to you. You've talked about not blocking supply...

NICK MCKIM: Yes.

KELLY O'DWYER: ...but will you also, you know, state on the record whether you will, you know, ensure that you don't move motions of no confidence?

NICK MCKIM: Well, that's a matter for David Bartlett. He's the one that wants to hand government to the Liberal Party in Tasmania.

KELLY O'DWYER: But what would you do?

NICK MCKIM: Well, our position has been very clear. We will - we've given many commitments to support budgets through the parliament. That remains our view. In terms of any commitment on confidence, I suspect that the governor will actually go to the Labor Party and ask them, because they're the ones that have abdicated government and want the Liberal Party to govern in Tasmania if David Bartlett holds to his word. So - and I make the other point, Tony, if I might. Firstly, in a balance of power parliament, all three parties are in balance of power. No one party can block any piece of legislation or motion and no one

party can get it through on their own. So these are questions...

TONY JONES: So just on that point, are you suggesting that the pulp mill old growth forests, they're out of your hands, in fact?

NICK MCKIM: No, they're not.

TONY JONES: Because there's nothing you can do to stop the Liberals and the Labor Party getting together to vote through any legislation on those issues they want to without taking any notice of you.

NICK MCKIM: That's true, unless there's a negotiated agreement, in which commitments are made.

CRAIG EMERSON: And I think Nick has just said that the legislation on the pulp mill is already through. I mean, I get that as a sort of a message to say, well, it's done and dusted.

NICK MCKIM: Well, look, personally I don't think the pulp mill...

CRAIG EMERSON: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth but that's what I understand...

NICK MCKIM: No, that's okay, Craig. I mean, the legislation is through but we've committed to introduce a repeal bill and that will remain our view unless there's any negotiation. But in relation to the pulp mill, remember that legislation was passed years ago and...

CRAIG EMERSON: But presumably you wouldn't bring down...

NICK MCKIM: ...there's still no pulp mill being built.

CRAIG EMERSON: Presumably you wouldn't try to bring down a government that did not support the repeal bill.

NICK MCKIM: Well, it depends on any negotiations that might occur, and I can't hypothesise about that.

SUE CATO: But, guys, hang on. The Liberal Party and the Labor Party are both supporting the pulp mill.

NICK MCKIM: That's right.

SUE CATO: So it's not like you're going to get your repeal bill up and I suppose my question is...

NICK MCKIM: Well, we won't have the numbers to do that.

SUE CATO: So, okay, so what you're saying then is it's a non-issue. But my big question is, does that mean we're going to have incredible boring government because no one is going to do anything interesting or exciting or show leadership?

TONY JONES: I want to hear from - well, let's throw that across to Graham Richardson, because I must say that on the night of the election - I did the election coverage in Tasmania. On the night of the election the man that I least expected to call for a Green Labor alliance, former Premier Paul Lennon, actually did so. I'm just wondering what you as an old hen, former Environment Minister and Labor powerbroker would suggest?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Well, I thought the comments from Bartlett that basically under no circumstances would he deal with the Greens was pretty silly. I hope he rethinks it. I hope he gets together with some of his colleagues and has a couple of quiet drinks one day and works out that that's pretty dumb and moves forward. If anyone can work with the Greens, it will be Labor. I think that's been proven over time and so you'd hope that's what would happen. But it doesn't look like it at this stage of the game. So it seems to me there's going to be some sort of Liberal Government with Labor Support. That will be unstable, can't last, won't last, so I think Tasmanians have got to look forward to a pretty difficult future until someone can sit down with the Greens and organise an agreement. But I wouldn't hang by the neck waiting for that one, Tony. I'd take a long, deep breath. It's going to be a while.

TONY JONES: Let's hear a final word on this from Nick McKim.

NICK MCKIM: Well, just really quickly, Tony...

TONY JONES: Where's it going to go?

NICK MCKIM: Well, the Tasmanian people voted. If there was any mandate out of the Tasmanian election, the people voted for political parties to sit down, be constructive and cooperate, stop sniping and work together to deliver stability and accountability that's actually been so lacking over the last decade in Tasmania. That was the mandate out of the election. We're ready to follow

through on that mandate and...

CRAIG EMERSON: And isn't stability in the interests of all three parties?

NICK MCKIM: Well, I think it's in the interests of Tasmania.

CRAIG EMERSON: I mean, if there was no stability then they're back to the polls. The Greens have demonstrated that they can't compromise. Labor is back in the polls. The Liberals are back in the polls and everyone says you're a mob of mongrels for bring us back to the polls.

NICK MCKIM: Well, I think it's in the interests of Tasmania. And just really quickly on the Labor Green accord. I mean, Michael Field got the Order of Australia medal because it began the debt reduction strategy that sees Tasmania general government net debt free today, and he couldn't have done that without the Greens. So I'm not sure that I agree, Craig, that it was an unmitigated disaster.

CRAIG EMERSON: He's a very bitter and twisted man.

NICK MCKIM: Well, he's actually running David Bartlett's strategy.

TONY JONES: There are an awful lot of bitter and twisted people in politics. Let's put it that way. Okay, you're watching Q&A and remember you can send your web or video questions to our website. The address is on the screen. Our next question tonight comes from in the audience. It's from Graham Jones.

GRAHAM JONES: Thank you, Tony. My question is for the panel. Tony Abbott sees a political advantage in displaying his physical fitness for all to see, his posing in pink lycra at Manly being a good example. Does the panel think the voters will agree with him, or do they prefer as their Prime Minister a less "out there", more conservative, politically focused nerd like Mr Rudd?

TONY JONES: Sue Cato, let's start with you.

SUE CATO: Gee, thanks, Tony. I'm presuming by saying "out there" you're not talking about body parts.

GRAHAM JONES: Ah, no.

SUE CATO: But, look, I've got to say I sit back and I look at him and by the way there's some...

CRAIG EMERSON: Bit risqué?

SUE CATO: Well, you know, it's late. It's after 9.30. We're fine aren't we?

CRAIG EMERSON: Past kiddies' time.

SUE CATO: I'm not going to get ticked off.

TONY JONES: We're fine as long as you don't start describing the body part.

SUE CATO: Can I tell you there is so no risk of that. Now, but look, I look at it and I think - in fact there was some research out today based from EMC saying that Tony Abbott has taken a bit of a hit in popularity. It's in the most recent polling, and saying that Kevin's moved up. I've got to say as - you know, and there are a lot of people around this table who have been in politics a long time who work really hard. I do personally have to wonder whether somebody can be a professional level athlete and a professional politician and, you know, and I - well, we heard Nicola Roxon talk about, you know, it's maybe time to get a health policy and, you know, I think people really cut Tony Abbott some slack straight after the worm debate on the basis that, you know, he's only a new leader, time to get a health policy up. But, you know, you can argue that for so long. If you've got - you know, I read somewhere today, and I could be wrong, that there's another bike ride slated for the next week or so. Well, you know what, when the next debate is up, if there's no policy, I think there's no slack.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Kelly O'Dwyer.

KELLY O'DWYER: I just find it extraordinary that Tony Abbott would be criticised for being somebody who is involved in his community, who raises money for charity, who believes that fitness is actually a good thing and who, on top of all of that, does a terrific job in his day job. I mean, if this is the worst thing that can be said about Tony Abbott then, gee, you know, bring it on. You know...

TONY JONES: Julia Gillard said that people...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I think there are worse things that can be said.

CRAIG EMERSON: Yes, that's right.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: We're only just starting.

TONY JONES: ...people don't want a personal trainer. They want someone who has policies.

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah, well, Tony, I mean, the really interesting point about the Labor Party continuing to harp on about policies is the fact that they are the only, you know, party that wants to talk more about the Opposition's policies than their own. I mean, it's really interesting that they actually don't want to talk about, you know, the debacle of the home insulation scheme. They don't want to talk about the $43 billion NBN network. They don't want to talk about...

CRAIG EMERSON: Happy to talk about...

KELLY O'DWYER: You know, they don't want to talk about blowouts in the building of the education revolution. You know, it's interesting...

CRAIG EMERSON: The greatest school modernisation program in Australia's history. Happy to talk about it.

KELLY O'DWYER: ...they actually think that the Opposition should be doing the job of government and, quite frankly, it's for the government to be putting forward their policies at this stage. We will certainly be putting forward policies, but we will do that once we know the state of the nation's finances...

TONY JONES: Once we get off our bikes?

KELLY O'DWYER: No, once we know the state of the nation's finances in May.

TONY JONES: Let's go to Graham Richardson.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I can recall John Howard in his green tracksuit and those sweaty walks around Kirribilli and...

CRAIG EMERSON: The walk of life.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: ...around Hyde Park in London, or wherever he was at the time. I don't think he either won or lost elections because of it and neither will Tony Abbott. I think Tony Abbott

going on bike rides and swims, if that's what you're about, good luck to you. I don't criticise it. I'm sure he'll find time to fit in a bit of politics in the interim and I won't be critical. But it's got nothing to do with the price of fish. At the end of the day Tony Abbott got the job, improved the Liberal's vote because he put the Liberal base back together. Turnbull fragmented it. Tony Abbott was always going to put the Liberal base back together. Now, you've got to do more than that. You've got to add on to that to actually win an election. He's not doing that at the moment. He seems to have stopped a bit. I don't think the debate helped him at all. It was pretty obvious he lost it. But, then again, he should never have agreed to it. You don't go into a debate without a health policy. You're a sitting duck and that's what happened to him. So I think Tony Abbott started very well and I think is still doing relatively well, but he isn't now climbing, and that's going to be his problem. What does he do to climb? He's going to have to have some policies and he's going to have to spend some time working them out.

TONY JONES: Yes, Kelly O'Dwyer, you were nearly apoplectic there, so I thought I should go to you. Make a response.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, no, I was just going to say, you know, it's interesting that all this criticism comes about Tony Abbott and you've had Nicola Roxon out and Maxine McKew and a whole range of other people who have been out there harping away at Tony Abbott, and yet you've got the Defence Minister, John Faulkner, who only last year, you know, spent two days bushwalking.

CRAIG EMERSON: Oh, heaven forbid.

KELLY O'DWYER: Nobody thought that was - nobody thought that was a, you know, a problem, that he was, you know, not focussed on his job. So, I think you've got to keep this all in proportion.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: But I'm not criticising him.

KELLY O'DWYER: Tony...

CRAIG EMERSON: Yeah.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I'm happy for him to go on his walks and his swims.

CRAIG EMERSON: Good luck to Tony.

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah, but Tony - Tony is an authentic person. He is somebody who, you know, is not a fake, he is not a phony, and I think we should applaud him for it.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Nick McKim?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Well, I do.

NICK MCKIM: Yeah, no...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I do.

NICK MCKIM: Well, Tony...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I like the boy.

NICK MCKIM: Look, I agree. I mean, I'm in awe of what he does physically. I mean, that is a great body he's got and don't you reckon there might be some Tony Abbott...

CRAIG EMERSON: Go the lycra.

NICK MCKIM: ...floats at the Mardi Gras this year? I mean, you know, he is going to be an absolute icon, that guy. The budgie smugglers...

CRAIG EMERSON: A Tony Abbott float. I can just see it.

NICK MCKIM: ...are a bit much for me. I'm a more sort of baggy board shorts kind of a guy but, look, I'm in awe of what he's doing physically. I can't see how it's going to hurt him, particularly when he's up against, you know, quite a boring technocrat, in my view, in our Prime Minister.

TONY JONES: Okay. All right. Before we come to the rest of our panel, which I think is Craig, actually, there's a web question from Rod Fountain in Erina, New South Wales. It is for Craig Emerson. "You and other members of the cabinet make derogatory comments about Tony Abbott in his budgie smugglers. Is this because you're jealous and cannot present a body" - and I thing they mean envious there - "cannot present a body as well developed to the voting public"?

CRAIG EMERSON: Oh, I don't know about that. It's true, I'm jealous. Look, Tony Abbott is entitled to do what he's doing, and that is getting fit and staying fit. I think the Australian people will make their

decisions not on who's the fittest but on who's got the best policies for Australia and the idea that people will say, oh, he's fitter than him so I'll vote for him, it's quite absurd. The Australian people are a lot smarter than that. My only question - and Kelly, I don't think Labor has been criticising Tony Abbott. I saw Nicola Roxon. She was saying, "Terrific. I admire him." I mean, we can only, you know, heap so much praise on his physical prowess. But the fact is - the fact is while he's doing that, someone's got to be doing the heavy lifting on policy and someone's got to be doing the heavy lifting on policy. Now, it won't be Julie Bishop because she just copies other people's policies, so who is it going to be?

KELLY O'DWYER: That's beneath you.

CRAIG EMERSON: Who is going to...

TONY JONES: No. Obviously not.

CRAIG EMERSON: I never said I didn't criticise Julie Bishop. But who is it going to be if it's not Tony and, look, the truth is the bicycle ride I think is 10 days. It's for charity. Good on him. But we've got to, I think, for a robust democracy, move from a period where Tony said when he got elected to Opposition leader, "Our job is to oppose." Well, that is actually true of an opposition, but at some point he has to present himself as an alternative Prime Minister with alternative policies and that's really the basis on which people will make their decisions.

TONY JONES: Okay, I'm...

KELLY O'DWYER: So, will...

TONY JONES: No, I'm...

KELLY O'DWYER: Will you give him the forum to do it? Will you actually...

CRAIG EMERSON: Yes, it's called the House of Representatives, the parliament.

KELLY O'DWYER: No. No. No. No. A forum. Will Kevin Rudd actually agree to debate Tony Abbott in the election campaign?

TONY JONES: It will be a bit of a problem if he called a debate next week while he's on his nine day run?

KELLY O'DWYER: No. No. In the election campaign. During the actual election campaign, when you can compare the policies.

TONY JONES: That's a good question.

CRAIG EMERSON: Well, as I say, every - 19 out of 52 weeks we are in the House of Representatives. It is a very robust...

KELLY O'DWYER: So that's a no.

CRAIG EMERSON: Well, I think it's a great debating chamber, myself. You're new to it and everything I hear about you is good, that you're an up and comer. I hope you enjoy the robust exchanges in the Parliament. Sometimes they're funny. Sometimes they're nasty. Sometimes they're hard. But it's the cauldron. It's the real contest of ideas. So we've got a physical contest, great. That's really good. I mean, I got to the gym. I've played rugby union with Tony Abbott a couple of years ago. Broke my pinkie the other day...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: You're my hero.

CRAIG EMERSON: ...playing rugby union. All of that's great. It's just that he does need to come up with some alternatives policies instead of saying, "Our job is just to oppose".

TONY JONES: All right. Now, Tony Abbott won, obviously support for his endurance, but did he win the all important health care debate last week? We have a question along those lines and it's from Calum Davis.

CALUM DAVIS: Yes, Sue Cato, I just was wondering if you could tell us about "the worm", if it took away - takes away freedom of opinion in a democracy? And do you think that a broadcaster has the right to say on real time television the pros and cons of what a democratically elected leader is saying and thus dictate public opinion.

SUE CATO: Okay, Calum, do you actually believe and agree with everything you hear on ever TV channel and every news channel?

CALUM DAVIS: Of course not. No.

SUE CATO: No. And the worm was one representation of view. And we all know there are 100 people in a room, if you're looking at Melbourne, twisting a dial. Everyone knows what's behind the

worm. And so you've got two worms who suddenly give red his mojo back after Tony Abbott pinched his mojo. Clever worms. But, I mean, you know, quite frankly - I mean the worms are a technique. No one takes them, you know, incredibly seriously except perhaps all the commentators who, once the worm had said, you know, Kevin's a winner, they decided to back him. I have much more respect for the Australian electorate and Australian views.

CRAIG EMERSON: Hear, hear.

SUE CATO: I think they can make their own mind up on these things.

TONY JONES: You did make an interesting observation about this. Sorry, we'll let you finish your applause, if you like. You did make an interesting observation about this, though.

SUE CATO: Yes.

TONY JONES: I mean, you actually made the point that you believed that Kevin Rudd was playing to the people who were twiddling the dials on the worm, whereas Tony Abbott was talking to the group of political apparatchiks and journalists in the Press Club.

SUE CATO: Yeah. No. No. Absolutely, and it's - you know, if you actually track the evil worm and actually see the way the hundred people were twisting the knob either in, you know, the Channel 9 studios or the Channel 7 studios, it was really interesting to actually watch that when the laughter that was actually carrying on in the Press Club at the time - so I mean, that's the junkies, if you like. The people who are actually the staffers, the politicians, the journos. The lines that Tony Abbott was delivering which - you know, the really brutal cutting lines, when you were getting the laughter for that, the worm was actually going in the opposite direction.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Yeah. Can I...

SUE CATO: So there was a massive disconnect.

TONY JONES: Yeah, Graham Richardson.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Tony, the point I want to make on that - it's important because I think a number of leaders have made big mistakes on this in the past. Tony Abbott did well in parts of that debate, but the worm always turned down and it has in every

debate since we've had the worm every time you become an attack dog.

CRAIG EMERSON: That's right.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: It plays very well in the parliament. It plays very well in the Press Club and it plays very badly in the lounge rooms, and that's what Tony Abbott, I think, will take out of that debate. He'll learn that if you go on the attack and you start banging your opponent and you might land a few punches. At home in the lounge rooms they don't like it. They never have. They never well.

CRAIG EMERSON: And that's why he would have been better off if he not necessarily brought in with him a completely articulated, highly detailed, alternative health policy, but he didn't.

MULTIPLE SPEAKERS TALK AT ONCE.

CRAIG EMERSON: He was a health minister for four years. I'm just making this point and it's just that if he had at least said, "This is the outline of our health policy," there could have been a debate about two alternative policies. Instead, there was one policy being debated...

TONY JONES: All right.

CRAIG EMERSON: ...with Kevin Rudd, surprise, surprise, supporting it and Tony Abbott, surprise, surprise, surprise, opposing it with every breath in his body and that's why, I think, people turn off.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Kelly O'Dwyer.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, I think - I mean, I agree with Sue in that I think media commentators are probably more obsessed with the worm than really anybody else and if the worm indicates anything - if we are to learn anything from the worm, I suppose it would have been that Mark Latham would have been Prime Minister. So I don't think we can draw too much confidence from the fact that...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I didn't think he did well with the worms.

CRAIG EMERSON: Did he win any worms?

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah. Yeah. No, Mark had the worm there and the worm was, you know, favouring him. So I think the reality is the worm is...

TONY JONES: Did you take the view that the worm process was actually set up to achieve a certain outcome?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, look, I think the worm responds well to sentiment. There are some stories that have actually been written about how people are selected to come along to the audience.

CRAIG EMERSON: Ooh.

KELLY O'DWYER: But look, I don't know.

CRAIG EMERSON: Liberal, Labor conspiracy.

KELLY O'DWYER: No, I'm not saying it's a conspiracy. I'm saying there are some stories and you have read them.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Do we really care about the worm?

CRAIG EMERSON: Who cares?

KELLY O'DWYER: No really.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I mean, it's just not worth all this debate.

SUE CATO: But, guys, why do worms hate Liberals?

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: The mob will always work you out. That's what I always thought in politics.

CRAIG EMERSON: Exactly.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Australians are smart enough. They work you out. They don't need worms. They look, they hear, they see and they say, "Righto. You're good. You're not," and they vote.

TONY JONES: Okay. All right, we've got a question down the front here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's really because, as we have already heard, all Tony Abbott is doing at the moment is opposing. He hasn't got any policies. Sooner or later he's got to drop the budgie

smugglers and show us his policies.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Nick McKim.

NICK MCKIM: Well...

TONY JONES: I mean, you watched that debate presumably.

NICK MCKIM: Yeah.

TONY JONES: So what was your sort of view?

NICK MCKIM: Well, I agree with Graham. I mean, the big lesson for everyone in public life and everyone in politics is that the attack stuff doesn't play well in lounge rooms. People don't like it, and I agree it's - and Craig said it's a hard forum parliament, and we've got a very small house of assembly, 25 members only in Tasmania. It's basically like sitting around your lounge room arguing with people, it's that close and tight. That stuff plays well and it's very hard to avoid, sometimes, in a debating chamber. But, look, I don't think people like to see that, and I think the worm shows that. In terms of, you know, whether the worm is a good thing or a bad thing, I mean, I don't really mind. People can sort of worm me up if they want to or not. I don't really mind. I think most people who watch political debates just see the worm almost as a distraction, and they're just focussing, as Graham says, on what people are saying and what they think about it. And I think that's a good thing.

TONY JONES: But very briefly, your understanding of the public view about attack dog politics, et cetera, has that informed your own style?

NICK MCKIM: Look, I think it has, Tony. I mean, anyone in public life who says they don't think about what people are thinking about them, I think, is trying to run a bit of a con job, and I think most people in public life do think about how we're perceived and, certainly, you know, I think we - I mean, whether it's me or any other political leader, I think we do think about those things. I think about them.

TONY JONES: Well, you must have thought about it pretty carefully.

NICK MCKIM: I've thought about it pretty carefully.

TONY JONES: Because, I mean, you worked in public relations at one point.

NICK MCKIM: Yes.

TONY JONES: You cut off your pony tail before running.

KELLY O'DWYER: Put on a suit.

TONY JONES: I mean, appearances obviously...

NICK MCKIM: Yeah. No, my mum's still got it.

TONY JONES: Really?

NICK MCKIM: See I made her very happy, Tony, when I cut it off. But look...

TONY JONES: Does she keep it on the wall or something, does she?

NICK MCKIM: No. Look, the ponytail came off for charity, actually, for the Leukaemia Foundation, but and that wasn't anything to do with what we're talking about here. But, look, I think most people do think about how we're perceived and we want to be perceived well, because we're human beings, too, and also the better we're perceived the better we'll do politically and the more chance we'll have of delivering on the things that we all care passionately about.

TONY JONES: Okay. Let's move on. You're watching Q&A, the program that gives you the chance to ask the questions you want answered. The next question tonight comes from in the audience. It's from Matthew Rodd.

MATTHEW RODD: I've got a question for Kelly O'Dwyer. Why is your party reverting back to using dehumanising, cynical and sort of divisive terms describing refugees? The latest example would be Scott Morrison last week referring to refugees of clients of people smugglers?

TONY JONES: Kelly O'Dwyer?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, I don't know of the circumstances that you talk about, but I think, you know, you've raised a really important question and that is, you know, Labor's failed border protection policy. The reality is - the reality is...

TONY JONES: Do you think that's what the question is.

CRAIG EMERSON: I don't think he meant to raise it in that...

KELLY O'DWYER: Yes, well, I mean, it's a legitimate...

CRAIG EMERSON: You might be putting words in his mouth here.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, I assume...

TONY JONES: Well, we can ask him. Was that what you meant?

MATTHEW RODD: Not really, no.

TONY JONES: No.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, I assume you want to actually talk about, though, the way that this policy is actually discussed, and you can't do that unless you actually talk about the policy itself; unless you go to the substance of it, and the reality is the reason why people like Scott Morrison are getting out there and talking about the policy is because only today we had the 99th and 100th boat turn up - you know, illegal boat turn up on our shores and you've got now over 4,500 people who have arrived, you know, since August of 2008. It's a clear demonstration that the Labor Party's policy has actually failed. It's an issue that we do need to talk about. It's an issue that the Labor Party don't like talking about.

CRAIG EMERSON: Happy to talk about it.

KELLY O'DWYER: All right.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Indistinct) reply to that. Under Howard's rule refugees arriving by plane increased considerably, whereas the boats stopped. Why are boats worse than planes?

CRAIG EMERSON: Good question.

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, you need a comprehensive policy. The reality is there are limited people that we can actually settle here in Australia, and we do have a very good record here in Australia of settling people who are legitimate asylum seekers. People who are refugees. And it's important that we do not outsource that settlement and outsource the people who are coming here to people like people smugglers who, in fact, are charging people upwards of $10,000 to get on a boat and come here. I think that's criminal, and I think it's wrong.

TONY JONES: Okay. Let's go to Craig Emerson. Craig Emerson, I mean this is starting to bite out there, it seems. I mean, you've only got to listen to talkback radio to realise that. 15 boat arrivals in a month. That's the - I gather the largest numbers since the middle - in fact, I think, the largest number in history, as far as I...

CRAIG EMERSON: Well, let's talk about numbers...

TONY JONES: In one month.

CRAIG EMERSON: ...and let's have the discussion.

TONY JONES: Why are they still coming?

CRAIG EMERSON: There's a certain hysteria, I just need to say this, about asylum seekers. One of the Sunday papers had a headline screaming, "They're here. They're in our shops." What, they're snitching our bargains? They're taking our best sales? I mean, it's just got to a point where they are regarded as evil people. Now, I had a look at the number of people who have come to Australia seeking asylum by boat. The number is 22,000. Now that seems like a fairly large number but that's not this year or last year - that is in the last 35 years. 22,000 people have sought asylum in Australia over 35 years and there's this hysteria with the Liberals saying, "Oh, it's as if we're being overrun by asylum seekers." It is just absurd and I think, in many respects, inhumane to treat people who go to do a bit of shopping with their kids as "they're here". Now, the policy that we have is offshore processing, which is the same as the Liberal Party's policy of offshore processing. Scott Morrison, the same guy, says, "What are these 87 people doing at Villawood"? We would never have allowed them on the mainland. Well, they build Christmas Island, where they were going to put a 747 strip there and deport them, because that's what's happening with these 87 people who are found not to be genuine refugees and we were sending them back to their home countries. So let's keep a bit of perspective about this.

TONY JONES: All right. Let's hear from Sue Cato.

SUE CATO: Well, I think as a nation we'd probably like to think of ourselves as humanitarians and, you know, there's a huge part of me that just says 4500 people. We actually can't work out - and yes there are some security issues but, you know, what we're hearing is that this is a policy nightmare. Whoever is in government, the other side is beating them up. You know, the tabloids who are doing the "Shock horror, they're here. They're

buying pizza and Coca-Cola and whatever," are the same people who beat Pauline Hanson up, but we always know tabloids can have it both ways, because they're very flexible. But I'm just saying it's, you know, never miss a good yarn. But I suppose I look at it and I just think, you know, there's - and I'm going to sound like you, Nick. There's got to be a compromise. There's got to be a better way through. But I'm just saying, I just think there's you know, sort of ugliness from both sides on this.

TONY JONES: Let's - first of all, I want to go to Nick McKim, but let me just hear from you. Did you think those headlines, the photos of the people shopping, did you find that offensive?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, look, you know, the reality is there are - you know, I'm not going to defend the newspapers in terms of their editorial writers and how they actually write it up.

TONY JONES: But did you find that concept of picking people and saying, "They're here. They're shopping," did you find that offensive?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, they are here shopping. I mean, that's a fact.

CRAIG EMERSON: Oh, my God, they are going to take our bargains.

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah. No, but the point is - the point is - no, that's not...

TONY JONES: So - no. No. Can I just - can I just...

KELLY O'DWYER: It's a fact. You know, you can try and dress it up. It's a fact.

TONY JONES: ...can I just finish asking the question, though? So you didn't find that offensive?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, look, you know, I wouldn't have described it in that way. I wouldn't have described it in that way. I wouldn't have described it in that way because I think it's important - you know, as you say, it is a humanitarian issue. There are lots of other people who actually don't get on boats, who do want to come to Australia, who do want to settle here, who are waiting in camps. Not just first generation but second generation and third generation. Why is it that other people are able to get on a boat, come here and fast track their application, whereas other people are forced to basically wait in these camps.

SUE CATO: Because not everyone wants to wait in a camp and, you know what, good on them.

CRAIG EMERSON: Yeah.

SUE CATO: If some people actually want to get out of the camp, go for it.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Nick McKim.

NICK MCKIM: Well, Tony, I mean, these people are human beings and we just have to treat them as human beings as if we would want to be treated if we were in the same situation that they are in and I'm not sure that, you know, with respect, that Labor's policy is all that much better than what we saw under John Howard. Yes, there are some marginal improvements. People are still being processed off shore. I regard that as inhumane. I regard it as a piece of political trickery, if you like. The excision zones still remain in relation to some issues of people arriving by boat. Look, ultimately what we need to do is bring people here, make sure we do the identity checks and then if they are found to be genuine, let's have them in our communities being valued members of our community and of our society. If they're not legitimate...

KELLY O'DWYER: But that's what...

TONY JONES: So, would you - would your...

NICK MCKIM: ...send them back.

TONY JONES: Under the policy you're advocating, would you detain them while you make the checks?

NICK MCKIM: Well, I think there are potential security issues, although I make the point I think that's been made by someone previously that if you look at people that are genuinely a security risk to Australia, they're not going to be arriving by boat. So...

CRAIG EMERSON: They've got a quid. They'll come by plane.

NICK MCKIM: That's exactly right, Craig. So, yeah, I mean, look, you do need to you can establish identity but people have to be dealt with and processed a lot, lot quicker than they are. They should be processed under Australian law, not bolted together - some piece of legislation that's been bolted together on the fly with all the sad and sorry history of both the Liberal Party and the Labor

Parties in the Federal Parliament. These people are human beings, for goodness sake. They are guilty of nothing except wanting a better life for themselves and their families. We just have to treat them as such.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Graham Richardson on this and we'll move on.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I just recall Nauru. John Howard stuck all these people out on Nauru. Not a great place, by the way. Don't think it's the garden spot of the world. He stuck them out there and he said, "See, we're not taking them. We're holding them up." Almost the whole bloody lot of them finished up here anyway.

CRAIG EMERSON: It was more than 70 per cent.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: It was a total con job. And so I think all this stuff about you process them off shore and in some way that's good, is nonsense. I don't understand why we don't just process them on shore. Christmas Island is clearly chock-a-block. You can't fit another person in there. I mean it just is a joke. So we have to build places here. We've got to do it here and we've got to do it properly, and I don't mean somewhere out in the desert in South Australia with barb wire and 45 degrees every day. Why have we got to do that to people? I mean, I just don't understand this whole hysteria. Now, what you need is both sides of politics to stand up and say, "I don't actually care now about the votes here. We actually have to do the right thing." Will that happen? No.

TONY JONES: Okay. All right. We are running out of time and it is time to move along to another subject. Remember you're watching Q&A, the program where you ask the questions. Go to our website - the address is on your screen - if you'd like to join the studio audience or upload a video question. Our next question comes from in the audience. It's from Anshu Vijay Wijeyeratne.

ANSHU VIJAY WIJEYERATNE: Thank you. This is to the panel. Does the increased number of career politicians who start as staffers and end up in parliament signify an over-professionalisation of politics centred on winning elections as opposed to the democratic ideal of local MPs representing their communities?

TONY JONES: Okay. Let's go to Kelly O'Dwyer because...

KELLY O'DWYER: Why not?

TONY JONES: Well, I could go to a number of people on this...

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah. No. No. No. I'm very happy to...

TONY JONES: ...but you did go from Peter Costello's adviser to his successor.

KELLY O'DWYER: Yeah. Well, that's right.

TONY JONES: But you did have a career before that.

KELLY O'DWYER: I was a lawyer before that and I worked in a bank, you know, afterwards. But I think - I think - I mean, it's an interesting point and interesting question that you raise. I think a lot of people who become political staffers who work in politics are actually pretty passionate about politics. They are actually passionate about representing their community, whether they're on the left or the right or they're in the Greens and a lot of those people.

NICK MCKIM: (Indistinct) Where are we?

KELLY O'DWYER: Well, you do say you're different, Nick, don't you, so...

CRAIG EMERSON: Somewhere in the middle.

NICK MCKIM: Yeah, probably right.

KELLY O'DWYER: And I think the reality is that those people who are passionate about politics, you know, often are the people who want to put their hand up. They're exactly the sort of people who you actually want to represent local communities, because they're the sort of people who care.

TONY JONES: Let's hear from Craig Emerson. You also had the same path, I think, adviser to Bob Hawke and then an MP.

CRAIG EMERSON: A little bit like Kelly, yes. I was a former staffer. I also ran a small business. I was head of the Environment Department. I've got a PhD in economics and did a couple of other things as well so, and that's maybe not typical but the idea that there are only two lives that parliamentarians have, one as a staffer and then secondly as a parliamentarian, is usually incorrect. They might - it's true, in the Labor Party they may have worked in a trade union. We get slagged off by the coalition for working in a trade union representing the interests of working people. I think

that's a proud career path. But there are many, many different paths but I also agree with Kelly. It's the conviction that people have, and that may drive them to be a staffer. And Liberal, Labor, Green - I think when people have the courage and determination of their convictions to enter the parliament, that's a good thing. On a rival television program this morning there was a woman - I can't remember her name. I don't really want to because everything she said was anti-Labor. I hate them. I hate them. And she said, "I'd be really good in parliament. Someone should put me there." Well, she should put herself there. She should drive herself and get herself elected.

TONY JONES: Well, that was the question really, and it gets down to the nub of the question, which is this whole thing has become so over professionalised...

CRAIG EMERSON: Well, I think...

TONY JONES: ...that's it's actually very hard for ordinary folk to come up from the grass roots and become MPs.

CRAIG EMERSON: There's a 19 year old in the Sunshine Coast seat of Longman.

SUE CATO: Wyatt Roy.

CRAIG EMERSON: Wyatt Roy. A young bloke. He's having a crack. I reckon people in their 50s and 60s...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Good on him.

CRAIG EMERSON: ...should have a crack. To me, politics is a career, to an extent, but the idea of a career for life, I think, is gone. And that's a good thing.

TONY JONES: Let's go back to our questioner.

ANSHU VIJAY WIJEYERATNE: I think my question is inspired by the amount of flak that, say, someone like Wilson Tuckey gets. He speaks his mouth. He's someone who's had experience in the community, being a local publican, but yet he's seen as the mad uncle of the party...

CRAIG EMERSON: He is a mad uncle.

ANSHU VIJAY WIJEYERATNE: ...because he can't tow the party line.

KELLY O'DWYER: Oh.

CRAIG EMERSON: He is. Joe Hockey described him as that.

TONY JONES: I've got to tell you that he got his nickname, Ironbar Tuckey, because of something that happened in one of those pubs. We'll go to Sue Cato.

SUE CATO: I'm just amazed that we've all forgotten Barnaby Joyce. I mean, two weeks ago we were sort of...

CRAIG EMERSON: How could we?

SUE CATO: Well, we seem to have been. We've gone to Wilson. We've gone to Wyatt.

CRAIG EMERSON: Yes.

SUE CATO: But I mean, you know, a couple of weeks ago...

CRAIG EMERSON: We were doing the Ws.

SUE CATO: A couple of weeks ago people were getting stuck into Barnaby, you know, having been an accountant in St George with 2400 people there as, you know, did he have the qualifications to be the shadow finance minister? Now, clearly...

CRAIG EMERSON: Tony Abbot thought no.

SUE CATO: ...Tony Abbott has views on that. But I'm simply saying I reckon both paths and as many paths as possible is what we need. My one thing though is if you've actually been a staffer and you know what it's really like, you know, you've got no excuse for going in.

CRAIG EMERSON: That's right.

TONY JONES: Kelly O'Dwyer, did Barnaby Joyce pay a price in the end for being too genuine?

KELLY O'DWYER: Look, the reality is that Tony Abbott needed to reshuffle the bench.

TONY JONES: Get rid of him.

KELLY O'DWYER: No, he needed to reshuffle the front bench because Nick Minchin declared that he was standing down because he's not going to recontest his senate position. Now, that left one spot. He had to work out how he could do that with minimal fuss. He's got a great talent in Andrew Robb, who is going to be fantastic in finance. A great talent in Barnaby Joyce, who is going to barnstorm all of the regional rural areas, which I know is something the ALP are not looking forward to.

SUE CATO: Lucky them.

CRAIG EMERSON: I can't hardly wait.

KELLY O'DWYER: But, you know, it's a fantastic team and I actually think it's a terrific reshuffle.

TONY JONES: Let's go to Graham Richardson. Now, you did come up through the machine. I'd be interested to get your perspective on the sort of people who make the best politicians.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: There isn't a sort of person who makes the best politician. They came from - the good ones come from all different backgrounds and you wouldn't want them all to be Wilson Tuckey's. A parliament full of Wilson Tuckey's I don't want to know about. You know, look, I've seen people come in who were in business. I've seen them come in from the law. God knows we've had plenty of them. There's huge numbers of lawyers go through. And then you see people who've worked for a minister on the staff or something. I just believe it's about whatever passions you have. Some people who are staffers make terrific politicians. Some make lousy politicians. Some people who are businessmen make good politicians. Some make lousy politicians. It's got three tenths of five eighths to do with what you've been. It's what you are and what you can become.

TONY JONES: Nick McKim.

NICK MCKIM: Amazingly enough I pretty much agree with all of that Tony. I mean, I've had a - I mean, I've been everything from a fruit

picker to a...

TONY JONES: Why should you be amazed, first of all?

NICK MCKIM: Well, Graham's, you know...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: I'm interested in what...

CRAIG EMERSON: Keep going. Keep going.

NICK MCKIM: We've got one minute left. I can see the sign. And I could mention the Ralphs Bay Conservation Area and Walker Corporation who wanted to develop a canal estate in the conservation area in Tasmania.

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Are you going to mention 20 per cent of Tasmania got put into World Heritage?

NICK MCKIM: Yeah, well...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: That would be worth a mention.

NICK MCKIM: We'll keep going at the end of the show.

CRAIG EMERSON: 282,000 hectares.

NICK MCKIM: But, look, Tony, ultimately parliaments...

GRAHAM RICHARDSON: Unbelievable.

NICK MCKIM: ...parliaments should represent the people that elect them. I've had very eclectic working career. I've done everything from picking fruit, I've been a wilderness guide, I've worked in advertising and public relations. I've prospected for gold for a mineral exploration company. I mean, whatever you do, I don't think it's all that relevant. I agree with Graham. You know, what's important is what you do when you get there and the best thing - the thing that you have to do is do what you can to represent the people.

TONY JONES: Okay. Well, we've run out of time, as we always do. Please thank our panellists: Graham Richardson; Nick McKim; Kelly O'Dwyer; Sue Cato; and Craig Emerson. Okay. Next week - next week a special Easter Monday Q&A with a panel of one, the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, the Iron Man. After four

months as Liberal leader he’s revitalised the Opposition but can he lead them back to government. We can’t answer that question with certainty, but next Monday we’ll give you the chance to put your questions to Tony Abbott live. That’s 9.35 next Monday night on Q&A. And we’ll leave you tonight with a mash-up from Brett Lethbridge’s NewsToon. Good night.