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Transcript
2CC BREAKFAST WITH MARK PARTON
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E&OE

Subjects: Malcolm Turnbull's resignation, immigration policy.

PARTON: Yesterday saw the... well, not quite the end, but Malcolm Turnbull came out and made the big announcement that he's not going to recontest the seat of Wentworth, and I've got to say it didn't surprise me one iota. I think it really was time for him to do that. The thing that surprised me much more was the suggestion that he put his hand up last month to join the front bench. What was going on there? Craig Emerson is the Federal Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs. Don't you almost wish that he'd been one of yours Craig?

EMERSON: Well he's not a bad bloke, Malcolm. I've known him for more than 20 years now and he's a great conversationalist. If you ever want to sit down and have a chat about just about anything, he's really quite intriguing. He's thought a lot, he's read a lot, has a lot of views, not all of them conventional views from within the Liberal Party, so I wish him all the very best.

PARTON: He has a crack doesn't he?

EMERSON: Yeah well that's the point. He had to work very very hard to get into Parliament. I think Malcolm had a fairly fatalistic view as to whether he would ever get there. He had to defeat a fellow named Peter King in a pre-selection but that seemed all fair in

love and war because Peter King had defeated another fellow named Andrew Thomson in a pre-selection in Wentworth and then Malcolm defeated Brendan Nelson for the leadership. It's a pretty rough and tumble business this politics. And then of course Tony beat Malcolm for the leadership.

PARTON: The whole pre-selection thing - you talk about it being rough and tumble on their side, gee there are some things that go on with pre-selection on your side that I scratch my head about. I couldn't help but think when looking at the goings on in terms of the pre-selections for Fraser here in Canberra that if someone like Malcolm Turnbull had tried to get himself in politics on your side that he wouldn't have made it?

EMERSON: Well he'd have to enter a Melbourne Cup field, that's right isn't it? And I just want to say quickly that I'm not making a party political point here. I'm not saying that Liberal pre-selections are any more or less combative or gracious than Labor pre-selections. They're mostly pretty hard fought contests, especially for a sought-after seat.

PARTON: And there's so many mechanisms involved here that those of us who have never been involved in the ALP, for argument's sake, can't get our head around. We're told that there's been deals done between Left and Right which are going to install Mary Wood as the candidate in Canberra and Nick Martin in Fraser. I cannot help but think when it comes to Fraser you've got people of the calibre of Andrew Leigh and George Williams in the field. Have you had much to do with George Williams, the constitutional lawyer?

EMERSON: I've met George once, I know Andrew pretty well, I know Nick Martin very well, they're all very worthy candidates, I think Canberra will be blessed...

PARTON: Craig, surely George Williams is the sort of person that we'd all like to see in Parliament?

EMERSON: It's very delicate in terms of my intruding into the pre-selections in Canberra but ultimately the people in the Labor Party will make these decisions and that's the way it works. They may or may not select the candidate that you think is the right one, but they go to the branch meetings and I reckon that says it all. If you can go to your branch meetings regularly you've probably earned the right to have a say.

PARTON: That's a very diplomatic answer. You've done well. There's a fair bit of talk this morning about immigration, A number of our callers are talking about it and I'm surprised at the passion that the Business Council of Australia are using when they talk about

it and also the Australian Industry Group. They're not happy in the slightest with the Coalition plan.

EMERSON: No they're not, and before the global recession hit there were very severe skill shortages and general labour shortages in Australia and that's likely to re-emerge, certainly within the next 40 years. The unemployment rate I think is in the low fives now. In the mining states, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, they've already re-emerged, and it's not just in the mines. Think Canberra think cafes, and the Coalition is saying that they will cut temporary migration, that is student holiday visas. If you're going into a café or restaurant in Canberra it's quite likely you'll be served by someone who is on a working holiday. Is this a bad thing? I think it's a pretty good thing.

PARTON: Does this mean that to get over this whole problem of skill shortages you've just got to keep on topping up? You've just got to keep on getting more people from elsewhere?

EMERSON: We need a healthy immigration program. We've always had one – certainly since the Second World War – but there's a new dimension Mark, and that's the aging of the population as reflected in three intergenerational reports, two under the Coalition and one under us, all prepared by treasury, who all point out that we're having fewer children. So our natural rate of increase is not consistent with us maintaining prosperity into the future. Therefore we need immigration and I think it is opportunistic and nothing more than seeking to harvest votes by the Coalition to now say that Labor has got some sort of runaway immigration program when ours is comparable with the Coalition's. What they're doing is saying 300,000, well that includes the temporary people, including the 457 visa workers, and those 457 visas, there are still skills shortages on a temporary basis. Who introduced 457 visas – John Howard and the Coalition. Now they're suddenly saying they're a bad thing and they should be cut.

PARTON: Craig, thanks for your time this morning, appreciate it.

EMERSON: Okay, thanks a lot Mark.

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