



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND
THE SERVICE ECONOMY
MINISTER FOR COMPETITION POLICY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON
DEREGULATION

Transcript
SKY NEWS AM AGENDA
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Kieran Gilbert interviews Dr Craig Emerson and Steven Ciobo MP

E&OE

Subjects: Health reform plan, Newspoll, asylum seekers.

GILBERT: Welcome back to AM Agenda. Joining me now in Sydney the Small Business Minister Craig Emerson, and in Brisbane, the Shadow Tourism Minister Steve Ciobo. Gentlemen, good morning.

EMERSON: Good Morning Kieran.

CIOBO: Good Morning.

GILBERT: Craig Emerson, the Prime Minister's deal really looking uncertain. As you could see there from our chat with Colin Barnett, he's not backing down. What's the sense in the Government? Do you really think there is any prospect now of a deal, or is it really looking negative for you?

EMERSON: I wouldn't make a judgement from where I'm sitting on that, beyond saying this is an opportunity. Truly, a once in a generation opportunity for fundamental reform of the health system so that we can fund local hospitals, local doctors, local nurses, and that's the model that Kevin Rudd has taken into these negotiations. I'm hopeful an outcome will be achieved because that's what the Australian people expect. They expect a reform of the health system, a fundamental reform because it is not going well. Tony Abbott was not right when he was Health

Minister when he said “No one should fret about an unreformed health system”. People should fret about an unreformed health system, and so we’ve got a policy, we’re taking it into the room today and I’m hopeful that as a result of the negotiations and the position of the Prime Minister, and the understanding that people expect a reform of the health system that we will get an outcome.

GILBERT: But Craig, the Prime Minister needs this politically as well doesn’t he? He failed on the ETS reform, he needs a big reform. If he can’t deliver this, that won’t be a good look.

EMERSON: Kieran, here’s a revelation: The Australian people don’t give a rats about the politics of this. What they want is health reform. They’ve been crying out for it, and we know that the State health budgets in another decade or two, probably two decades, will gobble up their entire budgets. Everyone knows this; everyone knows that the health reform is essential, that there are fundamental problems in the health system. That is everyone except Tony Abbott, who says “No one should fret about an unreformed health system”. And remember, we’ve got a policy; we’re taking it into the room today. Tony Abbott’s original policy was to oppose before we even unveiled this. Then he went into the health debate with Kevin Rudd, got hammered, and his advisers said “Listen, you’re going to have to be a bit more positive about it”. He came out of that, a week later and said “Maybe we will support this”, and now on the weekend, just on the weekend he’s saying “I urge the Premiers not to support this health reform”. So, this is a guy who licks his finger, he’s a weather vane, he’s just seeing which way the wind blows. He’s not a conviction politician. He doesn’t have any fundamental beliefs, other than opposing everything that the Labor Government puts up for debate.

GILBERT: Steve Ciobo, where does all this leave the Coalition? You’ve been completely sidelined in this debate haven’t you?

CIOBO: Kieran, it’s been extraordinary. I just listened to Craig Emerson speak for about four or five minutes and he said absolutely nothing. There was just this overblown rhetoric from this Minister, the same as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd...

EMERSON: ...Don’t you believe in health reform?

CIOBO: ...Oh, Craig, I listened to you, why don’t you just keep your horses under control and sit back and listen as I put forward the Coalition’s point of view. Because we actually have something to say about this debate.

EMERSON: ...Well a policy would be good Steve.

CIOBO: Craig, seriously. Well I'll tell you the situation. You've sat there for five minutes and said nothing. Let's be clear about what's going on at the moment Kieran. We've got the Prime Minister of the country wanting to take 30 per cent of GST off the States, and say it's all about health reform. But they won't go into detail about what the health reforms are. The fact is, this Prime Minister and the Labor Party are treating the Australian people like idiots...

EMERSON: ...You haven't been reading the papers.

GILBERT: ...Craig lets just hear from Steve. Please. Let's hear from Steve Ciobo.

CIOBO: ...Because what does matter is what the details of this proposal actually are. And the fact is this Labor Government is a very poor service delivery government. We saw the complete fiasco of insulation. We've seen the complete fiasco of the Building the Education Revolution. And now within not in a week, the Labor Party says "Trust us. This is a once in a generation reform, we're going to make it all better, but don't ask too many questions." So I say to the Premiers, good job for standing up for your States, good job for standing up for the constituents in your States because they deserve a lot better than this overblown rhetoric that they're getting from the Labor Party.

GILBERT: Steve Ciobo, has the Federal Liberal Party discussed this? Put any pressure on Colin Barnett to block this?

CIOBO: Not to block. What we're looking for is for the State Premiers to stand up for the best interests of their people. And what's clear is that only a couple of State Premiers are willing to stand up. All the rest have completely capitulated because they're nothing but Labor Party puppets wanting to do the will of the Prime Minister. We've got no detail, we've got States and people in States going to be a lot worse off as a result of this reform. And instead of actually meaningful information we've got Ministers like Craig Emerson, and the Prime Minister in Kevin Rudd, who simply go out there and say "Let's not get into the detail, we just want a better health system".

EMERSON: Kieran, there's a 75-page document. It was released more than a week ago. It is fully detailed, and Steven obviously hasn't read it...

CIOBO: [Laughter] What a joke. What a joke.

EMERSON: ...And his laughter indicates that hasn't read this document. Because they are too lazy to develop any policy of their own, and even too lazy to read a detailed document. None of the

Premiers are saying this policy lacks detail. Only the Opposition is because they're too lazy even to get off their bums and read the document.

GILBERT: Okay let's hear from Steve.

CIOBO: Listen to what Craig has just said...

EMERSON: ...Read the document.

CIOBO: ...We've got the Prime Minister who has put out a \$20 billion new spending initiatives in health. \$20 billion and Craig proudly boasts "Well this has been out for a week". This just demonstrates what a knee jerk, populous Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is, who's desperately trying to fix up a political problem that he caused. Because people know that when he was in Queensland, he was called 'Dr Death', he's shut down operating theatres, he didn't reform the health system for the better, he made it worse...

GILBERT: ...Gents we've got to pause there. We've got to look at this other issue, Newspoll is out today, Martin O'Shaughnessy is with me. I'll come back to the panel in just a moment. Chief Executive of Newspoll Martin O'Shaughnessy, a significant issue of health as you've heard there from our two guests on the panel, Steve Ciobo and Craig Emerson. How's it showing up on today's poll? It seems the Government's dropped a bit in its support on that issue.

O'SHAUGHNESSY: Well yes. Just a few points, not really statistically significant. What we're seeing is about 45 per cent now, it has been 46 to 48 per cent in the term of this Government. Saying that Labor is the best party to manage the issue of health and Medicare. It's a really polarising issue out there...

GILBERT: ...So this reform is not really working in terms of lifting the Government's rating. If it gets the reform through how do you see that playing out?

O'SHAUGHNESSY: I'm not entirely sure what would happen there. What we're seeing at the moment is seven out of ten Coalition supporters backing the Coalition as the best party to manage. And eight out of ten Labor supporters. So the polarisation is there. To make a change in the number of people supporting the Government on this we'd need to see Coalition supporters coming across, and maybe that's a bit unlikely.

GILBERT: We saw on our screens just a moment ago the numbers on asylum seekers. There's been a swing to the Coalition on the handling of border protection.

O'SHAUGHNESSY: Yeah, 'swing' is an interesting word. Basically, for the last two years the issue has been out there in the wilderness and no one paying attention to it. So the last two times we looked at this 'undecided' was the big winner, about 35 per cent. What's happened however is that as people have decided, people are strongly going across to the Coalition. The vast majority of people who have made up their minds are saying the Coalition would be the better party to manage. Even some Labor Party supporters, previously only 8 per cent of Labor Party supporters said that the Coalition was the best party to manage, now 23 per cent. And of course 81 per cent of Coalition voters saying that the Coalition is the best party to manage. And if you like, that's a return to strength, or a return to an issue that the Coalition has generally had a lead position on.

GILBERT: Just one final issue; on the primary vote, the two party vote. It seems it's still fairly solid for the Coalition. It seems their numbers have steadied, the Government though would be fairly pleased with its primary vote, steady at 43.

O'SHAUGHNESSY: That's right. Steady at 43 for the Government, and really only a two per cent drop in two party, to 54 per cent. Still a comfortable win. I think the comfort that the Opposition would take out of this is after Tony Abbott did lose the health debate publicly, in the last Newspoll we saw a bit of a loss there for him. But that's been arrested and no big move, but certainly no big slide for Tony Abbott, and no giant leap forward for Kevin Rudd.

GILBERT: Martin O'Shaughnessy, as always appreciate your time.

O'SHAUGHNESSY: Always a pleasure.

GILBERT: Craig Emerson, on the issue of the Newspoll, when it comes to the asylum seeker debate it seems that the Coalition has got double the amount of support that the Labor Party does when it come to this issue. Were you right to change your policy and strengthen that policy in suspending the processing of visa's for Sri Lankan and Afghani asylum seekers?

EMERSON: We made some changes that we obviously regarded were desirable. But again, that policy is out there, people understand the policy Kieran. As with public hospitals, the same is the situation with asylum seekers where we asked the Coalition what is their policy? Now I think it's reasonable in an election year to ask those questions, because they are trying to be the alternative Government, and present themselves as the alternative Government. Now, the latest declaration from the Coalition, this if from Tony Abbott, is that anyone who arrives by boat will not under any circumstances be granted permanent residency. That was backed up the next day by his Shadow

Immigration Minister. Under John Howard, around 90 per cent of successful asylum seekers were granted permanent residency. I need your viewers to understand, John Howard gave permanent residency to 90 per cent of successful asylum seekers, Tony Abbott said not one of them - not one of them - will get permanent residency, no chance. Backed up by his Immigration Minister. I do concede this; this is a policy. This is a new policy of the Abbott-led Opposition, although his office tried to clean that up the same night that he made that policy announcement.

GILBERT: Okay. Let me get Steve Ciobo's thoughts on that stronger showing on the issue of asylum seekers. Steve, on that it seems the Coalition is doing better after that strong campaign from Scott Morrison and Tony Abbott. But, it hasn't translated into any great jump on the two-party comparison?

CIOBO: Well Kieran, the reality is that Craig made an accurate statement when he said the Australian people understand this issue of boat people and asylum seekers. They do. And what they know is that the Coalition had Australia's borders under control. And what they know now is that under Labor, out border protection has completely fallen apart. Ever since the Labor Party weakened our border protection laws we now have had over 5,000 people, 111 boats absolutely charging down through oceans, bypassing other intermediary countries and heading for Australia because they understand that under the Labor Party they can queue jump and they can come to Australia. And I still maintain and feel sorry for those Kieran, who can't afford to pay people smugglers. Who are left stranded in refugee camps around the world because they can't afford to pay to come into Australia by queue jumping. And it is a great shame that the Labor Party insists on pretending that in some way they have policy measures that are better. They're not. They're worse. There's more boat people, there's more boats, and that's the problem. And the Australian people understand that.

GILBERT: We're almost out of time, but I want to get your thoughts, both of you, if you could just keep it brief, your response to this one. Craig, on the issue of health, the polling shows Labor is still doing well, but really as we await the outcome of these COAG talks today, so much rests on the outcome today for your credibility, the Government's credibility, doesn't it?

EMERSON: Well I'm glad of the opportunity because before the break I was saying it is true. The Rudd Government has offered \$20 billion extra funding for health and hospitals in this country. And it beats the hell out of Tony Abbott, who as Health Minister gouged \$1 billion out. Now, Steve Ciobo, on behalf of the Coalition is criticising the Rudd Government for offering \$20 billion more, so that we have better hospitals, better health care

in Australia. And their history, their track record is to pull \$1 billion out of the public hospital system, the Australian people know that. That's why the Australian people back health reform and back the Labor Government on health reform.

GILBERT: All right. Steve Ciobo, you've got less than a minute. But your response to that.

CIOBO: Well look, Craig Emerson, what he just said was wrong. The fact is we're doing our job to hold this Rudd Government accountable. No one for one moment is going to pretend Kevin Rudd and Labor can't spend money. They spend billions and billions of dollars. What we're saying is it's got to be spent wisely, not recklessly. They're spending it recklessly and so we applaud those Premiers that are standing up for the people in their States. Because they're actually trying to do the right thing.

EMERSON: ...So health spending is reckless spending? Thanks Steve.

CIOBO: ...Your health spending is Craig.

GILBERT: All right gentlemen, we're out of time. Small Business Minister Craig Emerson, Shadow Tourism Minister Steve Ciobo, a feisty chat this morning, we love it. Good on you guys, thank you.

EMERSON: Rightio, thanks Kieran.

CIOBO: Thanks a lot.

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