



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
Sky News AM Agenda with Kieran Gilbert

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E&OE

Subjects: Newspann, death of Osama bin Laden.

KIERAN GILBERT:

With me now in the Canberra studio, the Trade Minister Craig Emerson, and from Brisbane we've got the Shadow Attorney-General, the Deputy Opposition leader in the Senate, Senator George Brandis. Are you encouraged by that number Senator Brandis: Tony Abbott's approval rating up?

GEORGE BRANDIS:

Well I'm not complaining about it, but you know it's a long way to the next election. I think what it does reflect, though, is the collapse of public respect for the Prime Minister and there's a reason for that. The Prime Minister lied to the public about a carbon tax and when somebody lies to you then your respect for them evaporates. That's

what happened with this Prime Minister. If you look back over the polls historically, the real tipping point for public regard for Julia Gillard was after she announced the carbon tax, having promised faithfully at the election that there would be no carbon tax under any government she led. Now I don't think she ... she obviously hasn't recovered from that and I don't expect she will because the public knows they can't trust her.

GILBERT:

Tony Abbott - there have been suggestions Senator Brandis that he hasn't been positive enough. Does he show that he should just stay negative?

BRANDIS:

I think Tony Abbott's doing just fine. And you know one of the rules about public opinion is ordinarily when prime ministers do these world trips and are showcased with other world leaders, as Julia Gillard was, their popularity goes up and the opposition has a bit of a vacuum in the media. But that certainly hasn't happened on this occasion.

I think Tony Abbott, by visiting the steel workers in Whyalla - whom even the AWU says will lose their jobs because of the carbon tax - visiting Christmas Island to better inform himself about the collapse of the Government's asylum seeker policy - if one can charitably call

it a policy; it's a fiasco - I think has done exactly what an opposition leader should do, and that is focus on the areas where the Government is demonstratively failing.

GILBERT:

Craig Emerson, whatever Tony Abbott is doing, it's working thus far and you know there have been suggestions that he hasn't had enough of an alternative agenda. But, really, at the moment this time of the electoral cycle, why wouldn't he just be targeting your weaknesses, as Senator Brandis asserts that?

EMERSON:

He doesn't have any alternative agenda. But Lindsay Tanner's book is a timely reminder of the fact that we should not get hung-up on individual polls. And the truth is, and I understand why, every second Tuesday we have a discussion about polls, when George is happy with the polls he's happy to comment on them, when he's not happy he says, 'well we don't comment on polls'. I've been consistent on this that we are a reforming Government; we're going to drive reforms such as putting a price on carbon, which is a very important reform...

GILBERT:

You say Tony Abbott's got no agenda...

EMERSON:

... and we can see our way through to the other side on this.

GILBERT: But Tony Abbott's got ... has proposed things in the last few weeks, significant measures like ... well he's well ahead of the Government on mental health and he's also ahead of the Government on welfare, welfare reforms which, as I understand it, you know, the Budget next week's going to feature welfare, welfare to work - but Tony Abbott's been out there well before you.

EMERSON: On welfare reform, we've been advocating and putting in place measures such as the quarantining of Centrelink payments for years now. Now, okay, if Tony Abbott wants to join in on that, that's fine. But you say that he has alternative policies. On carbon pricing, he either believes that ...

BRANDIS: Carbon tax.

EMERSON: ...climate change is absolute crap or, alternatively, he's got a direct action plan that will cost taxpayers \$30 billion - \$30,000 million dollars! That would see the return of a high-taxing government just as the Coalition was the highest-taxing Government in Australia's history when it was last in government.

GILBERT: Senator Brandis, I want to move on if I can and talk about the major story of the last 24 hours: Osama bin Laden dead - it's taken so long to come. But

tell me, what's your sense, it's ... you know, I spoke to Clive Williams, terrorism expert, he says it's obvious that someone within the Pakistani authorities, intelligence or government, knew that ... knew exactly where this man was, and for a long time.

BRANDIS:

Well, look, Kieran I'm not going to comment on what may or may not have been known within the interstices of the Pakistani intelligence or military establishment - it's not something that I claim to have any specialist knowledge of. I think it's a little surprising to most people that bin Laden could have been living under the noses of the Pakistani military establishment for so long without them being a wake-up to that fact.

But may I just take the opportunity to say, though, on behalf of the Opposition this is a great triumph for the West. There is no doubt at all that Osama bin Laden was one of the great enemies of the West, one of the great enemies of world peace. And I'd like to congratulate both President Obama, who took quite a courageous decision to give this mission the go-ahead - because it was a risky mission - and the American personnel, and both the soldiers and the intelligence personnel who carried

this mission out with superb professionalism.

GILBERT:

Craig Emerson, bin Laden - you're Acting Foreign Minister now as well so in that context, we'll get the latest on the travel advisories from you. But tell me - you know what Senator Brandis said there is an accurate assessment - that bin Laden was under the nose, not just of the authorities but of the ... the military were right there and one of their training camps, their elite training camps was near Abbottabad.

EMERSON:

I think it's really best that I refer to President Obama's statement on this yesterday, where he thanked the counter-terrorism authorities for the co-operation that led to the location of Osama bin Laden. In fact he said 'our counter-terrorism co-operation with Pakistan helped lead us to bin Laden and the compound where he was hiding'.

So, I don't think it's of any useful purpose on my part speculating about who knew what and when. The fact is that Osama bin Laden has been at last tracked down and he was an enemy of Pakistan, as he was of the West. He basically declared war on Pakistan, so they were no friends as a nation and as a government of Osama bin Laden.

GILBERT: Okay, and for people travelling, as Acting Foreign Minister, what's the latest advice to anyone heading abroad?

EMERSON: It's essentially unchanged, as of yesterday, and that is - I'll just read this: The US Government has strongly urged its citizens overseas to limit their travel outside their homes and hotels and avoid mass gatherings and demonstrations. We advise Australians in areas likely to be affected by such gatherings to exercise enhanced vigilance regarding their personal security.

In other words, don't join in big gatherings, particularly if they're protests or about the killing of Osama bin Laden.

GILBERT: I want to play you both a comment from John Howard this morning, articulating something that he ... he also mentioned yesterday in response to this development.

[Excerpt]

JOHN HOWARD: To boost the morale of the anti-terrorist cause, it doesn't mean that we can relax; it doesn't mean, for example, that we can accelerate our pull-out from Afghanistan. If anything, it should

reinforce the commitment, because what it shows is that progress can be made, not only on the ground which we have been doing in Afghanistan. The military news in Afghanistan is getting better and to have this news of having taken out the top man, psychologically it's a huge boost as well as delivering justice.

[End of excerpt]

GILBERT:

The former Prime Minister John Howard there on the Nine Network's *Today* show.

Senator Brandis, John Howard says it show that the fight against terrorism can be won but, gee, there's still a long way to go and as we've seen many times before where one leader is knocked off in these groups, another emerges.

BRANDIS:

Well that's true, Kieran, and I agree with what Mr Howard had to say. I must say, I think it was rather refreshing to see Mr Howard back on the television in the last 24 hours and to be reminded what a grown-up prime minister looks and sounds like.

We have always - and I think this is a view shared by both the Coalition and the Labor Party - we have always said that the war on terrorism was a war that

was going to last for a very, very long time. And you know, it's been nearly 10 years since the outrage on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on 9/11 and I don't think we should kid ourselves that although this is a tremendous boost to the morale of the forces who are seeking to wage war against terrorism, there is a lot of work to be done and we shouldn't be complacent or think that this is mission accomplished.

GILBERT:

Okay, well gentlemen unfortunately we're out of time and it has been a busy program, a busy day. Senator Brandis and Trade Minister Crag Emerson, thank you both as always.

EMERSON:

Thanks Kieran.

BRANDIS:

Thanks Kieran.