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Subjects: Shadow Treasurer's National Press Club Speech; Tony Abbott; Michael Johnson.

EMERSON: Today Mr Hockey must set out in detail how the Coalition would achieve a budget surplus quicker than Labor and at the same time fund almost \$16 billion of unfunded commitments that the Coalition has made. Mr Hockey must set out exactly how the Coalition will achieve a surplus quicker than under the Government's budget and how they will fund \$16 billion of unfunded commitments. The time has come to move away from general rhetoric to the detailed hard work that an opposition needs to do in preparation to be an alternative government of Australia.

Now, Mr Abbott revealed in his statements the other night that he crumbles under pressure, that he cannot handle pressure. And he has admitted that he is saying that if he was in a pressure situation, he might say anything. He might just say anything in the heat of the moment, in the heat of the battle. Now is this really the mark of a Prime Minister? At a G20 meeting? In meetings with world leaders? Dealing with global financial crises? As an alternative Prime Minister he has said that he basically can't handle pressure, that he might say anything in the heat of the moment and if he does say something in the heat of the moment, you can't count on it anyway.

The final matter I want to raise is in relation to Michael Johnson. Now Michael Johnson has just appeared on radio claiming that he had done nothing wrong, that he has stood to gain nothing out of his involvement with a development foundation in relation to China. But his Liberal National Party colleagues have leaked information to The Australian newspaper that contains serious allegations against Mr Johnson. Now, on the 29th April, Mr Abbott re-endorsed Mr Johnson. So, only a few weeks ago, Mr Abbott strongly re-endorsed Mr Johnson as the Liberal candidate for Ryan. We now need to know what Mr Abbott knew at that time about the allegations being made by his own political party against Mr Johnson. What did Mr Abbott know about Mr Johnson's dealings? What did the Liberal Party say to Mr Abbott about Mr Johnson's dealings? And why, in those circumstances, did Mr Abbott feel confident enough to re-endorse Mr Johnston? Mr Abbott needs to explain what he knew about Mr Johnson's dealings and why he made that re-endorsement when his own Liberal Party colleagues were making serious allegations against Mr Johnson.

JOURNALIST: In regards to Mr Hockey, the opposition at this point have really been short in regards to policy, haven't they? So it's really time to put up isn't it?

EMERSON: The opposition has been short on policy but large on announcement. It's now racked up \$16 billion of unfunded commitments and it is time for the opposition to put up or shut up. The opposition has said that it will achieve a budget surplus in less than three years, but with \$16 billion of extra funding commitments compared with the Labor Government. Mr Hockey today has to set out in detail how they will bring the budget to surplus within less than three years and still fund \$16 billion of unfunded commitments. Mr Hockey needs to put up or shut up. They have been short on detail, but long on making expensive commitments that to this point in time are completely unfunded.

JOURNALIST: Are you expecting to find the same holes in Mr Hockey's speech tonight as Mr Abbott showed last week in his response?

EMERSON: Mr Abbott revealed in his budget reply that some of the so-called savings options didn't add up. In fact, there is very little that adds up with the Coalition. They make announcements but they refuse to fund them. They say they are a party of smaller government, but then have come out with a set of policies that the government, through Treasury, has costed at \$16 billion. So it's time for Mr Abbott and Mr Hockey today to put up or shut up; to provide the detail of how they are going

to fund \$16 billion of unfunded commitments and at the same time bring the budget to surplus in less than three years.

JOURNALIST: All these gaffes are mounting – is it time to call the election?

EMERSON: The gaffes are mounting because Tony Abbott can't handle pressure. And Tony Abbott, in his statements the other night, revealed that he can't handle pressure. He said to the Australian people that, as the alternative Prime Minister, that under pressure he breaks down – that under pressure he says things that are not the gospel truth, but are in the heat of the moment. He is saying that he is unreliable, and would not be able to handle the Prime Ministership of Australia. And that is a very big admission. It is effectively saying that he would not be able to handle the pressure of the Prime Ministership of Australia, because as Prime Minister, he would say things in the heat of the moment that he really didn't mean.

JOURNALIST: Would you do that?

EMERSON: Well, that's a matter for people to judge as to whether I say things in the heat of the moment, but I do consider what I have to say. It is quite clear that Mr Abbott not only doesn't consider what he has to say in the heat of the moment, but reserves for himself the right to repudiate it and say he didn't really mean it. Now this is very scary for the Australian people. And I'll make this further point about Mr Abbott: by admitting that under pressure he will say things in the heat of the moment that he does not mean, Mr Abbott has risk written all over him. He would be a very big risk for the Australian people because in pressure situations, he is saying that in the heat of the moment he is forced to say things that he doesn't mean.

JOURNALIST: He is getting some respect from some voters though who are saying that they don't expect any more, that they expect politicians to lie. What do you say to that?

EMERSON: I say that Mr Abbott is a very big risk to the Australian people because he has admitted that in the heat of the moment he makes statements that he really doesn't mean, that he melts under pressure. This is a very bad sign for someone who wants to be the Prime Minister of Australia.

JOURNALIST: Politicians are liars – I guess people do think they lie.

EMERSON: Well, as I said last week, the government will be held to account and we accept that, for a commitment that we make that we are unable to achieve. We understand that. But what we haven't said is that we make two sorts of commitments, one in the heat of the moment, and another in a considered,

scripted way. Mr Abbott has carved for himself an escape route, which says that when he is asked about a promise that is made and he hasn't kept, he is saying "I made that in the heat of the moment and therefore it doesn't count". It is a new paradigm for Australian politics where a politician can say a promise I made doesn't count because I made it in the heat of the moment. I suppose it started with John Howard with core and non-core promises. Tony Abbott has learned a lot from John Howard, but he's taken it a lot further because he is saying that, firstly, he melts under pressure, and secondly, under pressure he is likely to say anything in the heat of the moment. He can't control himself and that is a very bad sign, a very big risk for someone who wants to be the Prime Minister of Australia.

JOURNALIST: A massive part of Labor's Budget was health, and there are suggestions that the opposition is going to cut and save a lot on the health aspects of their budget?

EMERSON: It wouldn't surprise me if Tony Abbott wanted to cut health spending in his budget because he's done it before. He gouged \$1 billion out of the public hospital system. So that would actually be true to form for Mr Abbott that he doesn't believe in the public health system. He gouged \$1 billion out of the public health system when he was Health Minister, so if they do make cuts to health, that's, I suppose, what the Australian people expect of a Minister who, in the Howard Government, gouged \$1 billion out of the public hospital system.

JOURNALIST: And can the public health system afford to have cuts at this time?

EMERSON: Every Australian – every Australian would agree that the public hospital system and health system as a whole needs more funding, not less. Through the reforms that Kevin Rudd was able to achieve through the Council of Australian Governments, we are putting a lot more funding into health. And if Mr Abbott, through Mr Hockey today, announced cuts to public health, that would be true to form for the Liberal Party, because the Liberal Party has never supported the public hospital system and Tony Abbott himself gouged \$1 billion out of the public hospital system.