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Transcript
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton
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E&OE

Subjects: Election issues, leadership, Alister Jordan, Tony Abbott's mortgage.

PARTON: Around this time on a Wednesday morning we catch up with Craig Emerson, Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs. G'Day Craig.

EMERSON: G'day Mark. How are you going this morning?

PARTON: Excellent. We've been having a big discussion this morning about what is the issue that is going to decide the election and whether it's going to be something like asylum seekers, or whether it's going to be decided on emissions trading. Danielle Cronin from the Canberra Times is suggesting that it's going to just be something like the cost of living, that it was mentioned by both leaders in the party meetings yesterday. What do you reckon, Craig?

EMERSON: The economy usually goes to the heart of people's decisions about how they are going to vote. There are a lot of other issues, such as emissions trading, asylum seekers. There are specific issues in inner city areas that might be different, Mark, to outer suburban areas; there are different issues in different states, but everyone, particularly middle Australia, votes on the basic issue of who is best equipped to manage the economy, so I think that will be so important in the coming election.

PARTON: We've had a number of comments that have come through from listeners on air and also in written form, and I'm sorry, but when it came through it made us smile: Morry sent us an SMS, and he says the big issue this election is simply that Kevin is a knob. It's a free country, you can get away with saying that. I'm not expecting you to comment on that one, but David has emailed us and he says the ALP are not the problem, he says the Prime Minister is the problem. Take him out of the equation and I'd vote for the Government til the cows come home. He says, I'd love to see a Gillard/Emerson leadership team, they both impress me. Put it to Emmo this morning. I'm sure he'll play a straight bat, but put it to him anyway.

EMERSON: Well Emmo says that Kevin Rudd is leading a reforming government and obviously you lose a bit of skin when you're doing that. Economic reform, and even social reform, can be pretty hard, because you upset a lot of people along the way. And the alternative, Mark, is to do what I'd probably describe as the Menzies years, the lazy years, of just sitting there on the shiny seats, watch the world go by, be a spectator, take the parliamentary salary; or you get on and do some of these hard jobs, and if you do the hard jobs, people get upset.

PARTON: You blokes, it's always on party lines isn't it? The Menzies years, the lazy years...

EMERSON: I actually have a bit of a fond memory - to the extent that I was alive - of Bob Menzies. I think there's some affection for him, but you wouldn't call it a big reforming period, and most people, even Liberals, would concede that. They'd say that the Hawke Government, the Keating Government, were reforming governments. But gee, I had a look at some polls, Mark, just for the heck of it - what's wrong with me, I don't know, looking at polls in 1985, I should be playing more footy and doing less of that - but there was a big tax reform debate in 1985 when we closed down on the rorts. You know, business people booking up their golf club fees to the taxpayers, and business executives taking each other out to dinner at taxpayers' expense, converting their income into tax free capital gains. We introduced those reforms to close down those rorts and our popularity went through the floor, because people said this is really bad stuff. Well if we'd left that in place, all those rorts, we would have still had a top rate of about 60% and basically wealthy people choosing not to pay tax and every day Australians bearing the burden of that.

PARTON: I saw a story on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald this morning, and the suggestion is that Alister Jordan, the Chief of Staff in the Prime Minister's office, had been sent to have private discussions with almost half the caucus to gauge

whether Mr Rudd had the support of his party and I'm wondering if you can declare – there's no one listening Craig, just you and me – if you can declare whether Alister has come and knocked on your door one day and said, "Emmo, let's grab a coffee, you know, what's the go? Are you on the Kevin train or not?"

EMERSON: Look, if you promise this is just between you and me...

PARTON: There's no one listening, there's no one listening.

EMERSON: Well, I'll confess that I didn't get a phone call from Alister. I didn't get a phone call from Alister partly because I do speak to him very, very regularly anyway.

PARTON: Okay.

EMERSON: And, look, I don't know the details of that, but the fact is, Kevin's our leader, he'll lead us into the election, he'll lead us through the election. It'll be a real contest, we know that, we know that Tony Abbott could become the Prime Minister, and obviously, he's the guy who designed WorkChoices, so he's got a very great affection for it, and would bring it back. He's the guy that said, 'the name WorkChoices is dead', and he had the crazy look in his eyes when he said it; in other words, you know, "I'll change it to 'Work Options' but you're going to get it."

PARTON: It's interesting that you used that word 'crazy' because we were talking politics a couple of nights ago, me and a few others, and it's our belief that as we get closer to an election, that you guys are going to be doing your level best to paint Tony Abbott as a crazy man.

EMERSON: I don't think he's a crazy man, I think he's got crazy policies. I think he's got extreme policies. Personally, going back to rugby, Tony and I packed down in the second row against the Australian Defence Forces. That was a real experience. You know, personally, we get along really well. But when I look across the chamber and say 'Do I think that bloke could become the Prime Minister of Australia and run a trillion dollar economy?' I think he's just a risk. That's my concern and I think it's a concern shared by a fair number of Australians.

PARTON: All right, thanks Craig for coming onto the program this morning. Good luck with what could be the final week sitting of this parliament, who knows, and I'm actually disappointed that we're getting to the end of this, or perhaps this parliamentary cycle, because I was looking forward to at some stage whipping on up and getting in your face and saying hello face-to-face.

EMERSON: Well there's plenty of time for doing that. Why don't we do it?

PARTON: All right, we definitely will. I'll be in touch with the office and we'll make sure that happens.

EMERSON: I look forward to that. Thanks Mark.

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