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MINISTER FOR TRADE

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E&OE

Subjects: Abbott-led Liberal Party intolerance to different views on climate change.

CRAIG EMERSON:

In the last day we have seen on display the intolerance of Tony Abbott's Liberal Party to anyone who has a view different to Mr Abbott on the issue of climate change. A young woman turned up to a forum and was intimidated by a Liberal Party aide, a person Shadow Cabinet Minister Bruce Billson recognised and acknowledged as being on his campaign during the last election. And that man intimidated the young woman - followed her - and stood over her for about five minutes while she became so frightened that she had to call friends, and the police arrived to protect her from a Liberal Party bully.

The other incident of course was Mr Turnbull, who has been long a supporter of an emissions trading scheme, who has been muzzled by Mr Abbott because Mr Turnbull dares to have a different point of view to Mr Abbott.

Mr Turnbull said, 'I'm as mad as hell, and I just can't take Mr Abbott's hypocrisy anymore'.

What Mr Turnbull was really referring to is the fact that Mr Abbott has had as many different positions on climate change as he's had hot dinners. He has said that the science of climate change is "absolute crap". Mr Abbott has supported a carbon tax. Mr Abbott has supported an emissions trading scheme. Mr Abbott now says he supports direct action. Mr Abbott will say anything - and do anything - to seek to win the Prime Ministership.

And if I could finish on this: I hope this is not an insight into what an Abbott-led Australia would look like when the Liberal Party shows such intolerance to anyone who dares to have a different view, who dares to believe that climate change is a real problem, who dares to believe that we need to act to deal with climate change.

This intolerance is very worrying. But frankly it's not surprising coming from Mr Abbott who once said there can be too much tolerance in our society.

QUESTION:

But isn't it the case that Mr Abbott himself acknowledged the woman's right to speak.

EMERSON:

He did, that is right. Mr Abbott at the forum acknowledged the right of that young woman to speak out. Then a Liberal Party aide, who's been recognised by Mr Billson in Parliament for his support during the last election campaign, followed that woman out of the forum, down the road, and stood over her.

I've actually viewed the tape that runs for more than five minutes - as he stood over her, refused to leave, got to such a point that the woman started crying because she was fearful. She called a friend to come and pick her up. And the police arrived.

This is Liberal Party intimidation. And we've already had, now, to the early afternoon, ample opportunity for Mr Abbott to explain why a Liberal Party aide could behave in this way, showing such intolerance and bully-boy tactics towards a young woman who dared to have a different view to Mr Abbott.

QUESTION:

So what are you saying he should do?

EMERSON:

I am saying that Mr Abbott should come out, explain why the Liberal Party under his leadership has shown such intolerance, why he has not reprimanded Mr Declan Stephenson for his unbelievably thuggish behaviour towards a young woman who had the temerity to have a different view to Mr Abbott because she believed that this country needs to act on climate change.

QUESTION:

But in terms of climate change, why would the public see much difference between Tony Abbott apparently changing his position and the Prime Minister changing her position on how to do all that?

EMERSON:

Well the Prime Minister has been very clear. And we will go to the next election having implemented the putting of a price on carbon through an emissions trading scheme that starts with a fixed-price permit for three years.

The Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme that we sought to put through Parliament twice in the last parliamentary term had a fixed-price permit for one year. This has a fixed-price permit for three years. The Prime Minister is implementing an emissions trading scheme with a fixed-price permit for three years.

Call it whatever you want.

But the fact is we have always said, we have consistently said that we want to put in place an emissions trading scheme just as John Howard announced that he would do, and produced a detailed document, when Tony Abbott was a member of that cabinet.

Now the fact is Mr Abbott has said just in the last couple of years that he supports a carbon tax, Mr Abbott has said that he supports an emissions trading scheme, Mr Abbott has said that the science of climate change is “absolute crap”, and now he says he supports a direct action plan that would slug taxpayers while subsidising the heavy emitters.

He has had every possibly conceivable position on this matter. And that's why Mr Turnbull yesterday said ‘I just can't take Mr Abbott's hypocrisy any more’. And that's why he broke ranks with Mr Abbott because he can't stand the intolerance of Mr Abbott to alternative views.

QUESTION:

Mr Emerson, in light of all the carbon tax backlash, the PM came out today saying she's actually quite a shy person and finds it difficult to communicate with others. What's your opinion on how she's been travelling if that's the case?

EMERSON:

Well I think the Prime Minister has devoted enormous energy to explaining to the Australian people how this carbon pricing mechanism will work. What the Prime Minister has explained is that this carbon price will apply to the 500 biggest emitters, and yes, there will be some cost to living effects as a result of that.

But the average cost of living effect is \$9.90 a week. The average compensation is \$10.10 a week. And so the Prime Minister is out there advocating a reform that is a fundamentally important environmental reform for this country - and a fundamentally important economic reform.

And in that same speech the Prime Minister highlighted that reform is never easy - that we are following in the footsteps of the reforming era of the Hawke and Keating governments. And in those times, when I was an adviser to Bob Hawke, reform wasn't easy then. But true leadership involves pushing ahead with reform in the national interest.

QUESTION:

Is it a disadvantage for a politician to be shy?
Is that what she's saying?

EMERSON:

Well I think the Prime Minister has applied enormous energy to the development of a policy that is well balanced, well considered. It does put a price on carbon. It is a market-based mechanism. We agree with Malcolm Turnbull that a market-based mechanism is the way to go - because it finds the least-cost ways of reducing emissions. But Mr Abbott

has now repudiated a market-based mechanism, having supported one.

He has repudiated a carbon tax having supported one.

He has repudiated the science of climate change and then yet commits to the same emission reduction targets that the Labor Government has. And then he says he's going to have a direct action plan which would cost taxpayers a motza - because he has to ask taxpayers, demand of taxpayers, that they pay the taxes that he then uses to subsidise the major emitters.

A totally ineffective scheme. And the trouble that Malcolm Turnbull has with Mr Abbott is that he can't catch the guy. Because Mr Abbott keeps changing his position and actually used Malcolm Turnbull's support for an emissions trading scheme to depose him as leader.

QUESTION:

The most common question being asked in the public towards the PM is why did you lie? She essentially said there wasn't going to be a carbon tax. If she admittedly wasn't - didn't find it so difficult to communicate, do you think she'd be better equipped at answering those questions?

EMERSON:

Well I think she's answered that question time and time again. The question has been asked many times during the forum that was held last night. The same question was asked, and the Prime Minister keeps giving an answer to that.

What's at stake here is the future of our environment, and indeed, the future of the economy.

I'm an economist. I'm not going to boast about having a PhD in economics. But I will say that I was part of the Hawke-Keating reform era. And I will say this: this is a fundamentally important economic reform for Australia's future - to lock in prosperity and to ensure that other countries don't retaliate against Australia, who under Mr Abbott would be one of the few countries that refused to do anything about putting a price on carbon when many other countries around the world are doing exactly that.

QUESTION: But do you say...

QUESTION: Today ... sorry. Today Malcolm Turnbull published the name and number of a man who he said was sending him abusive text messages over Twitter.

EMERSON: Uh huh.

QUESTION: And also we heard yesterday with the Prime Minister being shouted out by a protester and Barnaby Joyce being drowned out. Is the level of climate debate in this country just...?

EMERSON: Well, look, we're fine about peaceful disagreement. Peaceful disagreement is really part of our great democracy. But when you have Liberal Party bullies pursuing a young woman who had the temerity to disagree with Mr Abbott's view that climate change is "absolute crap", and follows her down the street to the point where she's so distressed

that she has to call a friend to pick her up, and the police have to turn up, then that is thuggishness.

And I hope ... I hope to goodness this is not an insight into what an Abbott-led Australia would be: intolerant of people having an alternative view to that of the prime minister.

QUESTION: Doesn't the Prime Minister's...

EMERSON: I'll just have a little cough, if that's alright [coughs].

QUESTION: I'm wondering whether the Prime Minister's statement today that she's a bit shy is really an admission of some desperation that she hasn't been able to sell these reforms?

EMERSON: Well, I think the Prime Minister is perfectly entitled to reflect upon her childhood, her upbringing, and all of that. What's really at stake here is the future of the environment and the future of our country.

And if we did what Mr Abbott really wants to do, and that is diddly-squat, and sat on our bums and did nothing, then the environment would suffer, our great assets such as the Great Barrier Reef, our agricultural lands, all of those would suffer.

But Mr Abbott doesn't really care about that, doesn't really care about that. What he wants is an Australia that would elect him to be a prime minister, and then have him showing the sorts of intolerance and condoning, by refusing to condemn, the intimidation and bullying of a young woman by a Liberal Party aide; in fact,

an aide recognised by a Shadow Cabinet Minister, Bruce Billson, for his work during the last election campaign for Mr Billson.

Thanks very much.