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E&OE

Subjects: Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd; Tony Abbott and Michael Johnson.

HOST: Well it seems Julia Gillard is this morning under new pressure over her deposing of Kevin Rudd, following reports of the negotiations that led to her takeover. Ms Gillard reportedly agreed to allow Mr Rudd to remain as leader to see if he could reverse a downward trend in the polls, but then changed her mind quickly after consulting her backers. The controversy over the leadership backings yesterday overshadowed what Julia Gillard had intended to be a keynote speech on economic issues. For a government perspective on what's going on and on the Prime Minister's speech, Marius Benson is speaking to the Minister for Small Business in the government, Craig Emerson.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, the notional topic of Julia Gillard's speech yesterday was economic policy, but the speech itself seemed to be long on rhetoric – there was lots of talk on moving forward and being clean and green and lean – but a bit short on specifics of economic management.

EMERSON: Well, I thought it was a good speech. The reason I say that is that Julia connected to the reform era of the Hawke and Keating Governments, and described the forward agenda for economic reform as one where we invest in people and invest

in health care. To put an economic term around it: this is investing in human capital.

BENSON: Okay, that talk of investment got a little bit swamped when the Gillard address to the National Press Club seemed to become the Oakes/Gillard address, when Laurie Oakes, the Nine Network political correspondent, asked questions about the machinations on the Wednesday night that saw the end of Kevin Rudd's prime ministership and whether Julia Gillard had reneged on a deal with Kevin Rudd. Did the Prime Minister, the current Prime Minister, rat on a deal with the former prime minister?

EMERSON: I have no information on that, and, furthermore, Julia has said that she is not providing any details on that matter. So we think that it's more important that we do these very important investments in education, in health and in making sure that Australia is a seamless national economy. That is what her speech was about and I don't have anything more to the question that Mr Oakes asked.

BENSON: Now, you say you don't know anything about those leadership machinations. Not many people do, because in the room was only Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard and John Faulkner. Julia Gillard, out of self interest, would not be talking about the machinations. John Faulkner has universally been seen as being above suspicion, which leaves one suspect for this leak: Kevin Rudd.

EMERSON: Well, I don't think it's helpful to speculate one way or the other on that matter. As Julia Gillard said, she doesn't intend to do so; she doesn't intend to comment further on it, and I won't be adding to any further comment on it either.

BENSON: Well, there's not much scope for speculation if there's only one of three who could have leaked the material.

EMERSON: It's up to journalists to do whatever speculation or non-speculation they want to do, Marius. I'm simply saying that I don't have any information, or views, or input to provide on that matter.

BENSON: Would you be worried if Kevin Rudd decided that he was prepared to destabilise Labor?

EMERSON: Again, we're moving forward as a political party, as the Government of Australia, with a Prime Minister who is a consensus building Prime Minister in the Bob Hawke mould.

BENSON: Will moving forward be more difficult if Kevin Rudd is pushing in the opposite direction, and in fact, white-anting Labor, as some people now suspect he's doing?

EMERSON: Well, we are a united team and the big issues are the issues that affect the Australian people. And we're going to move forward with that. Tony Abbott is the alternative, and I'll give it to him – he does provide a stark alternative – of taking the country back, to cutting health care, to cutting education and to bringing back the worst elements of Work Choices.

BENSON: Craig Emerson, the discussions of what might or might not have taken place between Julia Gillard and Kevin Rudd on the night of his being deposed are not the only stories of political intrigue around today. There is also a story from Queensland saying that the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, was over-ruled by Queensland party heavy-weights when he tried to retain Michael Johnson – the Liberal MP who's now been dumped by Queensland. That's an issue that you would, presumably, be more willing to talk about?

EMERSON: Well, there's a lot of confusion and chaos in the Liberal and National Parties in Queensland. The Labor Party is a single, united party. This is a very uneasy marriage in Queensland, and even the hierarchy of the Liberal and National Parties in Queensland is at odds with Mr Abbott, because the LNP hierarchy has dis-endorsed Mr Johnson, the candidate for Ryan, and Mr Abbott has sought to intervene and to save him. There are some serious suggestions in what Mr Johnson is saying, that Mr Abbott said that he would fix Mr Johnson's legal problems. I'm not sure of the truth or otherwise of that, but I do know this: that Mr Abbott was supposed to be in Brisbane this morning, has scurried away from Brisbane to head north because he doesn't want to face any questioning on his role and his conflict between himself and the Liberal-National Party hierarchy in Queensland.

BENSON: Okay, I'll have to leave that there. Craig Emerson, thank you very much.

EMERSON: Righty-o. Thanks mate.

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