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Interview with Madonna King on *Inside Canberra*
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SUBJECTS: US elections; G20 conversation.

KING: Now within hours you'll know who'll rule the United States. The first African- American President, who's currently in the lead, or at 71 the oldest US President to sit in the oval office. Either way, this is history in our lifetime and there's a certain amount of excitement in that I guess. But when the dust settles and the next US President is sworn-in in January, what are the implications for Australia? Both sides are concerned about the issue of protectionism. But what is that and how do the candidates, one of them soon to be President, differ on what Australian producers would face? *Inside Canberra* now and we're going with Dr Craig Emerson, the Small Business Minister in the Rudd Government. Good morning Doctor.

EMERSON: Good morning Madonna.

KING: And Senator George Brandis, the Shadow Attorney General. Senator good morning.

BRANDIS: Good morning Madonna. Good morning Craig.

EMERSON: Hi George.

KING: Any chance of John McCain getting up, do either of you think?

BRANDIS: I think it's looking increasingly less likely. It's very difficult for John McCain to win for this reason – that he would need to hold on to all of the states that George Bush won last time and in fact he is, according to all of the opinion polls that we can look at, he's trailing in six of those states. So he'd really have to come from behind in every doubtful state.

KING: Any disagreement there Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Not really. The only qualification is that the history of American politics and also here in Australia has shown that on occasion polls have not been right. People tell pollsters things that they don't really intend to do but the polls here, in the United States, in this case have been so consistent and so strong for so long that it seems likely that there would be anything other than an Obama victory.

KING: There's also the Bradley effect though isn't it?

EMERSON: Yes, that's what I had in mind. Exactly.

BRANDIS: Yeah, but though I think the Bradley effect which your listeners would remember is named after Mayor Bradley who was a black politician...

KING: In California.

BRANDIS: In California and the opinion polls had him ahead and in fact he lost and subsequent sociological research revealed that there was a proportion of people who told pollsters that they were voting for him but essentially were not prepared to reveal to the pollsters that they wouldn't vote for a black politician. But I think that's abated and there have been lots of elections, this is about 20 years ago, and I think there has been lots of elections in the United States since, including in this primary season I might say, where that effect hasn't been evident in the opinion polls.

KING: Well there's also, people seem to know Barack Obama quite well. He's been out there every day now for 18 months, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: I think that's right. The only other example that I'd draw is remember One Nation got all those seats in Queensland. That was a bit over a decade ago, more than that, and no-one picked that, but look we're putting in a few qualifications here but you're right Madonna. Everyone knows who Barack Obama is. There is, obviously, a very strong mood for change in the United States and Barack Obama has captured that mood better than John McCain. I think there will be change anyway, irrespective of whether Obama wins or McCain but the change that would happen under Obama I think has much longer term implications in this regard, and I'll be very brief here Madonna. The election of a black American I think would constitute such enormous social progress, not only in the United States but around the world. It would send such a strong message that I think it would inspire a lot of people and a lot of nations to think we can make progress here.

BRANDIS: I think that's true Madonna and of course nobody should vote for or against someone because of the colour of their skin. But having said that, you know, people have observed over the years that slavery is the great original sin of the American Republic and the greatest enduring social problem of America is the white/black divide. Now for America to elect an African-American as President I think would, as Craig says, indicate tremendous social progress but it would also, I think, leave speechless all the

anti-American crowd who say that the American dream is a fiction. It would be the most wonderful vindication of the American dream.

KING: Seventeen minutes past nine. *Inside Canberra* this morning with Senator George Brandis and Dr Craig Emerson and remember after 10 we'll be crossing to America. George Brandis that's pretty much when the polls will be closed?

BRANDIS: Well the first polls to close, some of the states on the Eastern seaboard close in about 40 minutes time. That's when, for example, Virginia closes and that's a very important indicator, Virginia, because it's a state that hasn't voted for a Democrat since 1964 and yet overnight the most recent opinion polls within Virginia had Senator Obama up by 4.4 per cent. So if Obama wins Virginia, it makes it that much harder for McCain to catch up.

KING: And if McCain loses, if John McCain loses, can we just ask will Sarah Palin be blamed because a couple of weeks ago we were talking about how she could herald a difference to the Republican grass roots? A week's a long time in politics too, two weeks almost an eternity.

EMERSON: Yes, it does show how fickle politics is. She gave the McCain campaign a boost. I would not blame Sarah Palin though if there was a loss to the Republicans.

KING: What would you blame?

EMERSON: I think the fact that John McCain is a Republican. Accepted that's he's a maverick Republican, would not be the same as what we've had in the past...

KING: So he's still tied to George Bush?

EMERSON: I think so and, you know, voted, I think they're advertising this, voted with George Bush on many, many issues. So he's tied therefore more than he would like to the economic crisis, to Iraq, whether he likes it or not and I think that's the legacy.

BRANDIS: I agree with that too, but I think also we should point out that Senator McCain is, in fact, running ahead of the Republican Party. Now, this is a Democrat year. The Democrats were always bound to do well but Senator McCain is doing better than the Republicans are doing, for example, in the Congressional and Senate and Governitorial races and, you know, we've spoken about Senator Obama this morning, but let's not forget what an impressive figure John McCain is too. I mean, I can't remember the last time, in fact, in which we had an American Presidential election in which the choice between the candidates of both the major choices was a choice between two such outstanding individuals.

KING: Well...

EMERSON: And if I could add, two progressives. I mean people on our side of politics in the United States or in Australia might not accept the idea that John McCain was progressive, but in Republic terms he is.

KING: But also, I mean he's 71. Yesterday he crossed seven states. He did 3,400 miles. The energy of both of the candidates has just been mind blowing.

EMERSON: Must be on the Gatorade or something.

BRANDIS: He's obviously a very good customer as his whole life story suggests but I mean another observation, this is about Obama is Obama's campaign has been a triumph of temperament.

KING: What does that mean?

BRANDIS: I'll tell you what I mean by it. He has been so cool under pressure. He's had ups and downs. If he wins today it will mean that this guy who's only be in a US Senator for less than four weeks has come from nowhere to defeat the two most powerful political machines in American politics: the Clinton machine to win the nomination and the Republican Right to win the Presidency.

KING: He would have to go down as one of the best politicians of all time if he did pull this off, in terms of campaigning.

EMERSON: And that is the American dream isn't it. That someone can come from nowhere and become the President of the United States, don't have to be born into money, although they obviously had plenty of money to spend. I mean, I think the Democrats have massively outspent the Republicans this time round.

KING: Four years ago, if the three of us were sitting in this studio and I had said, look there's this called Barack Obama, I think he lives in a suburb in Chicago and he is expected to be the President of America in four years, George Brandis, what would you have said of me?

BRANDIS: Well I would barely have heard of him. He did make his name when he gave the nominating speech I think it was at the Democratic Convention four years ago. Before then literally no-one had heard of him. He was, at the time, he was a Chicago State Senator, an Illinois State Senator from the south-side of Chicago. And now that's part of the interest in Obama because, you know, as Frank Sinatra famously said the south-side of Chicago is the meanest part of town. Now this man has actually come through the meanest, nastiest political machine in America, the Democratic Party in Cook County, which famously...

EMERSON: George you know everything!

KING: He loves his American politics.

EMERSON: He's an encyclopaedia!

BRANDIS: I'm very interested in American politics.

KING: Look we'll come back to this. I'm fascinated by it. We'll come back to it in just a moment but I mentioned at the beginning that one reason both of you are not really supportive of Barack Obama is the issue of protectionism. What does that word mean and what's the impact if Barack Obama becomes the US President?

EMERSON: Well if I could just clear up. I didn't say I wasn't supportive of Barack Obama. What I'm saying is that McCain's a good guy too but in terms of protectionism it means that there is a fear that under a Democrat Administration the trade barriers would be erected or increased and that would...

KING: What does that mean to Australia?

EMERSON: Well it means most directly that we would be able to export less to the United States. Now the US market is important but not dominant any more. But if they put those trade barriers up for other countries such as China, then that has flow-on effects to Australia because it could affect the growth of the Chinese economy and if it did that, then that's less coal and iron ore and other commodities that we sell to China.

KING: Is this is a big difference between Barack Obama and John McCain?

EMERSON: On paper it is and I need to be honest about that. The McCain campaign has been more on the free trade side. The previous Democrat, Bill Clinton, was more for free trade. You could argue that George Bush was more for free trade. But sometimes there is a difference between pre-election rhetoric and actual policy. We'd have to wait and see.

KING: What do you mean sometimes? That's code for broken promise.

EMERSON: Well in this case...

BRANDIS: Don't take this personally Craig but I think...

EMERSON: In this case we'd be hoping for a broken promise to that extent; that is, that they didn't follow through.

KING: Well he's a politician so we've got a good chance haven't we.

BRANDIS: Look, I do think that Obama's protectionist rhetoric is the thing that we should be most worried about. Though, fortunately, the Howard Government negotiated the Free Trade Agreement with the United States so,

in its most immediate sense, Australia's interests are protected and we have access to the US market which very few countries have. But nevertheless the secondary effects on other markets that Craig mentioned are potentially consequential for us.

KING: But you say, you know, potentially consequential for us, does this mean that Australians would lose jobs? That our primary produce wouldn't have the sales overseas? Be specific on your concerns.

BRANDIS: Well it doesn't mean the latter of those things because that right of entry is protected by the Free Trade Agreement and that's the most important thing to bear in mind. Beyond that it's very difficult to say other than to make the general observation that the more protectionist the world's biggest economy is, the more dangerous that is for international trade and particularly a trading and commodities based economy like Australia.

KING: When do either of you think we will know who the new US President is?

BRANDIS: About two hours.

KING: In about two hours time? Craig Emerson, agree with that?

EMERSON: I think so. Could I just very quickly add on that protection issue, because it is so important, I don't recall specific policies being enunciated, it's more a mood or a sentiment.

BRANDIS: Yes, that's true.

EMERSON: So it doesn't necessarily mean breaking promises. It means more that a different impression might have been created before the election to what I would hope happens after the election and that is that the US Administration, assuming Barack Obama, but even under John McCain, is essentially pro-trade.

KING: All right. Can I move on to another issue, just a domestic issue that just is a mystery that I think is starting to grip the nation? This phone call between Kevin Rudd and George Bush that's so upset the Americans and you can understand why. It was reported that Mr Bush asked Mr Rudd what the G20 was. Now the Americans are upset about that. Kevin Rudd has denied that but George Bush phoned Kirribilli when there was a group of journalists, including the Editor in Chief of the Australian. Somehow out of that phone call the newspaper comes out with a story that George Bush didn't know what the G20 was. First of all to you Craig Emerson, what's happened here?

EMERSON: I don't have any information other than that which is in the public domain and that includes Kevin Rudd confirming that that conversation, that that statement, was not made.

KING: But he's not saying the journalist made it up either is he?

EMERSON: Well I don't know whether he is or not. I accept your word on that Madonna. I just can't really illuminate your listeners on that, other than to say that Kevin Rudd has said George Bush did not say that. I don't know how it appeared in the newspaper. What I understand to be the case is that obviously there wasn't a group of people sitting there while the Prime Minister was having a conversation with the President of the United States.

KING: Because that would be quite improper wouldn't it?

EMERSON: Well it would and no-one's actually asserting that that was the case - that there were a bunch of journalists there.

KING: So why wouldn't the Prime Minister come out and say, look this story is wrong, it's made up, I never said that.

EMERSON: He did. He did, by saying that George Bush did not make that statement. Now I would imagine, just from experience in previous Australian Governments, that there'd been communications through Diplomatic channels to provide reassurance but that's as far as I can take it Madonna.

KING: All right. George Brandis. What do you think happened?

BRANDIS: Well I disbelieve Kevin Rudd's denial frankly. As Mandy Rice-Davies once famously said, he would say that wouldn't he. He had to deny it once it was in the public arena but the journalist who was the guest at the dinner party, Chris Mitchell, the Editor of the Australian, is an extremely reputable journalist. The story appeared under his by line which is unusual.

KING: No, it didn't appear under Chris Mitchell's, I think it was under one of his senior journalists.

BRANDIS: Well if I'm wrong about that, certainly the claim was attributed to him. So he was the source of it in any event and frankly he would not have made that up. Now, you know Chris Mitchell, so do I and we both know he would not have made that up out of thin air.

KING: So what are you saying? That the Prime Minister came out and said George Bush didn't know what the G20 was?

BRANDIS: I disbelieve Rudd's denial and I think what Kevin Rudd evidently did was an atrocious thing to do for a couple of reasons. First of all it was a huge diplomatic gaffe because as anybody, as any of your listeners would appreciate, if you were having a private conversation with the President of the United States, you respect the confidentiality. I mean that's the highest level conversation any political leader can have and you respect the occasion but secondly to turn around and indiscreetly use the occasion to ridicule the President of the United States is not only going to have an impact on our relationship with the United States but other countries as well.

KING: Craig Emerson, the last fifteen seconds to you.

EMERSON: Oh, simply that George feels that he knows the truth. I don't know exactly what went on but George is very confident that he does. I don't really think I can add anything more to it.

KING: Gentlemen, thank you, look forward to talking to you again next week.

EMERSON: Thanks Madonna.

BRANDIS: Thanks Madonna. See you Craig.

EMERSON: Bye bye George.

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