



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

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Subjects: Craig Thomson.

WENDY KINGSTON:

Well, the Prime Minister has launched an attack on the Opposition over its tactics in the Craig Thomson credit card scandal. It coincides with calls from Mr Thomson's former employer, the Health Services Union, for a "please explain" over these allegations that he misused funds.

For more we cross to Minister Craig Emerson, Trade Minister, in our Canberra studio. Dr Emerson, thank you for your time this morning. We've certainly seen a pretty spirited defence of Craig Thomson, an attack on the Opposition from the PM.

It could, though, very easily blow up in her face.

CRAIG EMERSON:

I don't think so. We're very concerned with learning that the Shadow Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, before he sent documentation to the New South Wales Police, chose to ring

the New South Wales Liberal Police Minister to talk to him about that.

This raises real questions of impropriety given that the New South Wales Liberal Police Minister then rang the Police Commissioner.

We have absolute confidence in the New South Wales Police Commissioner. But what business was it of Senator Brandis to make a political phone call saying that this is all about legal matters and not political matters? And indeed, Mr Brandis would not have done that without the instruction of Tony Abbott.

Now, this raises real questions about the appropriateness, indeed the propriety of Senator Brandis making a political phone call to his Liberal counterpart in New South Wales, especially when we know that the Premier of New South Wales, Mr O'Farrell, has already delivered his judgement and said that Craig Thomson should resign from Parliament.

Where the Liberals have already made their judgement, they should leave the police to make their objective independent judgement and not interfere.

KINGSTON:

Surely, though, Doctor, in the scheme of this scandal the matter of whether George Brandis rang his colleague is just a side-bar issue in all of this?

EMERSON:

It's a very important matter. There is a notion of the separation of powers where politicians do not involve themselves in any way in police investigations.

Now, why did Senator Brandis ring the New South Wales Police Minister? And when Senator Brandis had a long press conference to announce that he had in fact sent documents to the New South Wales Police, why did Senator Brandis not mention that he'd rung the New South Wales Police Minister?

Why did he seek to conceal that information from the public, from the media, when of course it is a very important phone call to ring the New South Wales Police Minister?

And the fact is Senator Brandis did not want that to come to light. He wanted to conceal that and now Mr Abbott and Senator Brandis need to explain why they chose a political path when they say that they were pursuing this as a legal matter.

KINGSTON:

So a lot of allegations out there. We've heard from a lot of people, even the PM today. What about the man himself, Craig Thomson? Have you spoken to him, and how's he holding up through all of this?

EMERSON:

Yes, I have and Craig's holding up as well as could humanly be expected. This is a tough time for him. He's stoic. He's obviously had a lot of allegations

made against him and this has become a very high-profile matter.

He has denied those allegations. He's entitled to the presumption of innocence as every other citizen in this country should be entitled to the presumption of innocence.

And I support Craig Thomson. He's a friend of mine. I'm standing by him and I simply say let the legal processes now take their course without any suggestion of political interference whatsoever by anyone in the political process, including Mr Abbott and Senator Brandis.

Now, Mr Abbott must explain why he instructed Senator Brandis to ring the New South Wales Police Minister when it was supposed to be a non-political matter: the referral of documents to the Police Commissioner.

Why add a political overlay? And does this not again raise questions about what is called the separation of powers between the political processes and the legal processes? Mr Abbott has a lot of explaining to do.

KINGSTON:

All right. We'll leave it there. Minister, thank you very much for your time this morning.

EMERSON:

Thanks Wendy.