

INSIDE CANBERRA
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HON CRAIG EMERSON MP

MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND
THE SERVICE ECONOMY
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON
DEREGULATION

KING: Tomorrow the torch relay to travel through the streets of Canberra and it costs, some are claiming, \$2 million. *Inside Canberra* this morning with Opposition Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, and Rudd Government Minister, Dr Craig Emerson. Good morning gentlemen.

BRANDIS: Good morning.

EMERSON: Hello Madonna.

KING: Torch relay, let's start there. Either of you ducking out of Parliament tomorrow to see the torch relay?

EMERSON: Well, Parliament's not actually sitting and I'll be in Brisbane, so no I won't. The torch has landed, we've watched the coverage this morning.

KING: Yes, we've all seen that. Are you avoiding it, or you've just work back in Brisbane.

EMERSON: No, I've got electorate commitments Madonna, talking to some of the schools.

KING: What about you George Brandis?

BRANDIS: I'll be in Brisbane. I'm not avoiding the torch, I just won't happen to be in Canberra tomorrow.

KING: You feel very strongly about this torch relay, don't you George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I feel strongly about the issue of human rights in Tibet and we discussed that a couple of weeks ago. I think that this Olympic torch has become the flame of Tibetan freedom and I think to the extent to which it being carried around the world it is advertising the issue of human rights in Tibet. That's a good thing, although it's obviously not what the Chinese Government would have wanted.

KING: Well, I'm interested in the whole security operation tomorrow. It's a big thing. Last night we hear that Chinese guards will actually use their bodies to protect the Olympic flame from protestors. That's according to China's Ambassador to Australia. Do either of you know what that would mean?

BRANDIS: It would be completely unacceptable and I've said something about this last week in my Shadow Attorney-General capacity. Kevin Rudd has said that the Chinese torch guards will not get off the bus. Now, in fact, others have said different things and now we have the Chinese Ambassador contemplating the possibility that a group of foreign law enforcement officials will be enforcing the law on Australian soil rather than Australian law enforcement officials and that is completely unacceptable.

KING: But this is the opposite of what the Prime Minister is saying. He says that absolutely won't happen. Who's in charge here? Is it the IOC? The AIC? The Chinese? The Prime Minister? Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: The Prime Minister's position will prevail on this. There has been a clarification of the Ambassador's statements from last night and the situation will be as wanted and described by Kevin Rudd. I don't think there's much value in whipping up a fever about this. Let's actually celebrate the Olympic spirit rather than have this as a scene of, kind of, chaos. If people want to demonstrate, they have a perfectly legitimate right to, in a good robust democracy such as Australia's, to do it. But let's not lose sight of the fact that this is a celebration of the Olympic spirit.

KING: Yeah, but you shouldn't not talk about it. Especially when there's reports saying the increased security is going to cost something like \$2 million.

EMERSON: No, no, sure, no, no I'm not suggesting that we don't talk about it, but I am suggesting that when George says 'oh well, these goons are gonna come out of buses' or whatever. I just don't think that whole approach ...

BRANDIS: Now hang on a second Craig.

EMERSON: I think it will not happen. Kevin Rudd's position will prevail.

BRANDIS: Hang on a second Craig. First of all, I didn't use that word and I think that's an offensive and racist word. Secondly, when I talked about they won't come off the bus, that was a direct quote from Kevin Rudd, who said they will stay on the bus.

EMERSON: And that's the position that Kevin Rudd wants to happen and will happen.

KING: Should the torch relay go ahead George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Um, I'm not suggesting it shouldn't go ahead. No. I don't have a problem with it going ahead.

KING: Are you happy with everything that's been...

EMERSON: Madonna, that's a change of position. Two weeks ago George said that he hoped that the protestors prevailed and the relay was stopped.

BRANDIS: No, that's not correct.

EMERSON: That's exactly what he said.

BRANDIS: Actually, in view of the brouhaha that those comments caused I checked the transcript. What I did say and I continue to say is I hope that the protestors do succeed. What I hope the protestors do succeed in doing is bringing pressure to bear on the Chinese Government by drawing attention to the human rights abuses in Tibet.

EMERSON: That's actually not what you said. You said that you hoped that they succeeded in stopping the torch relay and you went on George...

BRANDIS: Incorrect Craig. Check the transcript.

EMERSON: You went on George to say that you hoped that there would be a political boycott of the Opening Ceremony which not only puts you out of step with your Leader, Brendan Nelson, but out of step with the Dalai Lama. And I'd be interested if you still hold that view.

BRANDIS: First of all, first of all, the first part of what you said is incorrect. What I said is I hope the protestors do succeed and I do hope the protestors do succeed in what they are seeking to do. Not to stop the torch being displayed in the various countries of the world, but using the occasion to draw attention to human rights abuses in Tibet. In relation to the second point, I continue to be of the view that there is no good purpose served in politicians attending sporting events. They are entirely surplusage and on an occasion like this...

KING: Ok, we actually talked about that last week and I don't want to go back into that but I want to ask you George Brandis, as the Opposition Attorney-General, as the Opposition, are you happy that everything has been done ahead of the torch relay tomorrow?

BRANDIS: No, I'm not happy for the very reason you've recited earlier in this broadcast Madonna, because there is still confusion about who will be the relevant law enforcement authority. Now Craig has said this morning that Kevin Rudd's position will prevail. Kevin Rudd's position was stated last week. It has since been contradicted by both Mr Stanhope and the ACT Police authorities and, overnight, the Chinese Ambassador. I understand there's been a retraction but there should never have been this controversy.

KING: No, Craig Emerson can I just ask you about that clarification. What does the clarification say from the Chinese?

EMERSON: I haven't actually read it but it essentially says that Kevin Rudd's position will prevail and it will.

KING: All right, so let's move on from the torch relay. Let's hope there are no violent protests as you say, or both of you say; everyone's entitled to protest non-violently. The week started with the Summit and I just want to touch on this briefly. Two elements of it, what was the best idea for both of you to come out of the Summit? George Brandis, first to you.

BRANDIS: The idea that I think is, in the long run, going to be the most important that came out of the Summit was the idea of a seamless national market so that the remaining regulatory differences and legal differences between the States will, over a period of time, be eliminated.

KING: Just before I go to you Craig Emerson, when I've said that a couple of times on air, George Brandis, people have said what does that mean? So in concrete terms, what's a type of law that may disappear as a result of this?

BRANDIS: Let me give you an example. In Australia at the moment there are different systems of land title and different land registers, modes of conveying land and different practices in land registries and for some time now the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General has been trying to set up a uniform national system of electronic conveyancing which would operate seamlessly across the country. That still hasn't happened because there are certain State stakeholders, in particular the Victorian Department, who are trying to basically engage in turf war. So that's a very small, though very practical example of what happens when you don't have a seamless national market.

KING: Craig Emerson, the best idea, the one you liked most?

EMERSON: Just when you thought George and I wouldn't agree on anything today, I happen to agree with him on that very point. The idea of a seamless economy, or a single national market, if I could explain to your listeners is one where, the best way of doing is comparing Australia with 21 million to the European Community with hundreds of millions of people. There are less restrictions on businesses and people moving across those boundaries in Europe than there are in Australia. So for example, tradespeople, plumbers, electricians, have to go and get a licence if they want to move from Queensland to Western Australia, have to get re-licensed to, and that's why they're talking about this seamless economy where people can just move across and get rid of all of this absurd regulation.

Now the truth is, I'll just finish on this, I know you want to move on, we're working on 27 areas of regulatory reform and I'm the Co-Chair of that working group with the Council of Australian Governments. So we are making good progress and including in that area of electronic conveyancing now George.

KING: Now, George Brandis, just before we move on from the 2020 Summit, you were a delegate or an observer in the governance stream?

BRANDIS: I was a delegate as a matter of fact. Let me tell you what happened. I had no interest or intention, I should say, of going to the 2020 Summit. I didn't seek to be chosen and you might recall, Madonna, on your program I expressed some scepticism about how...

KING: Some?

BRANDIS: No, no, I made it clear that the Opposition supported the 2020 Summit, as we always have, but I expressed some scepticism about how it was going to work. I was sitting in my office about three weeks ago, minding my own business, when I got a phone call from one of the Co-Chairs, saying would you mind being a delegate. So I thought about it and I discussed it with Dr Nelson who attended the whole weekend as well.

KING: And you went along to the governance stream?

BRANDIS: And I decided that, having been invited, I should accept the invitation and I did go along to the governance stream, yes.

KING: You went along to the governance stream. Their chief recommendation was the introduction of a republic essentially. I read somewhere where you were the only monarchist in the room. Is that fair?

BRANDIS: Well, I'm not a monarchist. I am a person who is not persuaded to change the constitutional status quo because I think it works just fine the way it is and I just don't think doing so less than ten years after this was last discussed is worth all the fuss.

KING: Were you the only person arguing that?

BRANDIS: Yes, yes. Well I wasn't actually arguing it because, believe it or not, we didn't even have a discussion about it. The reason we didn't have a discussion about it is that there was a virtual unanimity of opinion there. There were 100 people in the room, one person, Sir William Deane, the former Governor-General, abstained. When it was asked 'does anybody disagree with this proposition?' I was the only hand that was raised.

EMERSON: Good on you George.

BRANDIS: So Madonna, this is how representative the governance stream was. It was basically a gymkhana of law professors and political activists.

KING: A brief response to that Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Well I think the whole Summit was pretty representative actually and I do acknowledge that the Coalition was quite well represented with present and past frontbenchers – Brendan Nelson of course, George Brandis, Bill Heffernan was there on...

BRANDIS: I think Bill just showed up.

EMERSON: Oh, did he, well he had a fair bit to say wandering around the place, but that's not unusual for Bill. Tim Fischer was there, Warwick Smith the former Member for Tasmania, so I think it was a pretty broad cross section...

BRANDIS: Can I just clarify, sorry to jump in Madonna, very quickly, can I just clarify what I was talking about before was one of the ten sub-groups – the governance stream which I think was probably the least useful and, I suspect, the least representative. I'm sure very good work was done in some of the other groups dealing with slightly less amorphous policy areas like health policy for example.

KING: All right, let's move on and Craig Emerson can I go to you first on this one?

EMERSON: Sure.

KING: Have you got a suggestion for a title of Peter Costello's tell-all book?

EMERSON: My Bid for the Leadership.

KING: Is this something you think will become quite a political big deal by the end of the year?

EMERSON: If Peter keeps promoting the book, there'll be a lot of breathless anticipation about it, which is good for sales, but it's not, according to the media reports, simply memoirs but Peter's view on the way forward for the Coalition. I welcome that. I think that's important. When political parties are in Opposition it's really important to chart a way forward and I might have played a bit of a role with others in that when we were in Opposition. So it's a good thing but it certainly will fuel speculation about Peter's intentions.

KING: You'll buy a copy?

EMERSON: I will buy a copy of that one. I think that will be a best-seller because it does re-open, if it did need re-opening, the whole question of the leadership of the Liberal Party.

KING: Well, neither of you two can enter this but this morning you can go to abc.net.au/Brisbane, click on Radio Guide and Mornings with Madonna King and give your suggestion of the name of Peter Costello's book and I've got four double passes to the Queensland Theatre Company's Rabbit Whole at Cremorne Theatre, QPAC, on Wednesday, April the 30th to give away. So four double passes for the best four blogs. What would you name Peter Costello's new book? The memoirs. George Brandis, seriously, is this something the Coalition's worried about?

BRANDIS: No, far from it. I think it's a great thing that Peter Costello's writing a memoir. I mean Peter Costello, and I'm sure Craig would agree with this, has been a very serious player in Australian public policy for the best part of 20 years. Even before he was in Parliament he was one of the early advocates for root and branch reform of the industrial relations system which has since happened. So, you know, I think what we...

EMERSON: He was one of the architects of WorkChoices, that's right.

BRANDIS: What we need, what we need in this country is to have in Parliament people who are thinkers, people who are capable of writing seriously about public policy issues and I think Peter Costello's book will be a valuable contribution to the debate. Obviously an important historical source.

KING: Any chance he will stay and lead the Party in your view George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I can't sort of speculate beyond what he has said on the public record which is that he intends to leave Parliament and build a career in the private sector. Now, he hasn't specified when he is going to do that. I don't expect that he will stay in Parliament for much longer.

EMERSON: Madonna I think it is a little curious that Peter McGauran has said that he's leaving Parliament and Brendan Nelson in fact said 'well, if people are leaving, please let us know and let everyone know your intentions'. Peter Costello has not done that. There was an opportunity, if not immediately after Peter McGauran's announcement, then in the time that since elapsed to say well, I'll go on the same day and reduce the cost of by-elections.

BRANDIS: I don't think it's going to reduce the cost of by-elections very much if you have two different by-elections in two different parts of Victoria on the same day.

KING: All right, we're up against the news. I want a quick final response to this. One thing that we've been talking about this morning is these huge billboards around Brisbane, they're around Victoria, South Australia saying do you want longer-lasting sex. One hundred and eighty complaints have gone to the Advertising Bureau of Australia, they've looked at those, 90 of them are from Brisbane, they've said that billboard is fine. We've had lots of complaints from people saying 'you know, how do you deal with this with a six year old'. Have either of you got a view on that quickly?

EMERSON: I don't know what it is promoting. It will have to educate me on this. Not the general subject Madonna.

KING: A nasal spray for erectile dysfunction, I think, in short.

Pause.

KING: And then there was silence.

EMERSON: You've been struck by the sounds of silence here. George and I are completely bemused.

KING: Inaudible.

BRANDIS: I don't have a view.

EMERSON: No, I think politicians have got too many views on too many things.

BRANDIS: I think politicians should stay out of sex.

EMERSON: Stay out of some of these things, not sex necessarily, but...

KING: All right, we'll leave it there but I reckon both of you have ended the morning with splinters sitting on the fence on that one.

BRANDIS: I just don't have a view about the billboards, that's all.

EMERSON: Yep, I'm with George on it.

KING: Gentlemen, thank you.

BRANDIS: Thanks Madonna.

EMERSON: Ok.

KING: Senator George Brandis, Opposition Attorney-General, and Dr Craig Emerson, the Minister for Small Business in the Rudd Government. Perhaps they haven't seen the billboard. Perhaps I've just got them on the hop there. 1300 222 612 about anything they've said this morning.