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Transcript  
2CC Breakfast with Mark Parton  
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E&OE

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*Subjects: New Parliament; new Government.*

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PARTON: At this time on a Wednesday morning we catch up with Dr Craig Emerson, Minister for Small Business, Consumer Affairs and Competition Policy. He's on the line now. Craig, I believe that this is the most undemocratic election result that this country has ever had. What's your response to that?

EMERSON: [Laughs] That's a controversial statement.

PARTON: Well, I don't think it is. I don't think it is controversial at all. The Coalition won on every count, except this last one.

EMERSON: Well, that's not right actually. And to say that the result of an election involving millions of Australians expressing their opinion through the ballot box was undemocratic, I think, is a contradiction. But anyway, let's go through some of these figures that must be behind you in reaching the conclusions you have, in your mind. The two-party preferred vote is still to be determined; it's very close and counting continues. But, as you know Mark, it's the number of seats that a political party can command in the Parliament and Labor got 76. I bet you're going to say that the Coalition started on 73, which it did not. It started on 72, the same as Labor. Labor got to 76, the Coalition didn't get to 76; it got to 74.

PARTON: How do you reckon Rob Oakeshott will go in Lyne next election?

EMERSON: Well, Rob is a big boy and he has made his decision with his eyes wide open. And I'm sure he made it very much with regional Australia in mind, as did Tony Windsor. Issues such as the National Broadband Network, the fact that we are providing an emphasis on regional development – not

only the hard infrastructure of transport infrastructure, but also what's called soft infrastructure in hospitals and schools – it's very important to someone like Rob Oakeshott in regional Australia. So, I think he will be able to demonstrate that he's done the right thing by regional Australia in supporting Labor.

PARTON: This is going to be a very, very tough period of government because nothing will be easy. Are you up for it?

EMERSON: We are. And it will require some goodwill. There are obviously, Mark, issues on which the two parties have very, very different positions. But there are other issues – and there's probably a large number of them – on which we might have some differences of opinion, but they're not necessarily deeply embedded in the political positions of the two parties. Now, where that is the case, I think there is an obligation on behalf of the Australian people – and in the national interest – for the political parties to work together to get the right legislation through. The parliamentary reforms that Rob Oakeshott helped engineer will be important there. There will be a much more active role for committees, for example, so that where a political party may not say that it possesses all the relevant wisdom we can have a genuine engagement with the other political parties, and people who make submissions, not only in the Senate but in the House of Representatives to get that legislation right. With goodwill we can do that.

PARTON: Where's the Speaker going to come from?

EMERSON: Well look, I'm not privy to that. I'm not sure that it has even been determined. I think one of the reforms there, Mark, that has been agreed is that if the Speaker comes from one side then the Deputy Speaker comes from the other side. So in a sense they nullify each other out, if you're looking at a political perspective there. But that's another important reform. You know sometimes you might argue that the debate in Question Time gets very robust. I think there will be less control by the Executive and more control by the Parliament. That's probably a good thing. But as Julia pointed out, on those issues in which there are profound political differences there will still be robust debate. And that's really what the Parliament facilitates so that the people can understand where the major political parties are coming from.

PARTON: The team at Centrebet are of the opinion that there is going to be robust debate. So robust in fact, that on their market as to when the next election is they have prior to December 31 next year as the odds-on favourite. It's their belief that we're going to the polls at some stage in 2011.

EMERSON: People have lost lots of money on Centrebet, and that's why Centrebet operates – because it wants to make a profit. And so I think the fact that there might be particular odds on an outcome showing in Centrebet doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to happen. Julia and the Independents are very committed to running the full term of this Parliament. With goodwill from the Coalition we can do that. I don't expect Tony Abbott to be a shrinking violet. If I did I would be very disappointed anyway.

PARTON: You would, wouldn't you? You would be disappointed.

EMERSON: [Laughs] That's right. He has talked about a kinder, gentler Parliament. We'll see. But I think what Tony's saying is, 'look on the policy issues where we don't have profound political differences, let's get on with it'. I think if that's the attitude that's adopted then we will have a very workable Parliament and, you know, potentially a very exciting time in Australia's history, a positively exciting time.

PARTON: Well done on winning government. And I must say, because we've only mentioned once much earlier this morning – got to pay tribute to Mike Kelly in Eden-Monaro. Because, look, really it got down to every single seat, but Eden-Monaro always being that electorate that points which way the Government leans, certainly if David Gazzard had got the money there I think we would have Tony Abbott as the PM.

EMERSON: And Mike Kelly did do fantastically well.

PARTON: Oh, he did exceptionally well.

EMERSON: Not only in Queanbeyan, but he was telling me in the Bega Valley. And, you know, we've got Andrew Leigh and Gai Brodtmann here in the ACT. The ACT people did vote pretty strongly for ALP representatives. And in Gai and Andrew we've got very good representatives. They'll be very, very pleased with the outcome.

PARTON: Craig, thanks for your time this morning.

EMERSON: OK, thanks Mark.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson, Minister for Small Business, Consumer Affairs and Competition Policy.