



THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript
2CC with Mark Parton
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Subjects: President Obama's visit, uranium sales to India, asylum-seekers.

MARK PARTON: Thirteen to nine. Big day for Canberra; big day for Australia, because we've got the President of the United States of America visiting this town. Will touch down at 3.25 this afternoon. We've got the Federal Trade Minister Dr Craig Emerson on the line right now. G'day Craig.

CRAIG EMERSON: G'day Mark.

PARTON: How significant is this Presidential visit?

EMERSON: Any Presidential visit is very important for this country; no more important than President Obama's visit. We're very excited about it. I think all of Australia is, and we've just had very good discussions in Honolulu with the President on trade and other matters. So he's coming to Australia and then we're going off to Indonesia for the East Asia Summit. So it's great that he is coming "Down Under".

PARTON: Okay. You speak of these significant discussions on trade. As Trade Minister, what is it that you would like to see change in our trade relationship with the US?

EMERSON: Just some more openness: reduction of, and final elimination of, remaining trade barriers. That's what the statement that came out of the APEC meeting - or really the Trans-Pacific Partnership meeting - in Honolulu said: that the goal was the elimination of all tariffs. Australia's a great trading nation, and we really benefit obviously from greater access to other countries' markets, whether it be our farmers or our small businesses operating on the National Broadband

Network in regional Australia. We don't only sell goods like iron ore and coal and beef; we also sell services. And we think this is an opportunity for our small businesses to be able to participate in a great trading endeavour as well.

PARTON: Surely they owe us some favours, too. We're certainly staying the long haul in Afghanistan, and now it appears it's American advice that's forced the change in Labor policy on uranium sales to India.

EMERSON: I saw the PM being asked that question yesterday. It's her initiative, and we just think this is a change whose time has come. India is a peaceful nation and is committed to using Australian uranium for peaceful purposes. We do have the opportunity to negotiate an India-Australia agreement, a bilateral agreement to ensure that those safeguards are put in place. And that's what we'll do. By the way, Mark, if I could just mention, to humanise this, selling uranium to India really means more jobs for Australians, less poverty for Indians and lower carbon emissions. It's a pretty good equation.

PARTON: Look, I think it makes extreme sense in all areas. I know that the Greens won't and, don't worry, I was talking about that very fact of carbon emissions earlier this morning, because I know the Greens will be jumping up and down at great lengths and making a lot of noise about it. The reality is it's going to reduce carbon emissions in India dramatically, isn't it?

EMERSON: Well it is, and the Greens have been saying that they don't want any energy generated out of fossil fuels or out of uranium. Well, what's left: wind and sun? You'd want to hope that the sun shines and the wind blows. Otherwise the lights go out.

PARTON: Yeah, and when you look at the number of people in India, it's just absurd to believe that they could head down that direction. I do wonder why, though, the Indians just don't sign the treaty.

EMERSON: It's the relationship with Pakistan: it's not the greatest relationship on earth. And they want to behave peacefully at all times, but Pakistan is a nuclear weapon state. So, what's happened is that the United States and some other countries in 2007 entered into special agreements with India to sell uranium. Here's Australia to this point saying that we're not going to, so

good on the Prime Minister for identifying this as a policy shift that just has to occur. Bearing in mind, too, that 400 million Indians are below the poverty line, and most of those don't get more than 12 hours a day of electricity. So, this is a great humanitarian effort as well as creating Australian jobs.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson is with us. He's the Federal Trade Minister. So many fans of yours that listen to this radio station. One of them has just rung and said: "Look, if the ALP can back-flip on uranium to India, why can't we just back-flip to Nauru?" [Laughs]. It just always comes up. Why not? Why not?

EMERSON: I think there's a fair bit of political upheaval in Nauru right at this moment. And Tony Abbott says 'pick up the phone to the President of Nauru'. I think he'd be otherwise occupied. We do agree on this, though: that offshore processing is the way to go. It's the way of breaking this people-smuggling racket. All we're asking is that Mr Abbott change his "no, no, no, no and no" position simply to allow the government of the day to exercise the option that it, on advice, believes is the best one. So your caller I think could ponder this: why wouldn't Mr Abbott allow us to use Malaysia? If he became Prime Minister this legislation would allow him to use Nauru. And the fact is the advice that we've got is that Malaysia would work; that advice by the same officials that advised the Howard Government.

PARTON: On the whole Indian, I hate to call it a back-flip - I just think it's a change of ...

EMERSON: Well, policies change over time.

PARTON: Of course they do. Of course they do.

EMERSON: If people want to call it a back-flip, and that gets them excited, they can do it. I agree with you, Mark, that policy changes. If we had the same policies as we had in 1901 we'd be going around in horse-drawn carts.

PARTON: That's absolutely right.

EMERSON: Is the introduction of a motor vehicle a back-flip?

PARTON: What difference will it make, though, to the bottom line for miners in this country?

EMERSON: We already have about 4,250 people employed in uranium mining. But to get a sense of this, India is planning to increase its electricity generation from nuclear from 3 per cent to 40 per cent. So that's massive growth; it's not a little bit around the edges here. And there's that very big mineral deposit with lots of uranium called Olympic Dam, that is set for expansion. So that's really good, not only for the people of South Australia in terms of the working people who will get jobs there, but also that's a lot of extra wealth for Australia more generally. And they're not the only uranium deposits in Australia; I think we're the third-biggest uranium exporter, or we have the third-biggest reserves in the world.

PARTON: Give our regards to the "Big O". Thanks for coming on this morning.

EMERSON: I'll pass on your best wishes.

PARTON: Dr Craig Emerson, the Federal Trade Minister.