



**THE HON DR CRAIG EMERSON MP**  
MINISTER FOR TRADE

Transcript  
ABC 612 Mornings with Madonna King  
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E&OE

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*Subjects: Bullying; John Howard; David Hicks; Iraq war; APS salaries; Wyatt Roy.*

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KING: And have you been following the stoush between Peter Costello and John Howard? I wonder, if it was up to you to determine their role in history, how you'd paint it. Perhaps we can start there with Inside Canberra. Dr Craig Emerson is one of Julia Gillard's ministers, the Member for Rankin. Good morning.

EMERSON: Hello, Madonna.

KING: And Senator George Brandis, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, amongst other titles. Good morning, Senator.

BRANDIS: Good morning, Madonna. How are you?

KING: Did you just hear that grandfather?

EMERSON: I just got the end of it, Madonna.

KING: Let me just recap on that. I was going to start with John Howard and Peter Costello - and we'll go to that in just a moment. But we're talking about bullying in schools and how we try to stamp this out; as teachers, as educators and as parents. Put in a situation where your children were being bullied, what would you do?

EMERSON: I'd be straight off to the headmaster or the principal and demand that it stop. I know that that doesn't necessarily lead to it being stopped. And I also know that the child who's being bullied really often hates the idea of their parents intervening.

KING: Yeah.

EMERSON: Because it can even make it worse for the children because they're seen as sooks. So it's not a new issue.

KING: No, I understand that.

EMERSON: I think George will attest to it. I certainly remember bullying going on in the schools that I attended when I was little.

KING: Is there a point though, if you don't get satisfaction from the school, would either of you think, as a parent, you need to step in and do something?

EMERSON: I'd be more inclined to take the child out of the school. I think meeting violence with violence doesn't send the right...

KING: No, no, I don't mean that. I don't mean, I don't mean violence. I mean picking up the phone to the bully's parents, for example.

EMERSON: Oh, sure, absolutely. When I was a little fella there were these two guys that used to bully us and beat us up and threaten us. And one night Mum intercepted them on the way to doing what they were going to do to us, as we left the picture show. And she presented herself and said: 'I'll beat the living daylights out of you'. She never did but they stopped bullying us.

KING: Yeah, what about you, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I'm inclined to agree with everything Craig has said about this matter. I think that - I just want to make this one point - I don't think we should ever underestimate the seriousness of this problem and the effect it has on the victims.

KING: No.

EMERSON: I agree.

KING: You're exactly right there but it's a problem that for the five years I've had this job and for five years we've been talking about it. And you wonder at what point we can do something - we perhaps will never stamp it out - but do something about it so that kids aren't fearful of going to school.

EMERSON: For sure and I think teachers are trying to grapple with it. But the more the teachers are able to see the signs of bullying, the better it is. And I think we can always seek to do better there. Kids who are very nervy, very distressed, very distracted, that's often a sign of bullying.

KING: All right. Well, if you come up with a plan next year we might try and do something and have a little bit of a focus on this issue and try and do our part to stamp it out too. Let's move on to John Howard versus Peter Costello. George Brandis, who should we believe?

BRANDIS: Well, I don't think that's really the question. The fact is that both John Howard and Peter Costello were very great contributors to Australia. They have a shared legacy because of the great work they did in Government, in effect, as partners in reform.

KING: Aren't they destroying that in some ways now by bickering?

BRANDIS: Well, look, I think that any important public figure has a right to, after retirement, to give their version of the historic events in which they participated. Peter Costello did that the year before last in his memoirs. John Howard has now done that in his memoirs.

KING: Do you stay in contact with either of them?

BRANDIS: In fact, as soon as this program is finished, I'm going down to have a cup of tea with John Howard. And I do stay in contact with both of them, yes.

KING: And would Peter Costello have made a great prime minister do you think?

BRANDIS: I think he would have been a very good prime minister, yes.

EMERSON: George, you could become the peacemaker.

KING: Well, you could. Why don't you get Peter Costello down there? You'd certainly get a bit of publicity.

EMERSON: Down to Aussies for a cuppa.

BRANDIS: Well, well...

EMERSON: They'll have about 10 cameras there.

BRANDIS: The fact is, I think you know Madonna, that Mr Howard is in Canberra today to address the National Press Club at lunchtime. And Tony Abbott has kindly invited him to join Liberal members and senators for a cup of tea at, in about 20 minutes' time.

KING: But this mustn't be helping though. It would be manna from heaven for the Labor Party to have two of the party's heroes, I guess, publicly bickering in this way.

BRANDIS: Well, look, Madonna, people are, no two people who spend nearly 12 years together in Government and participate in endless hours of

history changing events are going to have precisely the same recollection of the sequence of events. So, I don't think this is a big deal.

EMERSON: George, you and I have known each other for about five years now and hardly ever had a cross word.

BRANDIS: Exactly. Well, that's a fair point Craig that you make in a kind of ironical way. But people who work very closely together in partnership over issues that are difficult and, by their nature, controversial, are not going to spend, you know, 12 years together working through these issues and find that they always agree about everything. But you test these things by the outcomes and the outcomes were great outcomes for Australia.

KING: And do you think, I know, Craig Emerson, I'll come to you shortly, but do you think in the same way Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard are working well together, George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I think they, as far as I can tell, they're rather trying to avoid one another. But it's, Kevin, of course, is overseas most of the time so he, they seem to be avoiding each other by staying on different sides of the globe.

KING: Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: I think George is avoiding the House of Representatives where Kevin has been during this sitting period, of course. And he and Julia are working well together. I'm not going to succumb to the temptation to make political points about John Howard and Peter Costello. I do think though...

KING: Only because you've had the same issue on your side.

EMERSON: No, no, because I think that I just want to bring something different to the discussion. I, as a Labor person, disagreed with a number of policies of the previous Coalition Government - WorkChoices, Iraq and so on. But I do think it's the wrong thing for former leaders and deputy leaders to be squabbling over the achievements of it.

KING: All right. Well, let's go onto the next question which also does involve John Howard. Craig Emerson, I might start with you here. John Howard's not the only person with a book out. David Hicks does too. Have you read it?

EMERSON: No, no, and I don't have any plans to read that book. And I think I confessed on this program before, Madonna, that I'm not an avid reader of political...

KING: All right, well if you were writing a history, what's your view of David Hicks? You would have seen Q&A the other night. How do you think history will paint him? As someone who was a supporter of terrorism or someone who was hard done by, by his country?

EMERSON: I think the legal system has identified him as someone who did the wrong thing. A supporter of terrorism and he served time in jail for that and before that at Guantanamo Bay. So, rather than me passing a judgment, I think the legal system has done that. And now he's out. I, you know, don't agree and am very strongly opposed to what David Hicks did overseas and I think we just need to respect the justice system.

KING: All right. George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well, I couldn't put it better than you put it, Madonna, in The Drum yesterday when you wrote that David Hicks wasn't picked on because he was some poor, lost soul inadvertently caught up in a war. He was pursued because of his involvement with al-Qaeda which involved real and serious terrorist training.

KING: But do you think there is, as some people have said, a concern that Australia should have looked after him in a better way? He certainly didn't deserve the treatment meted out to him in Guantanamo Bay.

BRANDIS: Well, look, what I say about that is this: the Howard Government made representations to the former Bush administration to have David Hicks' case dealt with expeditiously. And it, and he, as a result of direct representations by Mr Howard then as Prime Minister, to President Bush, Hicks' case was dealt with before any of the other detainees in Guantanamo Bay. Now you can, it might be able to be fairly said that, you know, they were kept there for too long before their matters, their cases were dealt with. But in fact Hicks was prioritised and the ultimate resolution of the Hicks case occurred as soon as it did as a direct result of the representations of the Australian Government of the day.

KING: All right, let's move on. And staying on the war theme, though, did you, I saw this morning where former Howard Government Minister Nick Minchin says it was a mistake for the US to invade Iraq while war was going on in Afghanistan. And it was described that his heart sank when John Howard told Cabinet that the US had decided to invade Iraq. George Brandis?

BRANDIS: I'm not sure that Senator Minchin did say that.

EMERSON: I saw reports on it too.

BRANDIS: No, I think there's been some concern. Senator Minchin isn't here at the moment. But I understand - don't hold me to this - but I understand that there may be, have been a mistake made.

KING: A misinterpretation of his speech?

BRANDIS: No, no, no, worse than that. Just before we came on air I was actually talking to the people in the Hansard office and I gather that in fact the speech that was recorded under Senator Minchin's name was Senator Evans' speech. So I think this was just a mistake.

KING: What do you mean?

EMERSON: I can't understand how that would be a mistake. That his heart sank in the Cabinet room when Australia agreed to invade Iraq.

KING: All right, we...

BRANDIS: Yeah, just check that out, Madonna.

KING: Well, we have put in a call to Nick Minchin's office. And we did that early this morning and I think he was away for personal reasons. But how it was reported is that his speech was delivered to Hansard because he was away for personal reasons?

BRANDIS: That's right but I think that he...

EMERSON: No, it couldn't be Senator Evans.

BRANDIS: The speech was attributed to Chris Evans...

EMERSON: Because he referred to his son who did have a terrible accident.

BRANDIS: Yeah, that's right. But look...

EMERSON: That could be something...

BRANDIS: There's some confusion about it.

KING: All right, well, we hope to speak to his office and we will try and clear that up for everyone. Just on the same issue, though: John Howard had the shoes thrown at him yesterday. What's the worst thing that's been lobbed at either of you in public?

EMERSON: I don't think I've ever collected an egg, a tomato, a shoe or anything like that. Just your, usually abuse has been hurled at me, plenty of that.

KING: Has there been or what was the issue that prompted most abuse?

EMERSON: Oh, look, how much time have you got? Look, it could be anything, Madonna. I mean I remember a nurse berating me for taking any income as a parliamentarian. She believed I should not take any income and that I should pay for my airfares.

BRANDIS: Was she a public sector employee herself?

EMERSON: May have been I don't know.

KING: I'm going to come to that soon.

EMERSON: But she was absolutely, she was furious at the idea that parliamentarians drew a salary at all and that we should pay for our own airfares to and from Canberra. And we couldn't calm her down.

KING: George Brandis, can you top that?

BRANDIS: I'm not sure that I can top that.

KING: What you've never been abused?

BRANDIS: No, no, no, you asked whether I could top Craig's story. Yes I have been abused for - by - because look, this is part of the robustness of Australian democracy. And as long as it doesn't become violent or as long as it doesn't affect innocent third parties, I think that that's fair enough. If people want to articulate, I'm a very, very strong supporter of freedom of speech. I'm very sceptical of any laws that try and restrict freedom of speech.

EMERSON: Hear, hear.

BRANDIS: And I'm very sceptical of hate crime laws, for example.

KING: All right, so this person is...

BRANDIS: So I think it's fair enough.

KING: All right so this person yesterday who threw the shoes at John Howard, do you think there should be consequences for him in doing that? That goes beyond free speech doesn't it?

BRANDIS: Well that does go beyond free speech. That was an attempted physical assault. Though if the shoes had hit either John Howard or Tony Jones then a criminal offence would have been committed, probably aggravated assault. So that's really a matter for the police.

KING: Okay, let's move on to something that I think it was Craig Emerson raised, when he said that the nurse said he shouldn't draw any public

pay rises. It's reported this morning that Julia Gillard has given the heads of Federal Government departments a pay rise more than four per cent, taking the highest paid public servants to more than \$520,000 a year. I'm just wondering should a public servant earn more than his or her minister. George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well look Madonna. I have a very strict policy of never commenting on parliamentarians' remuneration because it's in the hands of an independent remuneration tribunal so I'm not going to.

KING: But is that a cop out? Is that a cop out?

BRANDIS: Well maybe it is. But I'm just not going to be drawn on it because it's an argument that no politician can every really get into. But I will talk, I am prepared to say something about public service salaries. The senior public servants who I've encountered here in Canberra since I've been a Senator are some of the most able and impressive people that I've ever met in my life. They have enormous responsibilities. The Secretary of the Department of Human Services, for instance, or whatever that department is called now, but administers transfer payments, presides over the disbursement, of something like \$70 billion or \$80 billion a year. Now they have enormous responsibilities. And the relevant comparison I think, just leave we poor politicians out of it, is with other public sector employees. For example, University Vice-Chancellors earn more than that.

EMERSON: Is that right? I didn't realise.

BRANDIS: Yes they do. I mean there are University Vice-Chancellors at some of the big universities, they have negotiated contracts but some of them earn approaching \$1 million a year. I'm not saying they shouldn't though.

KING: No okay, well you've had your say on that. Craig Emerson, can I ask you, is a public servant worth \$520,000 a year?

EMERSON: I think they are, for this reason; that the real comparator is not whether they're getting paid more than the politicians but this pool of talent comes from the private sector as well. And these are talented human beings who have put a lot of effort into their own training. They also take risks under the Westminster System. Of course, the presumption is that the minister is ultimately responsible but these senior public servants are responsible for all of those who work for them. They go to these gruelling Senate Estimates processes and, where errors do occur, they do bear consequences.

KING: All right, so, from senior public servants to junior MPs. And George Brandis, I presume you would have listened to Wyatt Roy's maiden speech yesterday?

BRANDIS: Well I did. In fact I was present in the chamber for Wyatt Roy's maiden speech.

EMERSON: There's a stranger in the house!

KING: Yes.

BRANDIS: It was quite a, we Senators sit in the Senators' gallery. We're kind of roped off from the rest of the chamber but...

EMERSON: As it should be.

BRANDIS: ...but it was a historic occasion, the youngest person ever to have addressed the House of Representatives. Ad he gave a fabulous speech. It was a truly eloquent speech. He might be a very young man but he's a very old head on young shoulders.

KING: Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: No I didn't hear it. I was just...

KING: But you would have struck him, you would have struck him at Parliament or seen him speak.

EMERSON: Yeah I bumped into Wyatt three or four times I suppose.

KING: Yeah well what's your view on him?

EMERSON: I can't really form one Madonna. Because you know, obviously, despite the impressions to the contrary there's a lot of civility around the place. I say: 'Hello Wyatt'. He says: 'Hello Craig'.

KING: And that's where it ends. At least he's not calling...

EMERSON: I just haven't had the opportunity of an engaging conversation.

KING: Yeah what about your maiden speech? Both of you what was the thing, the one sentence message that you wanted to get across as an elected representative, Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: I think this idea of opportunity for all Madonna, through an excellent education, that all our schools are fantastic schools; that kids, if they want to, have the opportunity to go on to a university education regardless of the circumstances of their parents or the suburbs in which they live.

KING: What about you George Brandis? Can you remember writing it?

BRANDIS: Yes I can. It's always a difficult speech to write, isn't it? Because you want to do well, of course, but also you know that you'll be judged against it for years to come to the unforeseeable future.

KING: Yes and during the election campaign I played Julia Gillard's and Tony Abbott's maiden speeches. And they're sitting there in the library, so it is something that has a significance forever. What was the point you made in your maiden speech?

BRANDIS: I had a fairly conceptual maiden speech. I talked a lot about political philosophy. And I guess the main point I wanted to make was that it is bad, it is always bad policy to adopt the approach that the ends justifies the means. That one of the most perilous things government can do is to try and dominate the lives of the individuals. Out of some false notion of what's good for the community in general means that individuals can be sacrificed to the common good. We should never do that.

KING: All right, can I just try and clear something, this up about Nick Minchin. My producer has just had sent from Nick Minchin's office a speech. And in that speech it says: 'I recall that my heart sank when Mr Howard informed us in the middle of a Cabinet meeting that the US had decided to invade Iraq. But I knew that the decision, having been made, Australia had to support it. I regret that we were not able to be more successful in persuading the Bush Administration to remain focused on Afghanistan'.

EMERSON: Obviously I agree with Nick Minchin. That is the Labor position.

BRANDIS: Well look, I'm sorry about that earlier confusion I introduced into the discussion.

KING: No I'm glad you did because we want to get things right. But it appears - we have had - got that sent to us while you've been talking, from Nick Minchin's office.

BRANDIS: Okay, that's fine. Well look, I don't want to comment on a speech I haven't read. I mean I'm sure that all ministers who participate in Cabinet decisions to send troops to war do so with a heavy heart.

KING: Yes.

BRANDIS: Now whether Senator Minchin was merely saying that or whether he is being understood to mean that he opposed the decision, I don't know. And I'm not going to comment on that without having read the speech in the full context.

KING: And we're out of time in any case, so George Brandis, Craig Emerson, thank you.

BRANDIS: Thank you Madonna.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot Madonna.

KING: I look forward to talking to both of you again next week here on 612  
ABC Brisbane.

ENDS