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Transcript
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GILLON: Let's go straight to Sydney now for our panel of politicians. Joining me this morning the Small Business Minister Craig Emerson. Good morning.

EMERSON: Hello Ashleigh.

GILLON: Hi. And also the Shadow Small Business Minister Steve Ciobo, good morning to you.

CIOBO: Good morning Ashleigh.

GILLON: Now I know you both will be extremely interested in these unemployment figures due out a bit later this morning. Craig Emerson do you think that it is inevitable there will be a rise in the jobless rate today?

EMERSON: Well we have been forecasting a rise in the unemployment rate so it certainly would come as no surprise if today's jobless figures indicated an increase in that rate. It will, according to forecasts, peak at eight and a half per cent in 2011, but we're doing everything we can Ashleigh to save jobs. One job lost is one job too many. It's really important that we continue to support consumer confidence, business confidence that has surged very recently. We've had some good figures out on housing, on confidence, on retail sales. We're the only economy in the Western world that's still growing which is great and the IMF has pointed that out overnight. So there's a lot going for us but there's a lot of turbulence coming in from overseas so we're doing our best but we'll continue to support jobs in this country.

GILLON: Steven Ciobo, do you expect that rising unemployment is a world wide phenomena or can we expect the Coalition later today to put the blame squarely on the Rudd Government if we do see those figures rise?

CIOBO: Well Ashleigh there's no doubt that unemployment goes up when there's an economic slowdown but lets not lose sight of the fact that there's a lot of decisions that the Rudd Labor Government is taking which is making this problem worse, not better. Take for example award modernisation Ashleigh. Now we have the retailers association, we've got newsagents, pharmacists, horticulturists. Across the board there are hundreds of thousands of jobs in different industries where industry have said as a consequence of this Labor Government's decisions they will be laying off staff.

Now the problem that we've got is this Government refuses to acknowledge that they are making decisions which are costing jobs and instead trying to spin it to the Australian people that this is all just a result of global economic factors beyond their control. The reality is Ashleigh that Government decisions make a difference. That's why under the Coalition we got unemployment down to a record 33 year low. And now unfortunately under this Government, through short term decision making, we're seeing that the unemployment rate is actually becoming worse than it ought to be given Australia's relative position in the world.

EMERSON: Well of course Government decisions can make a difference Ashleigh. And that's why we're investing \$42 billion in a nation building stimulus plan that's been totally opposed by the Coalition.

GILLION: Okay I don't want to get into that argument just now. I think we've heard that over and over again on this program in recent weeks. Today of course at 11.30 this morning Sky will bring you the latest unemployment figures when they are released. Of course, the economy has been on the agenda at G8 talks in Italy. Also climate change as I mentioned at the start of the show. Craig Emerson how significant do you think was the setting of targets by the G8 leaders overnight?

EMERSON: It is a significant step but it's a step on the road to Copenhagen. The Copenhagen meeting will tell us a lot more about the resolve of the global community to cut back on carbon emissions. But this is encouraging There's no doubt about it but the real decision making the final decision making will be at Copenhagen. I think that we should be encouraged by the work of the environment ministers and the good work that Penny Wong's doing there on behalf of Australia and then again at the G8. So it's some steps forward but the real action the final decisions will be at Copenhagen.

GILLON: I guess the big concern with the progress overnight was that developing countries haven't been involved in signing up to any of those targets. Also the targets are non-binding. But Steve Ciobo there has been progress in terms of what America is doing. The US President Barack Obama has been hosting these talks on climate change. So America is certainly moving forward. We have seen some progress from the G8 leaders too. Do you really think that Australia still needs to wait until after that Copenhagen meeting in December before an ETS should be finalised here?

CIOBO: Absolutely we do. Ashleigh let's be clear, in the last 24 hours we've seen this issue wax and wane. We've seen it look like things were going to be resolved much more clearly now we see that it's actually now, to use the words described in *The Times* of London, 'hanging by a thread' in terms of this global agreement. What all this really demonstrates is that things are very fluid when it comes to international agreements on climate change. Now this just underscores the importance of the Coalition's position, which is not that we shouldn't do anything. We completely agree that something needs to be done to reduce global greenhouse emissions. But the key point here, Ashleigh, is that it's got to be a global solution. And what the Rudd Labor Government is trying to do is to charge ahead, to sign up Australia to a situation completely in the dark, without any knowledge about what the rest of the world is ultimately going to adopt as their position, and this is just a ridiculous situation. We need to be part of a global agreement. Australia should be doing what the rest of the world is doing. Not charging out by itself, in the dark, uncertain about what the rest of the world is going to do because the consequence, and this goes back to the point I made earlier, the consequence will be lost jobs in this country.

EMERSON: Well of course as you know Ashleigh the targets are conditional.

GILLON: Well this is a debate that's going to play out in the Senate in the first week when Parliament does resume. Then of course we'll see a vote finally happen in the Senate. Craig Emerson I'll just let you respond to some of the things Steve Ciobo had to say then?

EMERSON: Well we do need to show leadership. Barack Obama is showing leadership and that's terrific. The targets of, that we've set, the more ambitious targets are actually conditional upon what happens in the rest of the world. So it's not correct that Steve's saying that we're just charging ahead with no regard to what's happening in the rest of the world. He knows better than that.

CIOBO: So those targets could change.

EMERSON: He knows that's exactly what we set out in our emissions trading, our Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Malcolm Turnbull privately strongly supports an emissions trading scheme. But the fact is he has been driven now by Barnaby Joyce, the Leader of the Nationals in the Senate who calls it an employment termination scheme. The Nationals have said they won't have it under any circumstances. So again, Malcolm Turnbull's concerned more about his own job and his own future than the future of the country because he's bowing to the wishes of Barnaby Joyce and the Nationals in the Senate.

GILLON: Steve Ciobo this is a tricky one isn't it, for Malcolm Turnbull when you've got people like Barnaby Joyce sending out news releases pretty much every day saying that an ETS would be disastrous for the economy?

CIOBO: Well it certainly would be disastrous to have an ETS that's formed in the dark. But I've got to say I'm fascinated by what Craig just said. If I

understood him correctly he was making the point that the targets that the Rudd Government is seeking to introduce in Australia might in fact be flexible and that this could change ...

EMERSON: No they're conditional.

CIOBO: So the targets could change depending on what's happened...

EMERSON: Read the document. Read the document. This is what the Coalition is opposing because they haven't read it.

GILLON: I think what Craig Emerson was referring to there is that the Government has set targets that mean that if the world does agree then that they would reach more ambitious targets. Is that right Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Exactly right. Exactly right. Ashleigh if Steven would just read the documents.

CIOBO: So Ashleigh this is a key point.

EMERSON: It's a revelation.

CIOBO: Because what the Government is trying to do, is say to Australian businesses, when we know we are a resource intensive economy, is say to Australian businesses, oh look, we'd like you to subscribe to the framework, we're going to enforce a framework on you and we need to do this in a great rush because we need to provide business certainty. So on the one hand that's the argument. But then on the other hand, the Government says oh but hang on, all of this can change depending on what happens at Copenhagen and what subsequent agreements are reached. I mean this is the folly ...

EMERSON: Well this is a revelation: you don't know what's in the bill.

CIOBO: This is the folly of the Government's approach and this just underscores why we say that the best thing to do for Australian business is to provide certainty by being part of a global agreement.

GILLON: Okay, I think you've both made your point on that. We're going to move on to some other issues after the break. Do stay with us we'll be back in just a minute.

BREAK

GILLON: Welcome back to AM Agenda. We learnt yesterday that an Australian Rio Tinto worker has been detained in China on suspicion of spying. The Foreign Minister Stephen Smith seemed concerned obviously by this yesterday. Here's some of what he had to say.

SMITH: And today we were formally advised that he had been detained for suspicion of espionage and state secrets. This was, I must say, somewhat of

a surprise to us and as a consequence we are continuing to ask two things from the Chinese authorities. One is access to Mr Hu, and the second is further information and detail as to the basis of the detention.

GILLION: Joining us this morning Craig Emerson and Steven Ciobo. Minister, what do you make of this case? It seems like all of this story doesn't quite add up just yet. Do you see any basis for this man to be detained? Is it just a coincidence that Chinalco recently failed in its bid to get a larger stake of Rio Tinto as some people have been suggesting?

EMERSON: Obviously we are concerned about it Ashleigh. We don't know the basis of these people being detained. But it is grossly irresponsible, grossly irresponsible, on the part of Barnaby Joyce to be speculating about possible reasons, seeking to link it to the failed Chinalco deal. Barnaby Joyce doesn't know. He's just trying to get a headline. And Malcolm Turnbull ought to pull him into line. Barnaby Joyce ought to pull his head in and Malcolm Turnbull ought to pull Barnaby Joyce into line. What he's saying, what he's doing is grossly irresponsible. This is a Coalition in opposition. Barnaby Joyce is not just a backbencher he is the Leader of the National Party in the Senate and he should not be able to make these irresponsible statements.

GILLON: Steven Ciobo is the Coalition jumping the gun a bit on this? We still don't know many details about this case. Is it foolhardy to make connections between that failed Chinalco bid and this case?

CIOBO: Well Ashleigh the Coalition has not put out a position on this. So we've had a backbencher who's made a comment as indeed Labor backbenchers make comments themselves.

EMERSON: Leader of the National Party in the Senate, Steve.

CIOBO: But the important point here Ashleigh is ...

GILLON: Do you agree with those comments Steve Ciobo?

CIOBO: Well I haven't seen Barnaby's comments so I can't comment specifically on them. But look I think that's a distraction. I mean the reality is Ashleigh, what we're talking about is an Australian that Chinese authorities have taken, from what I understand from media reports, taken into custody. I mean maybe it's time that Australia's surrogate foreign minister stepped up to the plate. We know that the Prime Minister prides himself as having the greatest Sino-Australian relations that we've ever seen according to him in his own press releases. So this really should be something that the Australian Government focuses on. Let's not get caught up in the politics of this Ashleigh. I think it's a shame that you know the Labor Party's trying to score a political point on this. We've got an Australian that's been put in prison

EMERSON: Barnaby Joyce made the statement Steve.

CIOBO: We've got an Australian that's been put in prison. Let's keep the focus on that. Let's get our Government authorities to work and to work swiftly to get this matter cleared up.

GILLON: Are you suggesting though, Steve Ciobo, that the Prime Minister himself should directly intervene, perhaps with a phone call to his counterpart?

CIOBO: Well as I said I mean if you read the Prime Minister's press releases he's the greatest thing since sliced bread when it comes to Australia-Sino relations. So absolutely he should be involved.

EMERSON: The situation is not helped and is inflamed by Barnaby Joyce's irresponsible comments and Malcolm Turnbull ought to pull him into line.

GILLON: Steve Ciobo, Barnaby Joyce does get the Coalition into a bit of trouble on quite a regular basis. Is that something that is lacking in Malcolm Turnbull's leadership? Does he need to show a bit more force in getting Barnaby to run the party line more often?

CIOBO: You know Ashleigh, we've got firebrand MPs on both sides of politics. As much as the Labor party machine would like to make out that they crush any form of dissent in terms of the Government backbenchers the reality is it was only last week, or the week before I should say, that we had a Labor backbencher speaking out about Julia Gillard visiting Israel and saying how outrageous it was. I mean look, they'll always be people with strongly held views on both sides of politics. That's fine. That's acceptable. What we need to focus on though is what the official positions are of the Australian Government and Australian Coalition and that's what we should be doing.

EMERSON: Barnaby's no obscure backbencher. He's no obscure backbencher. He's the Leader of the National Party in the Senate. We just had a discussion on emissions trading. Barnaby Joyce is setting the agenda there. Now he's setting the agenda on a most sensitive, difficult issue and he should not be allowed to do that. He's not an obscure, rogue backbencher. He is the Leader of the National Party in the Senate in a Coalition. In an Opposition that is a Coalition which wants to be in Government as a Coalition. And this man, Barnaby Joyce would be the Leader of the Nationals in the Senate under a Turnbull Government. But Malcolm Turnbull just lets him go because Malcolm Turnbull can't control him and he knows that if he tries to control him there'll be a split and that would be the end of Malcolm Turnbull's aspirations. He ought to put the national interest first.

GILLON: Okay, I want to move on to another issue. Hopefully we'll get more details about the case of that Australian man detained in China later today. Steve Ciobo, you of course are also the Shadow Tourism Minister. A draft management plan for the Uluru National Park is suggesting that people be stopped from climbing the rock. Some of your Coalition colleagues have come out and said that this is ridiculous plan that could damage tourism. What's your opinion?

CIOBO: Well, Ashleigh, we need to be careful what we do here. My concern is this: that this is the kind of story if we do ban the climb of the rock that will resonate around the world. When you look at Australia's great tourism icons, you'd have Ayers Rock, the Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge would be the three that I'd nominate around the world as being the vision that people have when they look at Australia. We need to make sure that we do not send a message around the world that Australia is closed to international tourists. Now the tourism industry is generating something like \$24 billion of exports. It employs around 500,000 Australians and it has been dealt a very bad hand by the Rudd Labor Government who've imposed a billion dollars of new taxes on it in the last 18 months. So the industry is already doing it tough. They're coupling that with the fact that we've got a downturn in tourism numbers as a result of the global financial crisis. And this really could be something that really I guess is the straw that breaks the camel's back so to speak, if the message that is beamed around the world is that we're closed for business.

GILLON: So Steve Ciobo just to clarify, you think people should be stopped from walking up Uluru?

CIOBO: Well no what we've got is a draft report that's come out from Parks Australia which is proposing ...

GILLON: That's fine but what's your opinion?

CIOBO: Well, what I'm saying is we need to work closely with the tourism industry and find out what local tourism operators want. I know that for example that the Australian Tourism Export Council says they're relaxed about the walk being closed given that it is closed they say roughly one out of every two days. From my perspective this shouldn't be something that's imposed by Government on industry. What we need to have is Government responding to industry. What we need to have is Government consulting with industry, hearing what they want, and then going forward on that basis. That's the way forward.

GILLON: Craig Emerson do you think that the Government will step in and make this happen?

EMERSON: It is a process of consultation. As the former Director-General of the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service I can tell you that management plans are drafted. They are put out for public consultation, Ashleigh. So that's what, exactly what it is. It's not a matter of imposing the will or a proposition on anyone. But the major tourism, two major tourism organisations in Australia just yesterday came out and supported the proposition that there not be continued climbing on Uluru. My attitude to this is: let's have the public consultation process with the draft plan. But in terms of Steve's point about well, what impact it might have on tourism, I would think that those two major tourism organisations would take that into account in their comments and their comments are actually in favour of ending the

walking. I don't have a firm view on it. That's why we have a draft management plan out there.

GILLON: Well apparently around 250 people walk up Uluru each day. This is the subject of a poll on Sky News today.

EMERSON: Yeah but not every day.

GILLON: Not every day?

EMERSON: No, lots of days in the summer it doesn't happen very often at all.

GILLON: It's not on average.

EMERSON: In fact the total, indeed Ashleigh this is important, the total number of walks if you like has declined over the last few years. So it's not as if people go in large numbers to Uluru specifically to walk up it. I mean a lot of people go there just to be near it and to enjoy the bush life and so on. So it's not the case that this is something that's on the increase. In fact it's on the decline.

GILLON: Okay well if anyone sitting at home wants to have their say on this you can log onto Sky News and have your say on our poll running today. Just finally, one last issue, a new report is out on homelessness today. It suggests that even before the financial crisis that the number of people living on the streets was on the rise. Craig Emerson, can the Prime Minister really halve the number of homeless people by the year 2020 as he promised or is this going to be another one of these grand promises made by Prime Ministers. We can think back to Bob Hawke's pledge about no child living in poverty. Is this realistic? The report of course is showing it's on the rise.

EMERSON: Yeah well you certainly do need goals and we're not only setting a goal but backing it with a public commitment through the nation building stimulus plan to build 20,000 public housing dwellings - again I'll say incidentally as opposed by the Coalition. That would be a very welcome addition to the public housing stock and would support homeless people. The goal is the halving as you said by 2020 and a decline in the numbers by 2013 I think it is. So we're not just setting a goal and then stepping back and saying well we're not putting any resources into it. We are. It's an important part of the stimulus plan but it's an important part of dealing with one of the most difficult and heart rending social problems in this country.

GILLON: Steve Ciobo, do you think the Prime Minister's goal is a realistic one?

CIOBO: Ashleigh, once again it's now a case where Kevin Rudd's been elected Prime Minister and these promises are all starting to sound very hollow. You know, you'd recall before the last election he promised to bring down petrol prices. He promised to bring down grocery prices. You'd recall he said that the buck would stop with him when it came to Australia's health care

system. All of these things have evaporated into thin air and this is another one of those examples where the Government's rhetoric simply isn't matched by action. You know, unfortunately the Labor Party seems to think that the way you solve problems is to throw money at it. And they keep talking about it. "We throw money here. We throw money there." You know, the fact is Ashleigh, this Government has got us into an amazing amount of debt and deficit in only 18 short months. We're not seeing any results for all of that tax payer's money. Billions of dollars that have just been absolutely wasted by this Government and as you yourself identified, homelessness is getting worse not better. So really what have Australians got for the hundreds of billions of dollars of debt that this Government is racking up in a very short period of time?

EMERSON: We're in the process of building those dwellings right now Steve against the opposition of the Coalition so I don't think you can sit there saying well we're not doing anything when you're opposing it. In fact we are building those 20,000 units and refurbishing existing units to make them more liveable.

CIOBO: Well the proof will be in the pudding.

GILLON: Okay, Steve Ciobo, Craig Emerson, we have run out of time for this morning's program. Thank you both for joining us.

CIOBO: Thanks Ashleigh.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot Ashleigh.

GILLON: And of course at 11.30 this morning we'll have the latest unemployment figures for you with full analysis. Then later Kieran Gilbert will be hosting PM Agenda this afternoon at 4.15 Eastern. I'll be back with you tomorrow morning for AM Agenda. Until then, thanks for your company. I'm Ashleigh Gillon.

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