



HON CRAIG EMERSON MP
MINISTER FOR SMALL BUSINESS, INDEPENDENT CONTRACTORS AND THE
SERVICE ECONOMY
MINISTER FOR COMPETITION POLICY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
MINISTER ASSISTING THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE ON DEREGULATION

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With Ashleigh Gillon
Other guest: Shadow Environment Minister Greg Hunt

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GILLON: Welcome back to AM Agenda. We're coming live to you this morning from the ALP National Conference in Sydney. Joining me here is the Small Business Minister Craig Emerson. Good morning.

EMERSON: G'day Ashleigh.

GILLON: And joining me from Canberra is the Shadow Environment Minister Greg Hunt. Good morning to you.

HUNT: Good morning Ashleigh.

GILLON: We're going to be previewing the conference in just a minute. But just following on from the conversation I just had with the Nationals leader Warren Truss, Greg we heard Mr Truss say there the Nationals will not be supporting an ETS unless there's what he called radical change. He also suggested the Nationals won't consider negotiating anything before the Copenhagen conference is over. Does it disappoint you that the Nationals aren't fitting in with Malcolm Turnbull's position on this?

HUNT: I don't accept your assumption. Warren was completely in line with the view that Malcolm and the Shadow Cabinet put out last week. We want a level playing field. We would like to see it done after Copenhagen. We are right at five minutes to midnight. An international conference which could potentially radically change the global environment, a US system which will be the gold standard, the benchmark. Of course that should be the time after which we do the assessment and the negotiation. If Mr Rudd proceeds in advance of those then we've set out, the Nationals and the Liberals, nine very clear principles about a level playing field to make sure that we don't export jobs and we don't export emissions and we don't send up global emissions which is the risk exactly as Warren has set out.

GILLON: Today it was reported in The Age that the shadow cabinet has now decided to vote against the ETS legislation when it's put forward in a couple of weeks time. Is that correct?

HUNT: Well the position is very clear. In its current form this emissions trading scheme will simply send jobs, whether it's zinc or aluminium or displacing Australian agriculture, overseas whether it's to China or India or the United States. So in its current form it will simply send up global emissions and send down Australian jobs. If the Government wants to sit down ...

GILLON: So Greg Hunt we're not going to see any actual amendments put forward before the first vote?

HUNT: We've invited the Government to come talk, pick up the phone, sit down. I'm in Canberra today. I'm happy to meet with anybody from any Ministerial office. We are happy to meet with the Government. If they want to get action then sit down with us. But they want this vote defeated. They want to see the emissions trading scheme go down first time round for political reasons. If they're serious, sit down, come talk with us. Let's negotiate. But it doesn't seem as if they actually want to get it up. And that's because they want a political debate not an environmental solution.

GILLON: But when is the Coalition going to get serious in terms of putting actual amendments for the Government to consider? The nine points we've seen from Malcolm Turnbull are just proposals at this stage. Are you going to be putting forward amendments before the second vote then?

HUNT: We have said all along that we will be absolutely precise. But these are very precise amendments, statements, proposals, principles, whatever you want to call them. They are very precise.

GILLON: Well statements and proposals are quite different to amendments Greg Hunt.

HUNT: The inclusion of agricultural offsets, the exclusion of fugitive emissions, they couldn't be more precise.

GILLON: Well they could be a lot more precise.

HUNT: The Government with its thousands of advisers could come and sit with us, talk with us, work through them and we could potentially reach agreement. But they are not willing to do that. We've put them on the table. The door is open. The request is up for meetings.

GILLON: Minister what's your response to that? Is the Government dismissing these proposals like the Opposition said?

EMERSON: This is just another Coalition shemozzle – yet another Coalition position. Greg has just sought to re-write very recent Liberal Party history. Nick Minchin has said that in relation to the first vote they will vote it down. No negotiations. There are no amendments. There are nine principles. They are not amendments. Greg just said he couldn't be more specific. Well amendments are more specific than nine principles. Warren Truss has said they're going to vote it down anyway – not only the first time but the second time. So there's no indication of any ability or capacity on the part of the Coalition or at least the National Party to come to the party at all. They are not interested in negotiation. They want to vote this down. Although Malcolm Turnbull says he wouldn't mind having a discussion to see if they can support it the second time round. That's what Tony Abbott says. Nick Minchin says no. And now Warren Truss on your program has just said no. Now they're pretending that they're one big happy family but that Coalition party room is more like *Meet the Fockers*. They are an

absolute mess. It's a debacle. And they have just today on your program rolled their leader Malcolm Turnbull on this issue.

GILLON: Greg Hunt we read today that Peter Costello has been supporting Wilson Tuckey. We've seen the Liberal backbencher be dismissed by some of your colleagues as a wild uncle. But today, Peter Costello says that Mr Tuckey is intelligent, experienced. He says that he would welcome more debate on this issue. Do you think that Wilson Tuckey is getting a few more supporters on his side who are saying that this is something the Opposition should be rejecting full stop?

HUNT: My principle is very clear. Be respectful of all of my colleagues. And that's a principle which I hold and which I hope my other colleagues will also hold. Now in terms of individuals, I'm not getting into that. In terms of the issue, what is it we're concerned about? It's real environmental action which doesn't export emissions, doesn't export jobs and in its current form what we see is a plan which will export emissions and jobs. The invitation is there. Come sit down, talk. If you actually cared about solving the issues of protecting Australian jobs in zinc and aluminium and agriculture and using that as a chance to decrease global emissions why wouldn't you come and talk Craig Emerson? Why wouldn't Penny Wong come and talk? Why wouldn't the Prime Minister come and talk?

EMERSON: Well let me answer that Greg. The reason is we would be talking about this, the fact that you the Coalition have said that you're going to vote it down the first time. And secondly that you will not support a second vote before Copenhagen. Now that is completely at odds with what Malcolm Turnbull has been saying. You guys have rolled your own leader. Not only the National Party has rolled Malcolm Turnbull but Nick Minchin and others have rolled their own leader. Who would we talk to? Maybe we should talk to Wilson Tuckey. He might be the sanest one of all.

GILLON: Okay. I just want to move on to the events that will be happening in this building at the ALP conference over the next few days. This morning Anna Bligh, the Queensland Premier spoke to David Speers and she told him about her push for a national ban on political donations. Craig Emerson what do you make of that?

EMERSON: Well it is a really important issue that should be the subject of public discussion. We feel so much so that we put out a green paper. The consultation period on that has now closed. There we canvass a whole range of options. We will consider the input, the submissions to that green paper. But in the meantime something very constructive could be done. There is a bill that is stalled in the Senate which would reduce the amount that you can donate to a political party without disclosing it to the Australian people from \$11,000 to \$1000. It was the Coalition who put it up to 11,000. We want to take it back down. And that is being blocked. That is being blocked by the Coalition in the Senate. In addition, we want to ban donations from foreign sources. Again that's in the same bill being blocked by the Coalition.

GILLON: Greg Hunt I'll let you respond to what's going on with the Senate with those bills. But would you on the surface of this proposal give it any sort of support, a ban, a total ban on political donations?

HUNT: Well the first thing is that, at breakfast today at the Labor Party national conference, you will have people paying \$7500 a plate to attend the conference from the business community. You have a \$110,000 business special Labor Party access deal which is on the table at the moment. So we think there could and should and could well be real and radical campaign finance reform. And that means zero dollars from the union movement, zero dollars in kind from the union movement. If there is a

level playing field that doesn't distort democracy we're willing to embrace radical campaign finance reform. I personally believe in that radical reform. But that means not just one side but absolutely zero dollars from the unions. Do you support this radical proposal for zero dollars from the unions and zero dollars in kind from the unions as well as from business Craig?

EMERSON: This is a very good question. You're saying zero from the unions. But up to \$11,000 non-disclosed from the business community.

HUNT: No no. Let's get rid of all of.....

EMERSON: Talk to your colleagues and pass the bill.

HUNT: Let's get rid of all of it.

EMERSON: Pass the bill.

GILLON: Greg Hunt. You are saying that you'd support Anna Bligh on this – that you would support a ban on all donations?

HUNT: No she's not proposing that there is zero dollars from the union movement. She's proposing that the Labor Party gets access to millions and millions and millions of dollars of assistance a year from the union movement. But their political opponents the Liberal Party have no access to funding. And so this is a very dangerous, uneven proposal. If the proposal is for a radical level playing field of zero dollars from unions and zero dollars from business and only public financing that is very interesting to me. But if the proposal is for no money to the Liberal Party but millions of dollars from unions in cash and in kind then that is a dangerous development. So let's have real radical campaign finance reform which says nothing from the unions and nothing from business and then we're really ready to talk.

GILLON: It's going to be fascinating to see how that debate does develop here at this conference.

EMERSON: What I'm saying is that there is a green paper that canvasses the full range of options. If the Coalition were fair dinkum they would pass the bill where the level of disclosure, the amount is reduced from \$11,000 to \$1,000. The truth is they're not fair dinkum. They want corporate donations to be able to go ahead up to eleven grand and not be disclosed. Now in terms of the conference here.....

GILLON: Now you've made that point Craig Emerson. I just want to quickly get to one other issue that will be a focus of the conference. Of course we're expecting a range of different issues come up. Tomorrow, we're going to see rallies all around the country calling on Kevin Rudd to support gay marriage. What's your position on that? Why is there a ban on gay marriage?

EMERSON: Marriage is a union between a man and a woman. And we have done a lot in the area of reforming rights for gay couples, particularly discrimination ...

GILLON: But what's wrong with it? You say it's between a man and a woman. But what's wrong between same sex?

EMERSON: Well that is what marriage is. A marriage is not a union between two men or two women. Marriage is a union between a man and a woman. So we can't and we're not going to rewrite that. We don't support and I don't support personally

gay marriage. But I do support the right of gays to have a union. I support very much the removal of financial discrimination through Commonwealth benefits and superannuation so much so that we've done that.

GILLON: The Labor Party has made moves on that. Greg Hunt we know the position of your party on this. What's your personal take on gay marriage?

HUNT: Sure, just two things. The first is that as a national conference, this conference, this Labor Party conference will be a failure unless it produces a plan to reduce Australia's national debt. The Labor Party conference will be a failure...

EMERSON: That's got a lot to do with gay marriage!

HUNT: ...unless it produces a plan to reduce Australia's national debt. As for the second issue, the Labor Party can fight over that. I think our position is very clear. Personally I am very much in favour of making sure that there are broad rights for same sex couples. The gay marriage issue is not one that I think we're going to be taking up at this point in time. I think society would see that that's a step which is well down the track and not one that we're at that point of.

GILLON: Well all the people protesting around the country on this issue tomorrow look like they will be disappointed. But we will, of course, be bringing all of the highlights of this conference to you over the next few days. Greg Hunt thank you for your time this morning.

HUNT: It's a pleasure.

GILLON: And Craig Emerson thank you for joining us here as well.

EMERSON: Thanks a lot, thanks for having me on.

Ends