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Interviewees: Dr Craig Emerson, Senator George Brandis.

Subjects: *Swine flu, early election, LNP/Coalition, Gordon Ramsay, Therese Rein gym photos, solar rebates, unusual sayings.*

KING: It's a quarter past nine. Now from those photos of Therese Rein to suggestions of an early federal poll, to Gordon Ramsay's rant. He's just apologised I understand. Let's find out what the politicians think. Senator George Brandis, opposition spokesman on Attorney General matters, good morning.

BRANDIS: Good morning Madonna.

KING: And Rudd Government Minister Dr Craig Emerson, who just got a promotion. What's your title now?

EMERSON: Well it's Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs.

KING: Make you a little bit busier?

EMERSON: It probably increases my workload by about half, so yes it does.

KING: So just to throw you a curved ball, lets start with health this morning and the swine flu because debate is now whether we should just let it go, spread through the community naturally because it's not going to be able to be contained anyway according to many experts. Is there an argument for that Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: My doctorate is not in medicine so I've got to be really careful here Madonna.

KING: But you are a member of the Government here making these decisions.

EMERSON: Yes I am, and the government decisions are based on medical advice. We take the advice of the authorities that obviously is evolving over time as the spread of this disease does evolve over time. I think there is a further review happening today on these quarantining arrangements. But one thing that really struck me about this is that there's more than 1000 cases, identified cases of swine flu in Victoria and only 53 in Queensland, so it's not as if it's spread right across the nation. That's why I think some authorities in some states are taking particular measures or making recommendations about the quarantining of kids who come back from Victoria. A bit hard for me to comment on that as a medical authority, because I'm not one.

KING: No but you are a member of the Government making the public consultation
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EMERSON: I know but I'm saying we take advice from the medical authorities. I'm just saying that my understanding is that it is a recommendation that those children be quarantined.

KING: Are you a bit croaky yourself this morning?

EMERSON: I am.

KING: And where are you?

EMERSON: It's a beautiful day....

KING: Where are you talking to us from?

EMERSON: It's a beautiful day down here in Melbourne, it's raining, sleeting.

KING: Yes and seriously just on that you go to Melbourne, you're in Melbourne. Do you have to face quarantine in any way like children when you return?

EMERSON: Apparently it doesn't apply to adults. It seems again on the advice of the authorities it's more readily spread amongst children.

KING: Yes that's what we have been told. Senator George Brandis, are we over reacting or are politicians damned if they do and damned if they don't? If they don't try to curtail it, they'll be accused of helping to spread it, if they do contain it, people are saying well it's useless it's going to spread anyway.

BRANDIS: Well I think people may well say that but this is one of those occasions, this is an important public health issue it's developed very suddenly and it virtually came out of nowhere and I think when situations like this develop politicians really do need to put themselves in the hands of public health experts and you challenge Craig well you're a member of the Government who have to make these decisions that's certainly true and the Government has to take responsibility for these decisions. Think on the sliding scale of political issues versus public policy issues to the extent which there's a difference between the two. I think in issues like this of public health and a disease that the characteristics of which were not known when it

first began to spread, I think politicians are wise to adopt a precautionary principle and follow the advice of public health professions.

KING: All right that's the swine flu. Onto the election and the man who played a leading role in getting Kevin Rudd the leadership of the ALP. That's Mark Arbib is warning about going to an early poll. I think its due in January 2012. That would be the latest wouldn't it Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Yes it would, the election, the last election in 2007 was on the 24th of November so that would be the day of the full three year term but you can go a little bit later.

BRANDIS: That's not quite right; the Constitution says that the election has to be called within three months of the first sitting of the House of Representatives after the previous election.

KING: So what would be the day?

BRANDIS: I think it later in January so it can be as late as February/March 2011.

KING: Let's come back to this phrase 'early election' because a lot of people were upset when Anna Bligh promised to go a full term and then decided not to. Can I ask both of you what you would consider a full term for the Rudd Government. George Brandis.

BRANDIS: I would consider a full term of the Rudd Government to be to the end of next year and by the end of next year I mean in October/ November/ December period.

KING: Craig Emerson, briefly what would you consider full term.

EMERSON: Pretty much the same Madonna. I think within three months of that date. I take George's point about return of writs and the sitting of the Parliament.

KING: All right, who decides when you go to an election. Craig Emerson is it the party machine or the Prime Minister?

EMERSON: The Prime Minister obviously takes advice from colleagues, but I've sat beside or in fact opposite Bob Hawke on two occasions with a pen in his hand and a piece of paper in 1987 and 1990 where he signed that piece of paper. There were just two people in the room, Bob Hawke and myself and he was the one who made the decision.

KING: And just take us behind the closed doors. How did he make that decision?

EMERSON: Well he said, 'what do you reckon mate?' Sign it. No really. I mean by that time

BRANDIS: Well that story has a ring of truth.

KING: Yes it does.

EMERSON: It's true.

KING: Did he think that was the best chance to be re-elected on the date chosen? Well did it come down to that?

EMERSON: Well I'm not going to say other than that. Obviously a Prime Minister on behalf of the Government needs to make a judgement about the prospects for the re-election of that Government. There are a lot of considerations going into that and he took a lot of advice from other colleagues and there was no consensus about the calling of those elections and that's why he was still a little bit undecided. But at some point you have to make that decision and he put pen to paper and those elections were called.

KING: Do you think people feel betrayed when a government doesn't serve its full term? George Brandis.

BRANDIS: I think people get very annoyed when a government doesn't serve its full term and a government should, ordinarily serve its full term.

KING: Should we have fixed terms?

BRANDIS: Well I've always been of the view that we should have fixed terms, subject to this qualification that if there be a fundamental collapse or reconstruction in the Government of the day as we are seeing arguably in the United Kingdom at the moment then I think that the Government should go to the people to test its strength, seek a fresh mandate or face dismissal but ordinarily

KING: There are 11 Ministers who have walked from the government.

BRANDIS: Yes, yes, but ordinarily I think people are entitled to expect that a government will see out its full term and can I add that of course elections are very, very expensive. They're the biggest peace time logistical operation that Australia undertakes and they shouldn't happen other than in the three years the Constitution calls for in ordinary circumstances.

KING: Tacticians from both parties telling me about the importance of Queensland. Maybe they are saying that because I'm from Queensland but they've both earmarking particular seats here. George Brandis to you here, debate is being waged in your own party about whether Federal MPs will run as LNP candidates. That's what your party organisation is telling me. Other people are saying no in the federal parliament people sit as a Liberal MP or a National MP and Liberal MPs will be sitting as Liberal MPs. What is the situation?

BRANDIS: Well, these decisions will be made by the Liberal Party federal executive and the National Party federal executive in consultation with the state branch of the party where the two parties are fused of course as you know. So I don't think that's a big issue. You are right, that Queensland is a critical state and the reasons is that it's a critical state...

KING: Don't just pass me off. Will you be George Brandis LNP or George Brandis for the Liberal Party?

BRANDIS: Well as I said, I thought I had answered your question directly. These decisions will be made by those who are running the federal campaign.

KING: So if they come to you and say you will be George Brandis LNP candidate you will accept that?

BRANDIS: Of course, if the appropriate authorities make that decision. Now the appropriate authorities are the federal bodies of the two parties.

KING: Now you belong to the Queensland LNP. Why wouldn't it be the Queensland authorities who would make that decision?

BRANDIS: Well in federal campaigns, and it's the same on the Liberal and the Labor side, federal campaigns are run at a federal level and the state divisions or state branches of the parties give effect to strategic decisions that are centrally arrived at.

KING: Craig Emerson.

EMERSON: I remember a kind of famous conversation between you and George on this and I listened intently to George's response and I was none the wiser at the end, because you said I think 'so will you be running as LNP or Liberal' and George said 'both'.

KING: So double your chances of being re-elected.

EMERSON: Yes, that's right, two entries on the ballot paper: Brandis and Brandis.

BRANDIS: Look I think it's a semantic argument because there is a federal coalition that's called the Liberal National Party Coalition and that federal coalition is represented in Queensland by a unified political structure called the Liberal National Party. Now I don't think people could care less whether it's called the Liberal National Party Coalition which is technically what it is in Canberra or the Liberal National Party which is what it is in Queensland. It's the same thing.

KING: But do you think people ...

EMERSON: I'm still none the wiser.

KING: The Australian Electoral Commission doesn't have the LNP federally as a federal party, so you will be registered with Queensland as it has the LNP Queensland Division. Will you be able to run?

BRANDIS: I honestly don't know the answer to that. I don't think there is a Queensland division of the LNP because the LNP only exists in Queensland.

KING: All right let's move on.

EMERSON: This is headed for the High Court!

KING: Yes, I'm not sure I'm any the wiser because the decision makers are yet to make that decision.

BRANDIS: That's what I said.

KING: Do you know when they will?

BRANDIS: I assume that will happen before too long. Certainly I would expect it to be sorted out within the next few months.

KING: That's Senator George Brandis. Also with us Dr Craig Emerson as we go *Inside Canberra* this morning. Now speaking of the Prime Minister he spoke about his wife more than any policy yesterday. Any public interest do you think in Therese Rein losing 25 kilograms and any legitimate reason for a magazine to publish those photos? Craig Emerson.

EMERSON: In my view not and that is that they didn't seek any permission. I'm not sure how they managed to get the photographs of Therese in a gym. But I think regardless of the position, the standing of any politician there is some entitlement to privacy and Therese should enjoy that entitlement.

KING: You say that but George Brandis politicians are very happy often to use their families come election time. Where do you draw that line?

BRANDIS: Well, I think, I'm with Craig on this one. I think it was an invasion of privacy. I don't think that people should be photographed without their consent. Politicians in a sense impliedly give their consent to being photographed, certainly when they are going about their public business. But Therese Rein she may be the Prime Minister's wife but she's not a politician herself and I think the media should be much more circumspect in taking opportunistic photographs of her.

KING: What is the most inopportune photograph taken of either of you? Has there been one you've just cringed at?

EMERSON: It's funny you ask that. Just a few weeks ago when I was in NSW, Northern NSW and we were opening a business advisory service a photographer came along for the breakfast and every time I lifted a fork to my mouth to put some food in I could hear click, click, click. I thought I know what this is - this is to get the dumb photo of the Minister with the mouth half full of food and I actually said to him, hey just back off you've got about 23 photos of me eating that's probably enough.

KING: What about you George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Look I'm sure there are plenty, but I can't think of one in particular but I'm sure there are plenty.

KING: I'm sure by next week I'll be able to offer up a few suggestions. Kevin Rudd also hit out at Gordon Ramsay. What is Gordon Ramsay's appeal? Does cooking excuse his behaviour? I see where he has just apologised this morning but...

BRANDIS: Well I don't watch his show, I don't know much about him. These cooking shows, of which I'm not a particularly eager viewer I should say, they do sort of work on the personality of the chef and some of them are very funny and this guy has obviously decided that being a bit of a foul mouthed bully is his particular take. Perhaps that reaches a particular segment of the market, I don't know, but it doesn't much appeal to me.

KING: Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: Well I'll give you a contrast, Jamie Oliver. I think he's marvellous and a decent human being. He's funny; he's done a lot of work for charities, disadvantaged kids. Gordon Ramsay just doesn't do it for me at all. I think he is foul mouthed for some people. Obviously the ratings have been good on his programs but I think his attacks on Tracy Grimshaw are completely unedifying, unwarranted and it's amazing that when people after about three days then say 'I apologise and regret what I did'. He had no regrets for a very long time until the public pressure obviously became unbearable.

KING: Isn't that a bit like a government back flipping?

EMERSON: Oh well, governments do that with elegance and grace.

KING: Yes, okay.

EMERSON: That's right, the degree of difficulty 9 / 9.5 but I don't think there's a lot of elegance and grace in the way Gordon Ramsay goes about his work.

BRANDIS: I don't think there has been much grace and elegance on the back flip on the solar panel rebate either Craig.

EMERSON: I've never seen you on the diving board mate.

BRANDIS: I don't think you'd give that a 9 or a 9.5 score as an elegant pirouette.

KING: Because it's an interesting issue that George Brandis raises because the Government's made this snap decision Craig Emerson to end this rebate. It was due to end on June 30. Fair enough there have been 30,000 applications for it in the last month, the \$150 million set aside in the Budget has blown out to \$700 million but what would you say to all those people listening who were planning to do this and get a rebate before the end of the financial year? We've already heard from one this morning.

EMERSON: There is a solar credit system that comes in, will come into force from the very next day, so it's not as if it disappears. So we will be moving from one system to another. They would be eligible under the new system, the solar credit system.

KING: They're eligible today given it ended yesterday?

EMERSON: When the legislation goes through, and I do sincerely think that the Coalition will support the legislation, then it's effective from the very next day, so from today.

KING: So it will be retrospective? It will go through from today?

EMERSON: That's right. It will be provided in the legislation that the beginning of operation would be from today.

KING: All right, we will hold you to that. We will follow that through. So anyone who applies will still get it.

EMERSON: Well they will get the credit. They won't get the old

BRANDIS / KING: Come on Craig

EMERSON: I'm just saying, I'm not correcting myself.

KING: But they won't get the rebate.

EMERSON: I said they would get a credit. The rebate system is being replaced by a credit system. They will get the new credit. Obviously that's what the legislation provides for, the new credit.

KING: Just quickly, Community Cabinet in Logan which means in a couple of weeks' time, the 30th of June, 20 Ministers will fly into town. Is this just a PR exercise Craig Emerson?

EMERSON: It's actually modelled on what used to happen in Queensland and still does happen in Queensland; Community Cabinets all around Australia as the Goss Government I think started this in the early 1990s.

KING: So it's the big thing.

EMERSON: Well people really appreciate the face to face contact with Ministers. The fact that they can talk to them one on one or in a community hall setting and they are proving very, very effective. It certainly gives people access to Ministers and the Prime Minister that they otherwise probably wouldn't get.

KING: So George Brandis, a good idea?

BRANDIS: I think it's a good idea. The Howard Government did this as well. Both sides of politics do it. There will be a Community Shadow Cabinet meeting in South East Queensland in July. I understand we recently had one in Burnie in Northern Tasmania. Both sides do it and I think people appreciate the members of parliament coming out and mixing in their communities and hearing their local issues.

KING: You can almost smell an election can't you.

BRANDIS: I hope not. The Government and the Opposition do this throughout the parliamentary term and you know it would be a disgrace if there was an early election because there is no reason for one.

KING: Now if you want to go along to one, to that Community Cabinet forum meet the Prime Minister, eyeball the Ministers you can register by phoning this number 1800 088 323, 1800 088 323. We are also planning to broadcast between 8.30 and 11.00 am in Logan with our own Community Cabinet on that morning and stay listening to me over the next couple of days on how you can be involved in that. In 10 words or less Kevin Rudd said in the past couple of days 'fair shake of the sauce bottle'. What's the phrase you use Craig Emerson that everyone in your office turns and looks at you?

EMERSON: 'This won't buy the baby a dress'.

KING: And that means it's just not enough money?

EMERSON: No. When we are sitting around reading the newspapers in the morning and it's time to get back to work or get to work, I say 'this won't buy the baby a dress'. I have no idea why I say it. My mum used to say it. It's a completely meaningless saying and everyone looks at me quizzically and then they get up and start doing their work.

KING: I think he's just topped Kevin Rudd's 'fair shake of the sauce bottle'. George Brandis?

BRANDIS: Well whenever I want to terrify my staff I say in a self-mocking way to my chief of staff – 'Travis I've just had a good idea'.

KING: And he doesn't like that at all. I say something similar which gets me in all sorts of trouble. George Brandis thank you.

BRANDIS: Thank you.

KING: And Craig Emerson you stay in quarantine for a couple of days won't you on your return.

EMERSON: I will. If that's all right I'll stay in bed for a week.

KING: All right that's Dr Craig Emerson and George Brandis, back *Inside Canberra* at the same time next week.

ENDS...