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AM Agenda with Ashleigh Gillon

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*Subjects: ETS, double dissolution, Afghanistan troop numbers, War Memorial sponsorship*

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**GILLON:** Welcome back to AM Agenda I'm Ashleigh Gillon. Joining me this morning on our panel of politicians from Sydney the Small Business Minister Craig Emerson good morning.

**EMERSON:** Good morning, how're you going?

**GILLON:** Well and also from Melbourne joining me this morning the Liberal frontbencher Sophie Mirabella. Welcome to the program.

**MIRABELLA:** Good morning Ashleigh.

**GILLON:** Craig I want to start with you. The Newspann poll out today shows that an overwhelming majority of voters don't want the Government to go to an early election over the ETS. Craig is this the message that the Government is going to heed?

**EMERSON:** Well the Government hasn't been talking about an early election. The Government hasn't been talking about a double dissolution election. The Coalition has, some commentators have. What we have been talking about is the need to act on climate change and the same poll shows that at least two thirds of Australians want action on climate change and we are determined to act on climate change. We have legislation before the Parliament and we are calling on the Coalition to support that legislation.

**GILLON:** Sophie Mirabella what do you make of these poll results today? Could the poll results embolden some in the Coalition who want to call the Government's bluff perhaps and vote against the ETS for a second time?

**MIRABELLA:** Look I think the polls are encouraging from the perspective that those politicians who take the Australian population for granted and think that

a few sound grabs will fool Australian voters should think again. It shows that the Australian public aren't going to cop an early election because that fits the political timetable of the Labor Party. It shows that they want the Government to sit down and negotiate and not just ram through and bulldoze through their legislation on the ETS and I think that's very encouraging and that's the message that's coming through certainly when you talk to people out and about in business. They actually want the Government to sit down and negotiate and I think it'll send a shiver down the spine of a lot of the spin doctors in the Labor Party that they can't rely on an early election. They've had overt and subtle threats regarding a double dissolution and I think this will put them squarely in their place because Kevin Rudd is very sensitive to polling. We know that. And I'm sure he'll take heed from these polls and what I hope it will result in is some fair dinkum negotiation. We're in the process through Ian Macfarlane now, of drafting some amendments to the Government's proposal and we'll see how serious the Government is in listening to the Australian people and sitting down with the other major political party to come up with a solution that the vast majority of Australians are happy with because the polls also show that there is growing unease and uncertainty about the direction in which the Government is going.

**GILLON:** We are just going to have to go to a very quick break. We are just having some audio trouble so we'll be back with you in just a minute.

### ***BREAK***

**GILLON:** Welcome back to AM Agenda. Joining me this morning in our panel Craig Emerson and Sophie Mirabella. Craig Emerson we'll just start back with you. I'll let you respond to what Sophie had to say before but are you really trying to tell us Craig Emerson that all these vague threats about an early double dissolution aren't just aimed at pressuring Malcolm Turnbull to pass this ETS legislation?

**EMERSON:** We would like to apply as much pressure as possible to Malcolm Turnbull to pass the legislation there's no doubt about that. I'm just saying that we have not been saying that we will have a double dissolution election. Sophie's then spent some time speaking ...

**GILLON:** It is an option though isn't it Craig?

**EMERSON:** Well I'm not, we have never suggested that we are going to a double dissolution election. I can't be clearer about that. But Sophie's point then was why don't we sit down and negotiate. The Leader of the Coalition in the Senate Nick Minchin has said they want to contract out their amendments to the Emissions Trading Scheme, the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. Contracted out to whom? To the Labor Party. He's actually said that we should do some amendments, draft up some Coalition amendments not under their instructions but just have a guess, hand them over to the Coalition, ask the Coalition what they think, and if they don't like them we have to keep guessing as to what those amendments might be. Have you ever heard anything more ridiculous in your life than an Opposition party saying we'll

contract out the drafting of our amendments to the Government of the day because we don't know what they are? How absurd.

**GILLON:** Sophie the Coalition has been sending mixed messages on that. Nick Minchin made those comments on AM Agenda last week saying the onus is on the Government to come up with amendments now though the Coalition's new ETS spokesman Ian Macfarlane and suggested that amendments may be ready within the next month or so. That Newspoll we referred to earlier shows that 72 per cent of voters do favour the ETS. That's a message that your party should be heeding isn't it?

**MIRABELLA:** Look in the absence of the Government being fair dinkum and negotiating as we did when we were in Government and there was controversial legislation, we negotiated in good faith with minor parties and with the Labor Party. The fact that the Federal Labor Government hasn't done that means we will do all in our power to come up with suggestions to make it much easier for the Government to avoid this political role playing of being the good guys on an ETS and global warming and the Opposition being the bad guys. We know that politics isn't like that. We know that both political parties have got good ideas. They have got good people. And I don't think we should try and dumb down politics and make it simplistic. The fact that the Government didn't want to go ahead and negotiate, is using the ETS for political reasons not to get a solution, otherwise we would have moved further much earlier and I think that now with Mr Macfarlane working on those amendments it will leave much less wriggle room for the Labor Party to try and use the ETS for political reasons. But we've seen Kevin Rudd who was trying to panic everyone when he was saying we needed an Emissions Trading Scheme because that would compromise our negotiating position at Copenhagen. Now we've seen him do a total back flip and say well the fact that we don't have an ETS isn't damaging our ability to discuss these matters on the international stage. So we, excuse me for being a little bit cynical and sharing ...

**EMERSON:** You're making it up as you go along Sophie.

**MIRABELLA:** And sharing the cynicism of many Australians when we look at this issue how important it is to people but also how important it is to get it right because Australians don't want to export jobs. If the Prime Minister wants to make, give concessions to India and China why isn't he prepared to actually get it right for Australia so that we don't export jobs. We don't destroy industries but we use the best brains in the country to get the legislation right and that's I think people want.

**GILLON:** Okay well there's a long way to go on that issue. But there are a couple of other things I want to just get to, we are running out of time. Overnight we saw the details of a report leaked to a US newspaper about Afghanistan. General McChrystal has said that a major troop boost is needed over the next twelve months if the Coalition forces are going to make headway against the Taliban. Craig Emerson of course Kevin Rudd did recently announce an extra 450 Australian troops would be going to

Afghanistan. Do you think even more troops though could be an option the Government's considering off the back of this report?

**EMERSON:** We've said that the troop commitment by Australia is about right. I think we're the biggest non-NATO contributor. Kevin Rudd's commitment involves a 50 per cent increase, 1550 Australian personnel in Afghanistan, so we're doing more than our bit. Other countries are dropping off and obviously we're looking for a commitment, an increased commitment by other countries but we've made a very strong commitment there.

**GILLON:** Sophie Mirabella in total though, 1550 Australian troops is still quite small compared to a lot of other countries. Do you back the Government's position on this or do you think the Government should seriously consider sending even more troops?

**MIRABELLA:** Well we've got to look at the practical and strategic reality that we are a small nation and we do have a significant presence in Afghanistan. We can't make a unilateral decision about the number of troops. We need to wait and see what the US and what NATO decide to do with regard to increasing our presence there. We have a very important presence. We're training local army and police, we're involved in reconstruction and our special forces of course have got a particular role with regards to identifying and capturing insurgents and I think the US, NATO and the Australian Government do need to have a close look at General McChrystal's report because we all want the effort so far to be successful. We don't want the efforts that have gone before to have gone wasted and there need to be some very important strategic decisions made but again Australia can't act unilaterally in these matters because we are a relatively small player in spite of our relatively significant presence there so I think realistically we need to wait and see what the thinking is from some of the major players.

**GILLON:** Just finally Minister there're reports today that funding cuts in this year's budget has seen the Australian War Memorial seek commercial sponsorship for its daily closing ceremony. A lot of veterans would probably be pretty outraged by that, are you?

**EMERSON:** Well it doesn't sit easily with me that's for sure. I heard a little bit about that on the way to the program here today. I think they were saying well it's a last resort. It's something that they are considering. It's not something that the Government is considering to my knowledge, so maybe it's people saying we're really squeezed for money and this is an option that's then been floated in the public domain. It certainly doesn't ring home to me, it just doesn't sound right to me. I have to say that's a personal view but that is my view.

**GILLON:** Sophie Mirabella very quickly.

**MIRABELLA:** Well when we have a Government that is spending like a drunken sailor for political reasons, the biggest pork barrelling exercise in Australian history. What we're now going to see over the next few years is a

compromise on spending in important areas and ridiculous cut backs. A small amount of money cut back from certain programs and projects that will have a huge impact in the community but when you compare to the billions of dollars that the Government has wasted that's a crying shame. And we've seen with the Senate inquiry yesterday major economists, well respected economists saying that the Government has wasted money, they haven't actually invested adequately with the stimulus package. That we could have, one economist even said that every so called stimulus job was costing one and a half million dollars and that's just outrageous.

**EMERSON:** That's just incorrect. That's just outrageously incorrect.

**GILLON:** Look we are actually, we need to go to the news we're already overtime. Craig Emerson, Sophie Mirabella that's a debate we could continue for some time I'm sure. Thanks for joining us this morning. And of course I'll be back tomorrow morning for AM Agenda. Until then I'm Ashleigh Gillon thanks for your company.

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