



Campaign Transcript

ASSISTANT TREASURER

TRANSCRIPT OF ASSISTANT TREASURER, SENATOR NICK SHERRY

Radio National ABC PM

Interviewer: Mark Colvin

Panel member: Senator Helen Coonan

Friday 30 July

E & O E – PROOF ONLY

Subjects: Overview of Election campaign week

MARK COLVIN: Each Friday we're joined by our regular commentators to have a look at the past week on the campaign trail. Joining us from our studios in Burnie in Tasmania is the Assistant Treasurer and Labor Senator, Nick Sherry, and here in Sydney the Liberal Senator and former minister, Senator Helen Coonan.

Let's start with that last story we were just listening to, I'm not sure if you heard it all but you'd be familiar with the basic outline of it which is that 1.4 million people are still not enrolled. Whose fault was that Nick Sherry?

NICK SHERRY: Well firstly, good evening Mark, good evening Helen.

HELEN COONAN: [Indistinct]

NICK SHERRY: And good evening to your listeners. Well, we presented legislation to the Senate, we wanted to get it through and unfortunately it was blocked.

MARK COLVIN: Obstruction by the Coalition?

NICK SHERRY: One of many, many occasions where we've had a very negative opposition...

MARK COLVIN: Helen Coonan, I'm asking...

NICK SHERRY: ...blocking health reform, education reform, national broadband reform, carbon pollution reduction scheme, blocked...

MARK COLVIN: All right, let's focus on this for the moment. Helen Coonan, were you obstructionist about it?

HELEN COONAN: No, certainly not. We, of course, had taken the view that there should be a cut-off as to when people enrol and that's in fact what's happened and we think that that was an appropriate balance when the legislation came forward.

MARK COLVIN: You really think a day is enough?

HELEN COONAN: A day?

MARK COLVIN: A day which was what happened.

HELEN COONAN: Well look, people - this needs to be not just a day but it needs to be an ongoing program where people are alerted to when they can actually enrol, it shouldn't come down to a day or two weeks or even three weeks. It should be something that the government of the day, no doubt, promotes and advertises so that people know they've got an entitlement.

MARK COLVIN: Sure, but it's human nature to leave things, for some of us at any rate, to leave things till the last moment. I mean, you don't want this situation, surely, or do both parties - are both parties really quite happy because most of those off the rolls are young and not necessarily rusted on to either of you?

HELEN COONAN: Well I think it's important that those who are able to enrol to vote do so, there's a time limit and we think that when the legislation came before the Senate that that was appropriate, that what what the....

NICK SHERRY: Helen, when you were in government you made it harder, it's a disgrace, it's a disgrace that there's only that one day, you made it tougher for people to enrol and we tried our best and you blocked [indistinct] change.

MARK COLVIN: But by the same token Nick Sherry, Julia Gillard could easily have given us all a week to enrol simply by holding the election on 28 August instead of the twenty-first.

NICK SHERRY: But the point is we tried to change the law and the Liberal Party made it harder when they were in government, we tried to change it to allow greater time to enrol and it's just part of this ongoing very negative harping, blocking of legislation in the Senate over the last three years.

HELEN COONAN: But you have within your capacity as the government, the knowledge and the right to call the election when you want to. And you know that because you had a situation where you knifed the current prime minister, Julia Gillard obviously decided she'd

better rush off to the election before everybody woke up that while this might be a made over Labor Party, it's just a pig with lipstick and it won't work.

MARK COLVIN: Well, that sort of segues us into the next question, Nick Sherry, it has not been a good week for Labor has it?

NICK SHERRY: Well I think it's been an important week where we've sharpened the differences on the economy. For example, the issue today, national broadband, building a stronger economy.

HELEN COONAN: Well I do love to talk about that Nick.

NICK SHERRY: Well so would I because you want to scrap...

MARK COLVIN: We'll come to the economy.

NICK SHERRY: You want to scrap the national broadband.

MARK COLVIN: We'll come to the economy but I do want to talk first of all about that thing that has been dominating the headlines for the last few days and that is the question about the leak or leaks. Nick Sherry, do you trust your colleagues now?

NICK SHERRY: Yes I do, I do.

MARK COLVIN: Because somebody's leaking.

NICK SHERRY: I do trust my colleagues, and what I note is whilst there's been some focus on this issue over the last week we shouldn't forget the Liberal Party over the last three years has had three leaders. I mean, Helen referred to knifing, they've had a revolving door of leaders in front bench over the last three years.

HELEN COONAN: Oh for goodness sake Nick, I mean we've been in Opposition, you're a first term government and you cut down a prime minister in the first term of a government. The backstabbing and the rivers of bile that have been flowing over the Labor Party are something that I don't think we've seen, certainly not in living memory in politics...

NICK SHERRY: And Helen, we've seen plenty of it in the Liberal Party over the last three years...

HELEN COONAN: ...in this country.

NICK SHERRY: ...if we look at your party's performance. You've set the benchmark for instability. There is no party in the western world that has had more leaders in the last three years than the Australian Liberal Party.

HELEN COONAN: Nick, if you can't govern yourself, if you can govern yourself you can't govern the country. And it's very clear that with the deep divisions that are now very, very

apparent within the Labor Party there are people very, very high up, probably even higher up than you in the Labor Party who really don't think you should be given another term.

NICK SHERRY: You've had deep divisions of your own over the last three years. I mean, you've had so many front benchers come and go they haven't had time to get on top of their portfolios. You've been a revolving door, and it is important to scrutinise, not just the performance of the government over the last three years but also the Opposition.

HELEN COONAN: Can I say though, I think we've done a pretty good job of actually settling down and presenting ourselves as a very strong team and a very likely and good alternative government.

MARK COLVIN: We'll come to that. Nick Sherry, you say you do trust your Cabinet colleagues, does that mean that you think that Kevin Rudd was the leaker?

NICK SHERRY: No, I certainly don't. I've always had enormous respect for Kevin. And Julia Gillard, the Prime Minister's made it very clear she expects Cabinet confidentiality. I might say...

MARK COLVIN: Well she's clearly not getting it, that's the point, I mean...

NICK SHERRY: Well, and I might say...

MARK COLVIN: ...the objective evidence is there...

NICK SHERRY: ...I've been in politics now for 20...

MARK COLVIN: ...somebody's talking to Laurie Oakes, somebody's talking to Peter Hartcher from the Sydney Morning Herald.

NICK SHERRY: I've been in politics now for 20 years, and I've seen plenty of leaks, from the former Liberal National Party government, and from former Labor governments.

But Julia Gillard's made it very, very clear Cabinet confidentiality needs to be respected.

MARK COLVIN: So do you think now that she will be able to weather this and get on with the next week? Or is it going to hang on?

NICK SHERRY: Well, we continue to point out the very sharp differences, as I say, National Broadband, today, is yet another example about where we want to build a stronger economy. We're setting out a strong, positive agenda, and we continue to do that during the week in a whole range of area. As I say, National Broadband is one example, disability policy, a comprehensive suicide strategy.

They're but some examples during this week. And also further positive economic news, in terms of underlying inflation trending down. I mean, we've been strong, competent economic managers. We will continue to argue that case, and a case for the future.

MARK COLVIN: All right.

Helen Coonan, we seem to be seeing a pattern where Tony Abbott appears a day after Julia Gillard and announces a policy similar to hers, but with a bit more money. I mean he seems to be on a gazumping policy at the moment.

HELEN COONAN: Well, I wouldn't call it that, Mark.

MARK COLVIN: Where's the big picture? Where's the vision thing?

HELEN COONAN: I mean, what he's standing up for is real action. And when you really look at what Tony Abbott...

MARK COLVIN: That's the slogan...

HELEN COONAN: ...is actually promising.

MARK COLVIN: ...but where's the big picture?

HELEN COONAN: It's actually looking, for instance, at children with disabilities. I mean, do you seriously need a big picture...

MARK COLVIN: Having had a disability...

HELEN COONAN: ...to understand...

MARK COLVIN: We had a disability platform...

HELEN COONAN: ...that children need to have choices.

MARK COLVIN: ...from Julia Gillard yesterday...

HELEN COONAN: Yes, but it's not - it's...

MARK COLVIN: And another, slightly bigger one, from Tony Abbott today.

HELEN COONAN: But I think you need to look at the superiority of the real action programs that Tony Abbott's been announcing.

And we'll shortly be announcing, for example...

MARK COLVIN: Adelaide water yesterday; Adelaide water today.

HELEN COONAN: ...a broadband program, now, this is really, I think, a very critical issue. A broadband program that will deliver in effect the same outcome, in a much more efficient, and cost-effective way.

MARK COLVIN: What is it? Because all we've heard so far is abolish the NBN.

HELEN COONAN: And you w... it will be announced shortly, but...

NICK SHERRY: Helen, you had almost 12 years to do this.

HELEN COONAN: ...what we've of course had is a situation where Labor cancelled a plan, a broadband plan that we took to the last election that would have, now, been delivering the sorts of benefits that Julia Gillard was talking about today.

It's been a wasted opportunity. For three years, Labor hasn't been able to connect one household on the mainland of Australia. Three years of wasted opportunity. Whereas we had a policy that would roll out, at a fraction of the cost - something like \$2 billion - to deliver in effect the same outcome to every Australian, regardless of where they live, that would have let people have opportunities for education, businesses to have access to fast broadband.

Labor, because they were talking about some grandiose plan, went for the \$43 billion gamble. And it won't even be completed until 2018. And it is not a technology that is future proof, let me tell you.

MARK COLVIN: Well, without getting too bogged down...

HELEN COONAN: The technology of choice, in 2018, nobody knows.

MARK COLVIN: ...in the technical details of fibre to the node and so forth, Nick Sherry, is that right?

NICK SHERRY: No, it's not...

MARK COLVIN: That you blocked their viable plan?

NICK SHERRY: Look, Helen and her colleagues had more than 12 - almost 12 years to get this right.

HELEN COONAN: And we had a plan, which you cancelled.

NICK SHERRY: And they staggered along. You had a plan, but you didn't get an outcome, Helen.

HELEN COONAN: Yes- it would have been up and running...

NICK SHERRY: And you're harping, you're complaining, and negative.

HELEN COONAN: ...by last year, had you not cancelled it.

NICK SHERRY: We, in three years, have accomplished far more than you did in almost 12 years.

HELEN COONAN: You haven't connected one household.

MARK COLVIN: Let him finish.

NICK SHERRY: Well, that's not right, Helen, that's just not right.

HELEN COONAN: Well have you connected?

MARK COLVIN: [Indistinct]

NICK SHERRY: You should come to Tasmania, just up the road here from Burnie, where I am at the moment. You should come to Tasmania...

HELEN COONAN: Name one on the mainland.

NICK SHERRY: ...and you'd learn that there are households that are...

HELEN COONAN: You can't.

NICK SHERRY: ...that are connected. And it was always part of the plan to roll it out in Tassie first, and then spread it across the mainland.

HELEN COONAN: That's because it's tiny.

NICK SHERRY: Today's announcement about covering 93 per cent of homes and schools and businesses. It's fantastic.

HELEN COONAN: Yes, but it hasn't happened. And you've had three years of dithering.

NICK SHERRY: And all you can do, Helen - you've had your go.

HELEN COONAN: You couldn't deliver...

NICK SHERRY: [Laughs]

HELEN COONAN: ...your election promise of four point, doing it for \$4.7 billion. So on the back of an envelope, even Lindsay Tanner said that there's no business case for a \$43 billion spendathon.

NICK SHERRY: Helen, you had your chance for almost 12 years, you staggered along on this policy. Now we're implementing a national broadband for all Australian households and

businesses. We're building a stronger Australian economy, and your only response is to scrap it.

MARK COLVIN: All right, now, let's look at the - Tony Abbott and the scrapping of the - cutting of the company tax.

Now, Helen Coonan, George Megalogenis in The Australian says this is a blatant, staggering, I think, is the word he used, example, of double counting. That you're taking away on one hand, and giving on the other.

HELEN COONAN: Well, look, George is entitled to his opinion, but if you actually look at the...

MARK COLVIN: He's entitled to his calculations as well, surely.

HELEN COONAN: Yeah, well, to his calculations. But I disagree with the conclusion that he draws on this, because what you've got, of course, is you're scrapping the great big new tax on mining. You know, the 10 and a - \$10.5 billion. And what we're doing, of course, is giving a tax cut to companies of one and a half per cent. And that's not being delivered with any increase in taxes.

MARK COLVIN: Scrapping \$2.7 billion on one hand, and taking \$2.7 billion off them, on the other hand, for the paid parental-leave scheme.

HELEN COONAN: Well, look, that's a levy.

MARK COLVIN: But businesses are going to see it the same way, aren't they?

HELEN COONAN: I don't think so.

NICK SHERRY: It's a tax, Helen, really.

HELEN COONAN: I mean it's a fraction difference, quite frankly.

NICK SHERRY: It's not a levy, Helen, it's not a levy...

HELEN COONAN: And what we know is that...

NICK SHERRY: ...it's an increase in company tax.

HELEN COONAN: ...this paid parental-leave scheme will have such great productivity benefits, it's a visionary scheme, it knocks Labor's paid parental scheme out of the water.

MARK COLVIN: Isn't Nick Sherry right that people don't really see the difference between a levy and a tax?

HELEN COONAN: Well, I think they do, because a levy - a tax is a permanent impost, whereas we've said very clearly that once we're in a position to actually pay back this Labor debt that they've run up, blowing the surplus and blowing, you know, all of the great surplus, and accumulations in the Howard government that we left Labor with. We'll look at when you can actually remove that...

MARK COLVIN: Helen Coonan.

HELEN COONAN: ...and pay it out of recurrent [indistinct].

NICK SHERRY: Helen, your position...

MARK COLVIN: Last words. Very quick, Nick Sherry, we've got to finish.

NICK SHERRY: ...you're increasing company tax. You call that a levy, you're increasing it by 1.7 per cent on big companies, and at the same time you're reducing company tax...

HELEN COONAN: And all companies get that benefit...

MARK COLVIN: All right.

NICK SHERRY: And you - when you're reducing a tax you call it a tax...

MARK COLVIN: We have to wind up.

HELEN COONAN: ...as you know. Seven thousand companies.

MARK COLVIN: We have to wind up.

NICK SHERRY: ...when you increase a tax you call it a levy.

MARK COLVIN: Nick Sherry, Helen Coonan, thank you both very much, we will resume this bout same time next week.

HELEN COONAN: Look forward to it Nick.

NICK SHERRY: Evening, Mark, good evening Helen.

MARK COLVIN: [Laughs] Good evening.

NICK SHERRY: And...

MARK COLVIN: Nick Sherry in Burnie, and Helen Coonan here in Sydney,
thank you very much.

COMMUNICATIONS UNIT: Phone: (02) 9384 2220 | Fax: (02) 9264 2213
www.alp.org.au

AUTHORISED N.MARTIN for the ALP, 5/ 9 Sydney Ave. Barton ACT.