

29 June 2016

**TRANSCRIPT OF SENATOR THE HON. ARTHUR SINODINOS AO
INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA KARVELAS, RN DRIVE**

Subjects: marriage plebiscite, Coalition's economic plan, productivity report into workplace relations, unions, polling day.

EO&E.....

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Senator Arthur Sinodinos is the Cabinet Secretary welcome back to RN Drive.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Thanks Patricia great to be with you.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

The Liberal Party will have a free vote regardless of the plebiscite outcome; do you agree the Prime Minister can't dictate the outcome of a free vote?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well a free vote is a free vote, but as he has said we expect that it will pass through the Parliament, and that the Parliament will respect the wishes of the Australian people as expressed through a plebiscite.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Peta Credlin thinks the plebiscite could get blocked in the Senate and the Prime Minister has no Plan B – here she is;

[Audio of Peta Credlin]

"I think it will be a very big schism inside the Liberal Party, going back I think to the territory of 2009 and Malcolm knows it very well because that's where he lost his leadership. But I think it will also cause enormous stresses within the Coalition."

[Audio ends]

What is your Plan B?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well I'm not working on a Plan B, we are working on a plan for winning the election. Implementing our economic plan for jobs and growth and getting on with trying to provide the best possible government we can. And getting a mandate at the election for all the policies we put to the Australian people.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

What do you say to Peta Credlin's warning that this will be a 2009 sort of scenario, Malcolm Turnbull's party could fall apart over this issue.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Malcolm Turnbull in the time he has been Prime Minister has been a very good leader of the party, he is bringing people together, he is a uniter, he is a unifier and I think if we are lucky enough to be re-elected on Saturday I think he will prove that in spades, not only in relation to the Liberal Party but bringing Australians together.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

The people who pushed the hardest for a plebiscite hardest in your party room now want to ignore the votes result or at least abstain; do you think that's acceptable?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

As I have said, the Prime Minister has said, I believe the Parliament will respect the will of the Australian people as expressed in the plebiscite. I believe that implicitly, explicitly, overtly, covertly.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

OK, but some people are saying including the Treasurer that they may even abstain, these are the people who pushed for a plebiscite, do you find that odd?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Look, because it's a free vote, ultimately it's up to individuals as to how they will proceed. But I believe that the Parliament will respect the wishes of the Australian people in this regard.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

But did you expect there would be a free vote when the plebiscite was determined in that marathon party meeting? 'Cause I didn't, I thought that it would certainly not be a free vote after a plebiscite.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well, during that party room discussion, there was discussion of all sorts of options about what would happen in the next Parliament. The main thing to come out of that exhaustive and exhausting discussion in the Party Room was that there would be a plebiscite to give every Australian the opportunity to have and express a view on this. And when I've been out there, talking to people in the community – I was at the Greek Orthodox Church in Parramatta a couple of Sundays ago, they were actually thanking the Liberal Party for having a plebiscite to give them the opportunity to express their view about same-sex marriage.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

What's the benchmark for success, then? Is 51% of the national vote a success?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

It would be a majority of the vote.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Okay, so should MPs factor in their electorate's vote, or just the national result?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well, ultimately, as the Prime Minister has indicated, they will have a free vote; so it's up to them what they factor in. But I believe, ultimately, it will pass. If 51% or more Australians want same-sex marriage, it will pass the Parliament.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So why are we hearing the likes of Scott Morrison and Julie Bishop – who was on the record as a same-sex marriage supporter – saying only that they'd respect the outcome of the plebiscite rather than going further?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well, I take that to mean exactly that: that everybody would respect the outcome and make sure that, ultimately, the people's views are facilitated through the Parliament.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

The Prime Minister has previously used Scott Morrison as an example of a same-sex marriage opponent who would vote for it if the plebiscite is carried. Now he's stopped doing that, doesn't that suggest something's changed? I mean, Scott Morrison has walked that back on 7.30.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

I haven't been through the entrails of what various people have said over time. All I know is: this is our policy; I think it is a fair policy to put to the Australian people, and I think if they support us on the second of July, that is the policy we will implement.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Okay. Would you personally campaign for or against same-sex marriage in the plebiscite?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well I'm on the record as supporting a 'Yes' vote and –

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So would you campaign for it? I'm just interested in the logistics because this is all going to happen by the end of the year, according to the Prime Minister, so we're going to have this vote within months. Would you be out there campaigning?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well, I'll be – when we are returned, if we are returned, I'll be campaigning for all our policies including our policies around an economic action plan for jobs and growth and, of course, our policy to implement a plebiscite in this regard. I'll be out there campaigning on all our policies Patricia. I look forward to that if we win.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Okay, but would you campaign for a 'Yes' vote?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well, all I can do is give my view as an individual. If that influences others for or against, well so be it but I'm not focused on any one particular issue, I'm focused on the government getting back and particularly promoting its comprehensive plan for promoting jobs and growth in the economy.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Okay, you've completely taken me to my next question, Arthur Sinodinos, which is when Malcolm took over – Malcolm Turnbull, I should use his surname there – Malcolm Turnbull, the Prime Minister took over, he promised economic leadership and you're right, he's now promised a national economic plan that he hopes to legislate. In these uncertain economic times, why should we spend the next half of the year, which it looks like now, on this marriage equality plebiscite? Do you not worry that this is going to distract from the economic work that you need to do.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

If we are elected on the 2nd of July, we will immediately get on with all the elements of our plan. Whether it's the Innovation Agenda, whether it's the tax cuts through the Parliament, whether it's the Defence industry plan being implemented properly and all the other measures that go with it, monitoring and working on the implications of Brexit and how we make sure that the economy can be insulated from any shocks in that regard. We've already commissioned work and if we are elected, we'll sort of respond to that work by the Council of Financial Regulators and others. So we'll get on with everything that we need to get on with.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

On RN Drive, my guest is Arthur Sinodinos and our number is 0418 226 576. Another – just one question about the plebiscite someone's just texted in, will it be compulsory to vote in the plebiscite or will it be voluntary?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well those details will be worked out later, there are a number of matters –

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Do you think it should be compulsory?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

My own personal view is that you get the best expression of public opinion by doing that. These are details which will be worked out later.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Okay. On another theme, you repeatedly promised to respond to the productivity report in to workplace relations before the election, it was released in December. Where is it?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well what we've done so far in this campaign is lay out our program in relation to the response to the Heydon Royal Commission which includes the response to the Australian Building and Construction Commission and the Registered Organisations Bill and if we can get those through at a joint sitting we can, in the next parliament I think, turn our mind to broader issues but in doing that we won't do anything which is inconsistent with the commitments we've made in this campaign.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So the report hasn't been junked, you've just delayed when you will respond?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well I think that the fact that we haven't responded as yet should indicate that we will take our respond in a way which is consultative and takes in to account views of all stakeholders including the trade union movement. Because if we win on the 2nd of July, we want to have a government which brings Australians together and that means being able to talk to various stakeholders in the community as we did at the national reform summit after we brought them together after the Prime Minister became Prime Minister in September of last year. We need to bring people with us, the best way to do that is to take the time to consult on major issues and the productivity commission reports on various issues whether it is the NDIS, age care reform, they have provided a vehicle for doing that.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Are you scared of a last minute union campaign against the last minute changes to industrial relations because we were thinking we were going to hear before polling day what you were doing and now you're saying we're not going to hear it before polling day?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Look we've had enough on our plate between the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal being abolished and Bill Shortens promise to bring that back, the Country Fire Authority under heavy duty union fire in Victoria and we've responded with a policy on that so where we can we have prioritised dealing with the immediate bush fires if you like, of the trade union movement. The other thing we're fighting is a strong trade union campaign on the ground against us in marginal seats across the country where they are essentially doing the Labor Party's work for them and underlining again the unfair advantage the Labor movement has over us in terms of funding election campaigns.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Bill Shorten says a Labor Government would ask a Senate committee to review the need for a federal corruption body. You've been involved in the ICAC process in NSW and it's just had a big win with the conviction of Eddie Obeid. Is it time to consider this on a federal level?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well what's happened in the past is that these anti-corruption bodies like ICAC, the Crime and Misconduct Commission I think it's called in Western Australia, and similar bodies in Queensland, they've arisen in circumstances where there's been a gap in the armoury. At the federal level where you have the AFP, the Australian Crime Commission, the various other bodies, ASIC, the data reporting and transaction centres and the like, the real issue there is making sure that corruption is looked at by the right body, rather than trying to add new bodies, so it's not been our policy to add a new body to that mix. In terms of what's

happening in NSW, that's happened in the context of NSW matters, and that reflects some of the gaps that were clearly apparent in NSW when the ICAC was first set up.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

How will you measure success in Saturday's result? And what will Malcolm Turnbull need for the sake of his own authority? Is winning enough seats to pass the ABCC legislation in a joint sitting the test?

ARTHUR SINODIONS

Look, in politics to win is to win. You don't come an honourable second. So the important thing is to win and go from there. And if we win against a virulent union campaign in the marginal seats supplementing the efforts of the Labor Party, I think we'll have done very well because we're running, if you like, a fairly comprehensive economic argument. Labor are essentially just spending more money.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So that means a win is a win, and if you don't have the numbers in a joint sitting it doesn't matter? I mean, you'd prefer it, but it doesn't matter?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well look, I'm not speculating on what the outcome might be. My preference is to win as emphatically as a possible, and have as many seats in the house as possible and get majority control in the Senate. That would be fine. But I'm not going to speculate on what the outcome might be. I'm not going to respond to that.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

But if it's a marginal win, you know, a couple of seats, you think that's acceptable, and that it doesn't undermine Malcolm Turnbull's authority?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

A win is a win. It will underline his authority.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Arthur Sinodinos, thanks so much for your time. I suppose I'll speak to you on the other end. We'll find out what happens on Saturday.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Thanks Patricia.