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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE HON. ARTHUR SINODINOS AO
INTERVIEW WITH PATRICIA KARVELAS
SKY NEWS**

Subjects: US refugee resettlement, US Election, Trump’s policies, 18C, Legislative agenda for final sittings, Mardi Gras, Orange by-election.

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PATRICIA KARVELAS

My first guest tonight is Cabinet Secretary Arthur Sinodinos, Arthur welcome to the program.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Great to be with you again.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

On this deal with the US on refugees, are you confident it will be safe in the Trump era or are you hoping to resettle all of these refugees before he takes over?

ARTHUR SINIDONOS

As the Prime Minister said this morning we are dealing with one administration at a time, but I am confident that this deal will stick. I think it is a good deal for Australia, it will come from within the American administrations existing refugee assistance program, so it’s not as if we are asking them to do extra over and above their existing intake. But from our point of view it is a very good deal, it brings to an end what has been a very sorry saga, having to initiate very strong border controls when we came back into Government in 2013 then dealing with the legacy of those people who were in detention. I think this is a very important deal and it’s got Malcolm Turnbull’s stamp all over it, he was determined upon becoming Prime Minister that this issue had to be dealt with in terms of those people in detention. And we have been able to do that and at the same time we are sending a very strong signal to people smugglers and others that we have the assets at sea and in the air, in the seaways and airways leading in to Australia to intercept any attempts to take advantage of this process.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Why doesn't the deal rely on getting your hardline laws through the lifetime ban on people, on refugees in offshore detention? Why haven't you made that one of the criteria?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well I think the legislation we are talking about is very important, because it sends a very important signal to the people smugglers that people will not profit by coming here and being resettled here, ultimately that will not happen. For us it's essential that that legislation be passed, it's an important part of our armoury in dealing with any fallout from this decision to negotiate this deal with the United States. We think that it is essential that that legislation be passed, we think that Labor would send the signal that Bill Shorten was talking about in that clip you just ran, about being at one with the Government. Well, they should be at one with the Government by helping us pass this legislation and showing to quote Kim Beazley in the old days "there's not a cigarette paper between the Commonwealth, the federal government and the opposition on this matter.'

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Just want to move on to some other issues because Malcolm Turnbull will be with Chris Kenny talking about this deal very shortly on Sky at 8pm. Just on the election of Donald Trump and the pretty significant result there, Donald Trump said some pretty offensive things during that very long campaign about women, about Mexicans, also just even contentious policies that Australia couldn't possibly agree too, and certainly your government wouldn't. Isn't the Australian Government still obligated to speak out against these ideas and this kind of misogyny and sexism?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well our obligation is to work with the new President in Australia's interests. This is all about what is in our interests, not what is in America's interests. Not about whether we like or dislike a particular person. If we got into this position where we said we don't particularly like you we're not going to do business with you even though you are now leader of a, the major western power, the leader of the free world. I think from Australia's point of view that would be deleterious in terms of our national interest. Our national interest now lies in working with the new US Administration to get the outcomes that we need in the region, which include continued US engagement both at the strategic level and at a trade level, and it's very important for us not to be if you like, distracted, by those sorts of issues which are fantastic issues for commentators but you know, the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, other members of the Government, we have to deal with the administration we have before us. I think it

provides big opportunities for Australia to act as a bit of an honest broker in the region between the US and some of the other players. I think we should take full advantage of this with the new administration in Washington.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

But isn't it also our obligation as a friendly ally to call it as we see it? So for instance if Trump does try to embark on a tariff reintroduction, surely we would speak out? Surely we would be pretty vigorous in our criticism of that?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

That goes to the point about our national interest. Our interest is to have an open a trading regime as possible. And yes of course we would engage the new administration on that basis. We would encourage them to pass the TPP, we would encourage them to forge new trade deals, because those deals are overwhelmingly in the interests of everybody and in fact, what is I think best for America in the long run is to keep doing really good trade deals because the main benefits of those ultimately, are in terms of the cost of goods and services in the US, and they support the living standards of lower income people. When tariffs go up, when protection goes up, the main victims are the unemployed and the poor and those people who don't have high incomes. That is the truth of protection, so yes we have to speak truth to power, it's about doing so in the context of our national interest.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Just in terms of the Australian implications, because there has been a lot of people trying to read into this result, what it means for us, and what it could mean for us electorally. South Australian Senator Cory Bernardi has warned of this kind of disconnect between what he calls the elites and the silent whispering majority. Do you share Senator Bernardi's view that Donald trump's victory is a sign of what's on the horizon in Australia; that it's a big warning shot to us here in Australia?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

I think – as you said in your introduction – many politicians from many vantage points will interpret this result in a way that is favourable to perhaps their own preconceptions; and I'm not criticising anybody in particular by saying that. My take on the Trump victory is that he at least maintained the proportion of the vote that Romney had, Mrs. Clinton was unable to achieve the vote that Barack Obama had achieved in 2012 – she just wasn't the same vote-getter as Bill Clinton or Barack Obama. That is the truth. Then when the result comes in it's also very clear that Mr. Trump has appealed to some rust-belt states that in the past have been traditionally Democrat. What that tells you is that, yes, he was addressing at least, or venting, the feelings of people who are feeling left

out of processes of Government, or perhaps the economic advancement that other parts of the country were seeing. So what's the lesson for me here in Australia? The lesson is: growth has to be as inclusive as possible, it's all about jobs, it's about trying to make sure as many people as possible are encouraged into the mainstream through policies that promote economic and social participation – and that's what we're trying to do. People got sick and tired of listening to jobs and growth, well they're going to get even more sick and tired of it in this term because it's all about creating jobs. That is the basis on which you create higher living standards, and you have full participation of people in the social and economic mainstream.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Eric Abetz told me on Friday on my radio program that a Trump victory sends messages here, particularly on 18c and the Racial Discrimination Act, that a majority of Australians want the Racial Discrimination Act reformed, and drew a very distinct link to the Trump victory. Do you see a link between the Racial Discrimination Act and what we've just seen in the US?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

I think, in relation to matters of free speech, you have to remember in the US free speech is very free, it's a very libertarian approach to free speech. In Australia traditionally there have been certain restraints and they're embodied in some of the laws you mentioned there. So what's happened in Australia is there's often been an attempt to strike a balance between completely free speech and issues around how that might impact on the rights and the perceptions of others in the community. Now, we've had a couple of cases lately where clearly processes have broken down in how some of these pieces of legislation are enacted or implemented. Clearly that's something the Government is happy to have a look at. But frankly, we have a lot of free speech in Australia and the reason we've struck a balance in these laws is because we have a lot of communities who are also very sensitive to the way those laws are interpreted, and that they not be interpreted in such a way that gives license to potential hate speech and the rest. We always have to strike a balance, that's why the idea of having a parliamentary committee review, with very expansive terms of reference, the various issues around 18c and 18d and the Racial Discrimination Act and so on. It's very important; evidence based policy is a good way to go; it's an inclusive way to go.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So are there risks too if you go too far on reforming the Racial Discrimination Act, because some of your colleagues are pushing for pretty significant reform. You've been stung once before under the Abbott government, are you learning the lessons from that experience?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well the last time round people like me were left very exposed because we had ethnic communities coming to us saying, 'look, what's going on? Why is the Government doing this?' And, frankly, it was a difficult conversation, because they had a particular perception about how those laws operated and the impact of those laws on them. So having this exercise now, where we're actually trying to, in an evidence based way, look at the pros and cons of change is, I think, the right way to go. It may not suit people who want to be really radical, but one of the lessons out of any election is that if you push too far to the left or too far to the right, you lose the great mainstream, the great silent majority is the mainstream and are often looking for balance in these things.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So you're saying don't go too far to the right, or too far to the left, don't look at the Trump victory as meaning there is some kind of endorsement for moving to the right; because there are contested views about what Trump represents. Some people say he's quite left-wing on many issues.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well if you look at some of the proposals he put up, yes, some of them are quite left, or left-populist if you like, there's quite a mixture. But look, he's now the President. There's a lot we can work with him, in fact he's endorsed a number of our policies, for example he wants to cut company tax, that's something we're wanting to do. Now we're happy for them to embrace that. We're keen to do it here because it will improve our competitiveness. All I'm saying is the bottom line of any election victory is that numbers count, you go after the most number of people you can and that means dealing with the grievances people have got and any politician worth their salt should be trying to do that in every election.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Just finally, let's talk about what you will pass through the Senate in the last two sitting weeks. I mean, there are two sitting weeks left in the year, what are your priorities? Is the ABCC going to be listed again or is that over for this year?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

We're very keen to do if possible the ABCC and the Registered Organisations Bill this year. We've got bills on backpacker tax, on superannuation, a number of other bills to do with the Budget we'd like to get through but our priority is to get as much as we can this year and show the parliament is working because the people have sent us to Canberra to make the parliament work. That's another issue with the public, they don't want us to be distracted too much and talking about issues that look like they're Canberra or inside the belt-way issues, they want us to get on with the bread and butter

and that's what we want to do. There is legislation around social services to promote youth employment, all that sort of thing that we have to get through as soon as possible – bread and butter stuff, that's what we're about. If you do that, the public will reward you and they won't be pushed to extremes.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

So you do think that genuinely the ABCC legislation might be dealt with this year?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Yes, I'm optimistic, there is a lot of work being done by Michaelia Cash and the Prime Minister but look, let's wait and see but I'm very keen to end the year on that note.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

And just one final question, I don't know if you've seen the reports but the Prime Minister might be about to get uninvited to the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras where he's been I think the first Coalition Prime Minister that's attended. What do you make of that un-invitation?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Well I think that's wrong. I don't think, with respect to the Mardi Gras Committee that they should have done that because in this business – you know, Woody Allen used to say '90% of life is turning up'. Okay, they're disappointed at the way issues have gone around the same-sex marriage issue in recent times. Well work with us because you know, we made a promise that we wanted to keep and that was to have a plebiscite, we could have had a plebiscite by February of next year and we could have had this issue done and dusted. So I think it's better to always engage with those people that you know, have a different point of view and have the debate and I think it sends the wrong signal to uninvite in that way.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Just one – I always do this but I can't help myself I have so many questions on my mind. What do you think about – what are the implications of that swing against the Nationals in Orange in that by-election in New South Wales? Again, we're talking about elections and lessons, what's the big lesson there?

ARTHUR SINODINOS

I think people were disappointed by some of the actions of the state government including over greyhounds, they wanted to vent, they found a safe way to vent because the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers party is essentially pretty closely related really to the Nationals in many ways in terms of ultimate aims and objectives. The Nationals are

better in my view, I hasten to add. My point is, it was a way for them to vent, I don't think it gives you an indication as to some massive rebellion in the bush. I remind you at the federal level that Barnaby Joyce was very quick to call out the issue of greyhounds and other matters in the bush and we're lucky I think to have a leader like Barnaby Joyce for the Nationals at the federal level because I think he's someone who stays very close to his base, very close to the bush and I think he's doing a great job within the Government of mediating those concerns within government circles.

PATRICIA KARVELAS

Arthur Sinodinos, thank you so much for coming in.

ARTHUR SINODINOS

Thank you.

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