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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
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***SUBJECT/S:** Stephen Conroy*

**DAVID SPEERS:** With me now a good mate of Stephen Conroy's, with Labor front bencher Richard Marles. Richard Marles thanks for joining us. Did you know about this?

**RICHARD MARLES:** I didn't, I've spoken with Stephen this morning and the reasons contained in his speech are the reasons that he's calling this. There's a bit in here which you didn't quote which was that during the week he scored a hat trick for the Parliamentary soccer team. So he wanted to go out on top.

In all seriousness, when I spoke with Steve this morning he said he's missed half of Bella's childhood and he doesn't want to miss the other half. Who can blame him for that?

**SPEERS:** You've got young kids, older kids; the pressure of being here in Canberra for the number of weeks a year that you are that does take its toll.

**MARLES:** Absolutely it takes its toll. I love what I do; I know Steve has absolutely loved what he's done. But the hardest thing about this job is time away from family. And there's always this duality. You know coming up here you're in the nations' capital, you're in the Parliament; I pinch myself every time I walk into this building day knowing I have an office inside of it and I know I'm going to have an exciting week. But when the car comes to take you away from your family you feel sad. You do every single time and I know Steve does.

I think it's a good observation on your part that we have had a bit of time at home since the election. I think Steve wants to be with Paula and with Bella and that's the reason for this decision and I think it's nothing more and nothing less.

**SPEERS:** No great job offer? We know he's pretty well connected with people like Kerry Stokes and others in the corporate world.

**MARLES:** You're also right that Steve's got time to have a career and that'll play out in due course. But that's not the issue, because in a sense that could have happened at any point in time. This is about a decision that is made for his family. From a personal point of view, I don't really have a closer friend than Steve Conroy in this place. He's been a big mentor for me and I'm going to miss him greatly. He's been a giant in our movement.

**SPEERS:** I guess in the scheme of things it's not such a big deal how he resigned; but it is pretty bizarre isn't it? How do you explain that? The statement; no comment last night.

**MARLES:** Steve Conroy has always done things in his own way. I mean, you know that and everyone else in this building knows that. We can spend a lot of time trying to explain it, but we don't necessarily need to.

**SPEERS:** Another close friend of Stephen Conroy's said to me that he can be quite emotional and he wouldn't have wanted to tear up; speaking on the floor of the Senate Chamber when talking about his family and all of the staff that he thanked and so on. Do you reckon that could be it?

**MARLES:** He's emotional today, as you would expect...

**SPEERS:** He was when you spoke to him?

**MARLES:** Yeah, and that's perfectly fair enough.

**SPEERS:** Not telling Tanya Plibersek though, she's acting leader! What's going on there?

**MARLES:** Look, again David we can go through the minutiae of how this has played out. The one thing we always knew, is that when Stephen Conroy called it quits, he was going to do it in his own way and on his own terms. That's obviously what he's done.

But I think the important thing is to reflect on the contribution that he's made and it's a giant contribution. I mean the thing about Stephen, which people may not necessarily know, is that in politics when the pressure is really on, when it's most acute; and you know I think acute pressure in politics is kind of unique, you won't find it anywhere else in human discourse. There's often a tendency for people to freeze and it is the rarest of abilities to be able to keep making decisions at that moment. And Steve Conroy had that ability.

**SPEERS:** Labor had a lot of pressures during the Rudd-Gillard split; you say that you've got no closer friend than Stephen Conroy. But you two went different ways on the Gillard-Rudd issue. How did that affect your friendship, your relationship?

**MARLES:** Well it didn't at all. It says something about Stephen; indeed on the night of the vote when Kevin came back, I had a call from Steve within about 20 minutes. As he was talking through with me about; OK, now this has happened; this is where we're going to go to next; and these are the sorts of issues everyone needs to be

considering. Steve was the consummate professional. And as I say his capacity to make decisions in the hardest of moments; and to make the hard decisions, is I think irreplaceable.

And there's a lot of people in this building who are doing great things and have given great service to this country, not actually just in this building, but in particularly the Victorian Parliament, who are there because of Steve Conroy.

**SPEERS:** He's been a strong factional leader; no one gets pre-selected in Victoria in the right of the Labor Party without Stephen Conroy's involvement. You've got big shoes to fill there Richard Marles?

**MARLES:** I'm not sure where you're going with that question.

**SPEERS:** Well, who takes that mantel then of leading the Victorian right?

**MARLES:** Listen, all of that plays through. One thing I absolutely agree with, they are enormous shoes. But I want to say something else David. We think about Stephen in that sense; the contribution he's made, if you like, in terms of the political machinery which is a really important part of how politics works. But Steve's also a policy person. You look at his speech last night. His proudest achievement is the NBN. I've got no doubt that five, ten years from now when he reflects back on his career, it won't be that all the political stuff that he remembers most fondly; it will be the policy achievement of the NBN. The father of Australia's NBN is Steve Conroy. It is a gigantic achievement. It'll be something that he will be remembered for.

**SPEERS:** The Government has a different view on the legacy that he's left.

**MARLES:** The Government as you know, have no idea what they're talking about.

**SPEERS:** Alright, I don't want to get into the NBN debate. Who's your tip on who is going to replace him in the Senate?

**MARLES:** There's a lot to play out in terms of that. I'm mean, you're right, there are big shoes to fill in lots of areas; in terms of the Senate, and obviously his place on the front bench. That'll play out in the days, the weeks to come and we've got plenty of time to do that. I think today is about marking the moment of the contribution of Steve Conroy in this building over the last 20 or so years, but in Victorian and Australian politics for a lot longer.

**SPEERS:** Final one, he was only just elected a couple of months ago for a six year term and then goes. Some people might see that as bit weird.

**MARLES:** I think, there's plenty of precedent for that. You know, we could list probably a dozen people who've done that.

**SPEERS:** Why does it happen? You run expecting to be in government, and then when you're not, you think 'ok, I'm out'?

**MARLES:** Well, the thing about elections is that your future and your fortunes as a politician turn on a dime, turn on that day. You kind of know that your future is going to turn on a dime. In that sense everyone in life has that experience. The difference is that in politics is that you get told the day on which it is going to happen. There's a million scenarios that could've played out after the election, depending on the result. Given the result Steve's made this call. But it's in the Senate; it doesn't require a by-election. It doesn't require any cost. It's a fair enough call in that respect.

**SPEERS:** Richard Marles we'll see you back, in an hour, an hour and bit, for Pyne and Marles, look forward to that. Thanks very much for joining us then.