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TELEVISION INTERVIEW
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SUBJECTS: *75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea; US alliance; Malcolm Turnbull's education cuts*

KIERAN GILBERT: Welcome back to the program. With me now the Shadow Defence Minister, Richard Marles. It's a significant moment this, the 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea and just a few hours ago, Richard, five veterans of the Pacific war, all in their 90s now, arrived in New York for that commemoration.

RICHARD MARLES: Well, I listened to your interview with John Berry and I can understand well that a tear would have been brought to his eye at the idea of those veterans landing in New York and participating in this commemoration. It's a really good thing that there is such a spotlight being placed on this.

I don't think there has been a battle in Australia's history which has had so much strategic significance to the Australian nation, and in that sense it's right that we commemorate it in the way that we are now and that there is a spotlight put on it. You can say it in the context of Australia on its own, but you've also rightly highlighted the significance that this battle had in terms of our relationship with the United States and so it is a fantastic thing that this is being commemorated in New York and that the effort has been put in to allow those veterans to participate.

GILBERT: Yeah, very strong setting for the first face-to-face meeting between Trump and Turnbull - John Berry in that interview also pushing back at some of the calls for Australia to reassess our approach to the alliance in the wake of the Trump victory. What do you think the comments made by Paul Keating that we should cut the tag along approach to the United States within the alliance? Not so, says John Berry.

MARLES: I actually think what the election of Donald Trump has done is cause all of us to think long and hard about the alliance. I think you and I have been talking about the alliance more in the last few months than we perhaps ever have before and that's indicative of the discussion that's more broadly happening across the Australian polity. Actually, I think that's been a positive thing, because when you assess the value of the alliance with the US, irrespective of who is the President and who is the Prime Minister, it becomes clear how important this relationship is to Australia in terms of our defence, in terms of our economy, in terms of scientific cooperation, and engagement in astronomy and medical research - the list

goes on, and so I actually think it is really important notwithstanding who is President and who is Prime Minister that the alliance is invested in by Australia because it remains really the centrepiece of Australian foreign policy and it obviously remains the centrepiece of Australia's defence strategy.

GILBERT: And one of the things that John Berry referred to was that within that relationship that it's necessary Australia continues to have frank discussions with our ally. What do you hope that we secure as a nation from this first face-to-face discussion with Donald Trump? Is a reassurance that the US is still committed to the region - is that enough, that he is committed to the ANZUS alliance?

MARLES: Well, I think they are good starting points. The alliance, as we've spoken about over the last few months, is deeper than the individuals, as I've just said. Irrespective of who is leading our respective nations I believe the alliance will continue and needs to be invested in.

That said, of course the leaders of our two nations, the Prime Minister and the President, no two people are more custodians of the relationship for the period that they're in office than those two, and coming together is a really important meeting. It is going to set the tone for a lot of the relationship going forward in the next few years and so I think, you know, to be honest establishing a good rapport is probably as critical as anything.

The American presence in East Asia is absolutely critical to Australia and advocating that continued presence is very important. Advocating the ongoing significance of alliance relationships, Australia in particular, but the alliance relationships and that includes obviously in our region countries like South Korea and Japan.

I also think a lot turns for Australia on the way in which the US relates to China. Now, the signs there are much more positive now than they were early on in the aftermath of the Trump election. I think it's it is a much more constructive way to go about that relationship to have America and China cooperating on North Korea, for example, than on the US putting up tariff barriers against Chinese product going into the United States. So there are positive signs in relation to that as well, and I think that we ought to be encouraging that relationship between the US and China. Basically our part of the world, and indeed the world more generally, is a safer and more stable place, has more potential for prosperity, when those two countries are getting on well.

GILBERT: I want to ask you a final question on domestic politics, the Government announcing Gonski 2.0. Given, fundamentally, it is the same aim as what Julia Gillard announced a number of years ago now, surely Labor will have to back this? If you want to increase the funding down the track, fine, but in terms of the focus if schools are over-funded to the degree that Simon Birmingham has was pointed out surely there needs to be some arrangement here?

MARLES: Well, we've made it clear from the outset that if there are over-funding of certain schools we are happy to talk to the Government about that question, but let's be clear as what's gone on with the announcement yesterday. They are using the window dressing of that particular point to go out there and make an argument that cutting \$22 billion from school funding over the next decade is OK. Now, it's not.

Labor had a proposition which would have seen \$22 billion more spent on education, school education, over the next decade compared to the Government. In terms of what we face in our region, what we face in the world, the need to be investing in education, the need to be skilling our population - how does it make any sense at all that you would stand for cuts of

that order of magnitude to education? OK it's not \$30 billion, but \$22 billion cuts to education over the next decade - that is not a good thing.

GILBERT: Well \$360 billion versus \$240 billion, still a lot of money over 10 years, but unfortunately we're out of time, Richard Marles. We'll talk to you soon. More on *A.M. Agenda* after the break.