

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
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E&OE TRANSCRIPT

TV INTERVIEW

SKY NEWS, AM AGENDA

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SUBJECTS: John Setka; Chinese warships; National security policy; Foreign donations; Veterans Affairs; U.S Open.

KIEREN GILBERT: Welcome back to the program. With us now the new deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles. Thanks so much for your time, John Setka is going to be it looks like expelled but from the Labor Party it could remain that the secretary of that union which you're affiliated to is that an acceptable position to be in?

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Well simply that's a matter for the CFMEU. But from the point of view of the Labor Party and that's what we control here. Anthony Albanese has made it very clear that the comments that John Setka made in relation to Rosie Batty were completely unacceptable. I mean domestic violence is a scourge within our community and it has been very much at the core of what Labor has been about, to do everything we can to deal with the question of domestic violence and to make those comments were completely contrary to what the values of the Labor Party are, so Anthony Albanese has taken action.

LAURA JAYES: Why would these comments be the straw that broke the camel's back? I mean 60 charges, a couple of dozen convictions didn't do it.

MARLES: Well look at the end of the day, as Anthony pointed out yesterday he's been the Leader of the Labor Party for about two weeks. So you can hardly criticise him for being tardy in his action and he has been completely decisive in taking a stand here and there is no doubt that these comments were completely unacceptable in terms of what is faced by women in our society and also in terms of what the Labor Party is about.

GILBERT: He said he will go if his branch members want him to go should they stand up and say enough's enough.

MARLES: Well that is a matter for the CFMEU. Right now we're talking about how the Labor Party deals with these comments and they are the steps that have been taken.

JAYES: But if he doesn't leave, Richard Marles, doesn't this just expose the weakness that the party arm has, that you just don't have the power over the union movement, I mean in the end these might just be words from Anthony Albanese and little else.

MARLES: Oh no, it's much more than words. I mean if you're not a member of the Labor Party you can't participate in its forums and ultimately the Labor party has control over its own membership and Anthony Albanese as the Leader of the Labor Party has taken a stand and he's done so in a very decisive way.

GILBERT: Is this an attempt as well by him to differentiate himself from his predecessor Mr Shorten who was seen by many to have very close links to the union movement of course a former union secretary himself.

MARLES: Look, I wouldn't read too much into that if at the end of the day Anthony Albanese has taken a stand in relation to the comments that were completely at odds with what the ALP is about and he's acted very –

GILBERT: He, unlike Mr Shorten doesn't have that track record of heavy union

involvement. He's of course a longtime Labor figure, but no one could say that he's been tied to the union movement as Mr Shorten was accused of.

MARLES: I mean I'm not going to go into the way in which Bill Shorten was characterized. I don't necessarily think that's fair at all. At the end of the day what we've got here is a very simple matter; John Setka made comments which were completely at odds with what the Labor Party is about. Anthony Albanese is the Leader of the Labor Party and he's acted and it is as simple as that

JAYES: To your portfolio Richard Marles, we saw Chinese warships enter Sydney Harbour somewhat unannounced. Was it a surprise to you and would you like to see the protocol changed here?

MARLES: Well it was a surprise to the whole nation because we weren't told and this isn't that difficult an issue. These sort of visits are completely normal I don't actually have a problem with the Chinese warships visiting Sydney. It's just that it should have been made public and it should have been made public as soon as it was able to be made public by this government. But what this highlights is the complete lack of confidence that Scott Morrison and his government has in dealing with what is just the most about the most important bilateral relationship that Australia has and that's with China and it's a very complex and difficult relationship but it's one that requires a lot of thought and this is an area where the Government lacks confidence and I think this is just an example.

GILBERT: What was the problem though if you could characterise it for us last week in terms of where it fell over in terms of how they manage that.

MARLES: They didn't tell anyone, I mean that was the problem. The problem was back in April.

GILBERT: I think the timing also the fact that it was the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

MARLES: I reckon, I think it's as simple as this Kieran, the Prime Minister has said that this visit was organised back in April, that's when this should have been made public. That's when the Australian people should have known that there would be two Chinese warships coming in for replenishment in Sydney harbour -

GILBERT: Because the Premier didn't know, did she?

MARLES: As reported she didn't but the whole country should have known back in April. That's the simple fact here, this isn't that hard. Visiting warships come to Australia quite often and that's not a bad thing. It builds relationships and that's a good thing, but this is something which should happen in the public view and the idea that this was a surprise to the country because the Morrison government kept it secret says everything about how awkward they are in handling the relationship with China.

JAYES: So what needs to change here. Is it just a simple fact of the government needs to be more upfront. They needed to announce that this visit was happening or is there a protocol issue between Defence and the government.

MARLES: Look this is really simple in terms of visiting warships when they come tell people about it. That's not that hard, we can use words like protocols and procedures just tell people what's going on. It's really very simple, but I think what it actually does point to is a deeper issue within this Government and that is a complete lack of confidence about how it is handling our bilateral relationship with China. Now that is a big issue and that is an issue where this Government has been getting it wrong for a very long time and in my mind actually what this is just a symptom of that bigger problem.

GILBERT: The ABC meantime is reporting in relation to a donation made to Chris Bowen and Chris Minns courtesy of a Chinese Australian businessman with links to the Communist Party. What do you say to this report this morning is

there anything sinister going on here is there anything in terms of undue influence here over our political figures?

MARLES: Look I've seen those reports, I don't know the circumstances of this particular case in detail on the face of it doesn't look as though there's been any wrongdoing. You know I understand it's being looked at and ultimately at the end of the day it's a matter for the New South Wales branch of the Labor Party. I think again that the bigger issue here is this in the aftermath of the 2016 election ABC and Fairfax did a report into foreign donations during that campaign and I along with many people were surprised by what came out of that. We have been very clear since then that we support banning foreign donations in Australian election campaigns. That's actually the policy answer to this question and we've been strong advocates for that.

JAYES: Veterans suicide; it is becoming epidemic, an epidemic in epidemic proportions are we at the stage where we need a Royal Commission? And were you surprised to learn that the Government doesn't actually have figures or know how many veterans have committed suicide?

MARLES: Look I think there are difficulties in keeping stats you know in relation to this but certainly we would want to have the very best information that we can have. There's no doubt this is a terrible issue within our society and in my role, I've met many veterans as you would imagine and that transition from active duty into a civilian life is something that we need to be constantly working on and there's no doubt that for many particularly those who've seen operational service. There are profound issues that people experience in later life and we're seeing suicide as a part of that and we need to be doing everything we can as a community to deal with this issue. The Productivity Commission right now is looking at the question of how Veterans Affairs- the Department of Veterans Affairs and the system operates with veterans. That's an important piece of work and we want to see that but we do need to be doing everything.

GILBERT: It's interesting though because I know from my own experience in Canberra I've made great friendships with many ex-service personnel who've

gone on to really successful business careers and so on. So it seems there is this, I don't know, a split within the service community either people do really well but many of them struggle.

MARLES: Well the Defence Force is a representation of our society as it should be. So there are people who-

GILBERT: It seems the military equips a lot of people with those skills for great success post service but but it also has you know, can create many demons as well.

MARLES: Well I think actually the military does a really good job in terms of equipping people with skills throughout their period of being in active service. We need to be working hard and I think the military is to look at ways in which we can equip people for life outside the Defence Force. But I mean the ultimate answer that question is that there are all types of people who give service in our military and people react differently to that service and some people can go through the same experience and be okay at the other end while others are not and that's just the nature of the broad range of people who go through this. But what we need to be doing is making sure that we are equipping everybody with the best possible means to go into civilian life and that the services are then available to them post service to deal with their issues.

JAYES: As the Deputy Leader you could have really had any portfolio but it's my understanding that you wanted to stay on as Defence. Some have said that you should have taken on a more domestic portfolio so you take the fight to the Government but that tells me that you know and I know from experience with you and during various debates Richard, that you know this is an area that you're passionate about. So what's the number one thing you want to achieve in this portfolio over the next three years?

MARLES: Well good question that there's and you're right, I feel very passionate about Defence. And certainly in the last three years in this role have come to love it and part of why I love this area so much is the people that you

meet in and the people who are involved in it, those men and women who engage in service to our community through the Australian Defence Force. I would say one thing, if you look at defence industry and this is perhaps the answer to your question which affords a real opportunity a strategic opportunity for our nation that is very much a domestic issue. This is about building capability within our country right now which can help project Australia on the global stage and so I think making sure that there is a proper strategic rationale for our defence industry is an argument that I'd want to continue to make.

GILBERT: Mr Marles thanks so much and you know from a little bit of indulgence quickly I know your golf tragic, who is your tip to the U.S. Open.

MARLES: Well it's got to be Tiger. Who's yours?

GILBERT: Adam Scott.

MARLES: Adam Scott.

GILBERT: For the golf tragics out there a little one to finish with. Thank you, Richard Marles. A quick break, back in just a moment.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.