

**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP  
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SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE  
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**E&OE TRANSCRIPT  
TELEVISION INTERVIEW  
ABC BREAKFAST  
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***SUBJECT/S: John Setka; Cashless welfare card; Mandatory drug testing for social security recipients; Newstart***

**MICHAEL ROWLAND:** The Government wants to talk about tightening welfare payments, The Opposition meanwhile, wants to focus squarely on the sluggish economy. The Deputy Labor Leader, Richard Marles joins us now from Canberra. Richard Marles, good morning to you.

**RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY:** Good morning to you.

**ROWLAND:** Let's start with the move from the Government, the legislation to de-register so called, 'rogue unions'. Jacqui Lambie, of course, who holds the swing vote in the Senate says that she will move to block that legislation but only if John Setka, the controversial Victorian construction union boss, quits. Has she got a point?

**MARLES:** The issue in respect of John Setka has been made perfectly clear by Anthony Albanese. But at the end of the day, this is legislation which is trying to make the work of trade unions more difficult. And ultimately, when you are thinking about a sluggish economy where wage growth is at the lowest on record, why you would be focused on this; beggars belief. Ultimately, this is a Government which is spending all its time in the lead-up to every parliamentary sitting week thinking about how it can wedge Labor, if it could spend some of the time to think about how to get the economy going, I'm sure that every Australian would be the beneficiary of that.

**ROWLAND:** We're talking about Jacqui Lambie here, though, Richard Marles. And of course, the Labor Party is on the record, as you just restated, in opposing this legislation. Are you offering an out here in a bid to step up efforts, to get rid of this guy, who as you say, has been roundly condemned by all senior figures in the Labor Party. Why won't that move be stepped up?

**MARLES:** I don't think that you could ask anything more of Anthony Albanese in terms of the position he has taken in relation to John Setka. Obviously, Jacqui Lambie's decisions, in terms of how she conducts herself in the Senate is a matter for her. We've made our position completely clear in relation to John Setka. But ultimately, you look at this and the raft of other legislation which is being put forward by the Government and it is just one big distraction from the fact that they are managing the economy in a way which is leading it incredibly sluggish.

**ROWLAND:** Okay. One of the big items on the agenda in the next few weeks, at least, is the plan to roll out this cashless welfare card on a national basis. Where does the Labor Party stand on that?

**MARLES:** Well, again, we've been opposed to this. It's for the Government to actually explain the basis on which it sees benefit of this being rolled out. The Auditor General has been scathing about the effectiveness of this where it has been tried. The evidence that the Government cites is really skinny. So, it's for the Government to actually explain to the Australian people why it thinks there is an evidence base to roll this out further. But again, this is not something which was really talked about during the election campaign. It's not something which over the last five weeks, as I've been in my electorate and been hearing people talk about. There's only one issue that people want to know; when are we going to see the economy get going? When are we going to see wages start growing? When are we going to see productivity grow? When are we going to see the economy growing? You will not hear the Government talk about that this this week because it is the elephant in the room. And instead, all they're doing is thinking about how to wedge Labor.

**ROWLAND:** Okay. Another issue is this plan to- revived plan- to drug test welfare recipients. Firstly, where do you stand on that? And also where do you stand on Jacqui Lambie's suggestion that that is all very well and good, but MPs and Senators should be drug tested too?

**MARLES:** Well, we can all be drug tested, that's fine. I don't think that any of us are particularly concerned about that. I think that there is an indignity in what is being proposed here. We're obviously for anything which stops people taking drugs and anything that gets people into work but we've got to see what the evidence for this particular proposition is, and it's a real problem if we're seeing the most vulnerable in our society being persecuted. But I look at my own community where in the last few years we've seen Alcoa and Ford stop their manufacturing; if

you're a worker who has worked there throughout your life and in your mid-50s, and now on Newstart- that's a large component of people on Newstart- you've worked your entire life and you get to that moment and now you're being asked to pee in a cup in order to get your Newstart payment- what message is that sending? And I think that there is no evidence at all which suggests that this makes any difference and again, this is just the Government putting on its thinking cap in the lead-up to a parliamentary sitting week thinking about how they can wedge Labor. Whereas, what they should be thinking about is how to get the economy going.

**ROWLAND:** And one thing most experts agree would help stimulate the economy because low income earners tend to spend, and certainly those on welfare spend most of what they get in, is increasing the Newstart allowance. I want to clarify - where does Labor stand on that?

**MARLES:** We've made it really clear that we feel that Newstart is too low, and that it's a point that we've been making for a long time now. And I think that again, the Government needs to explain to people on Newstart how they see that the amount that they are receiving is enough to live on, and exactly what their plans are to do something about that. But we've made it very clear that we think that Newstart is too low and the Government needs to act.

**ROWLAND:** Okay, and therefore, you'd support an increase in Newstart?

**MARLES:** As I say, we've made it really clear that we see that Newstart is too low. Something needs to be done in respect of Newstart and we're waiting for the Government to do it.

**ROWLAND:** Okay, Richard Marles Deputy Labor Leader, thank you for joining us.

**MARLES:** Thank you.

**ENDS**

**Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.**