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RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LABOR LEADER: Thank you for attending this morning. And, I'd like to extend my thanks to Andrew Crisp, the Victorian Emergency Services Commissioner for the briefing he has just provided to me, along with the senior leadership here at the Victorian State Control Centre. They are doing a fantastic job in helping to help keep Victorians safe during the coronavirus crisis. And coordinating the work that is being done here at the State Control Centre continues to place Victoria in a position of national leadership around the question of dealing with the coronavirus. Labor welcomes the decision that has been made to put in place a 14 day isolation period for all people returning to Australia. We think that this is a very sensible move forward, in terms of being able to protect our community and making sure that as much as possible we protect the community from further spread of coronavirus. It is really important that we get clear and consistent messaging from the Commonwealth Government as the coronavirus unfolds. It makes no sense that we can go to football on Saturday night but it's not okay to go to the football on Monday night. It makes no sense that it's okay to shake people's hands on Sunday morning but it's not okay to shake people's hands on Sunday afternoon. We understand that this is a rapidly evolving situation. But what that means is that there is a greater imperative on the part of the Commonwealth Government to make sure that it is constantly and clearly and consistently communicating with the Australian public around the question of the coronavirus. We don't need scrambling for one-liners, we need clear leadership and decision making from our Prime Minister and from the Commonwealth Government. The question of schools remaining open is clearly one which is evolving- a number of private schools have already made the decision to close and this is a question that is being considered by governments around the country. Now, in those circumstances it is really important that we have a plan in place in relation to those people who work in essential occupations,

principally in health but also in emergency services, in policing. It's really important that plans are being worked out right now around how those families will deal with potential school closures in the future. Now, Chris Bowen our Shadow Minister for Health raised this question yesterday. This is an urgent issue that the Commonwealth Government needs to be working on right now. This is not good enough to be scrambling on this question down the road. We are not in a situation now where we can kick a single can down the road; we cannot have complacency from our Federal Government on this question. And if we do find ourselves in a situation where schools are closing, it also heightens the need to be working out arrangements for a significant proportion of our workforce who are casual employees and we've been calling on the Government in relation to that as well. Now it stands to reason, it is a matter of logic that, in terms of social distancing measures; the sooner those measures are put in place the bigger the impact that they will have. Every transmission of this disease which is allowed to occur makes the whole question of dealing with this disease so much harder. And so, we need to see the government being proactive on this. It is absolutely essential that the Federal Government acts in a way which means that this disease does not significantly take hold within our society but that is what the Commonwealth Government must do right now.

Any questions?

JOURNALIST: Was the Federal Government too late in implementing that total travel ban- that quarantine, where every new arrival in Australia?

MARLES: It's an important measure to be taken. But again we need leadership from our government here. We've seen a range of social distancing measures being introduced by companies in the private sector and various agencies around Australia- we actually need to have clear and consistent leadership from our Commonwealth Government in relation to these clear social distancing measures. And it is self-evident that in terms of any step that's going to be taken in relation to social distancing but the earlier that it is taken, the bigger impact that it will have. And it is imperative that we are doing everything we can as a nation to make sure that this disease does not significantly take hold within our country.

JOURNALIST: You said we need clear and effective and consistent information, has Dr Brendan Murphy been an effective communicator?

MARLES: Well this is a matter for the Prime Minister of Australia and he is the person who is the chief communicator in relation to this and the Commonwealth Government. They are the elected representatives. They are the people who are ultimately answerable to the Australian public. Now, to have a situation yesterday where it was okay to be shaking hands in the morning but it's not okay to be shaking hands in the afternoon- it makes no sense. It doesn't give

people a sense of calm and a sense of confidence that there is a clear set of decisions being made about how to deal with this crisis as it evolves. Now we understand that it does rapidly evolve. But that only heightens the need to have clear and consistent and frequent communication on the part of our Commonwealth Government.

JOURNALIST: Are you happy for Parliament to come back in a limited capacity?

MARLES: That's a matter which is going to be worked out between the parties. Obviously it is really important that we are dealing with questions of stimulus and that stimulus is allowed to flow at the earliest opportunity. And we have made clear our support for the Government in relation to that. We want to make sure that stimulus is sufficient but that which has been announced, that is very important that it is allowed to be rolled out and we understand Parliament's crucial role in terms of that. The precise logistics of how that might work, in terms of Parliament being recalled is a matter that is being spoken about between the parties now.

JOURNALIST: Would you feel comfortable and confident in returning to Parliament House with the thousands of people inside, given the current conditions?

MARLES: It is an issue which is being worked through by the respective parties and they're obviously taking proper advice around that. Our first responsibility is to the Australian people. There is a decision that needs to be taken for the benefit of Australian people in terms of stimulus; we're very clear about that. And I feel completely comfortable about playing my role in making sure that that stimulus is in the hands of the Australian public at the earliest possible moment.

JOURNALIST: How do you think Australia's placed right now to deal with an outbreak? There is a sudden ramping up of community infections.

MARLES: Well again this is where we need to make sure that we are getting very clear consistent messaging from the part of the Federal Government. Where there is leadership on the part of the government and where there is a clear plan about how we move forward. The answer to our ability to be able to manage this going forward lies in the decision making and the leadership that the Commonwealth Government ultimately puts in place. But it is really essential that in doing this this disease is not able to significantly take hold within our community because with the mortality rate associated with it, the consequences of that are very clear.

JOURNALIST: Right across Australia, we're seeing people have difficulty going

grocery shopping, supermarket shelves are empty. Woolworths has taken the step of opening early to allow the disabled and the elderly to get what they need, should other supermarkets follow?

MARLES: Yeah look I really appreciate that question. There is an understandable anxiety that people have around shopping and being able to make sure that they are in a position to deal with whatever is about to occur within our society. But we do need to be really mindful of those who are most vulnerable, and make sure they too are in a position to be able to get the provisions they need to get through this crisis. I think the step that Woolworths have taken to open an hour earlier and to have that dedicated to pensioners, people with disabilities, those who are most vulnerable, is an act of community leadership which should absolutely be commended and I do that right now. And in saying that, the other retail chains should follow suit, from that act of leadership on the part of Woolworths, to enable people who are most vulnerable to have an opportunity to buy the provisions that they need to provide. Again, this is an example of leadership which has come from the community. What we need to see though, is leadership from the Federal Government. And it's really important that Scott Morrison and his Government are talking to the major retail chains to make sure that there is an ability for those who are most vulnerable in our community to be able to get provisions that they need at supermarkets.

JOURNALIST: Here in Victoria, the State Government is going to be offering care packages to people who end up in isolation and don't have access to the essentials. Is there anything the Commonwealth can do to make that more uniform across Australia?

MARLES: Again, I think it's really important that what we see is best practice around the country. And in terms of state action becomes the practice of the norm around the country; the Commonwealth does have a role to play in making sure that best practice becomes everyday practice across the entire country.

Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.