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TELEVISION INTERVIEW
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SUBJECTS: Borders; Victoria; the winding back of Jobkeeper and Jobseeker.

ALLISON LANGDON, HOST: "I will not be bullied by the Prime Minister". Those were the strong words from Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk yesterday, accusing Scott Morrison of trying to intimidate her into granting a border exemption to a young woman unable to attend her father's funeral. I am joined now by Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton in Brisbane, and Deputy Opposition Leader, Richard Marles in Melbourne. Good morning to both of you.

RICHARD MARLES, DEPUTY LEADER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY: Morning, Ally.

LANGDON: Peter, is the Prime Minister a bully?

PETER DUTTON, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS: No, he's not. We all want to make sure that everybody's health is taken care of but at the moment this indiscriminate application of the border restrictions is really having a very negative impact on people's mental health and it is really devastating families, as we have seen in the interviews this morning and there is no consistency. If you are Tom Hanks from California, you are okay. If you are Tom Hanks from Chermside or Castle Hill, sorry, you are not coming in, even to your brother's funeral or your

dying daughter. It is just unacceptable. And, I think the consequences are very far reaching and the Premier needs to fix the problem. It is a problem of her making and it needs to be fixed sooner than later.

LANGDON: But borders are a State issue. Did he need to weigh in yesterday?

DUTTON: Yes, of course, Ally, because we get representations as Richard does, as the Prime Minister has of people in tears. They can't go to a funeral, they have got days left for a loved one before they pass away and they want to have contact with those people. They are coming from zones that have no cases. In fact, less cases than what Queensland has. So they pose no health risk in a COVID sense, but the reality for these people is that their lives are devastated, they will be scarred forever. And the Premier is making these reasons, not based on health advice, but based on the fact that we have an election coming up at the end of October. The Prime Minister feels very deeply about this, as we all do. We don't want to see people suffering and the Premier is making these decisions not in a consistent way. So if you are an AFL executive, no problems, you can spend your two weeks by the pool and on the golf course, but somebody coming up to a funeral of their mum or dad or their daughter or son is not permitted to travel across the border. It is crazy and it needs to stop.

LANGDON: There does seem to be double standards here, Richard.

MARLES: I don't think what Peter is saying is fair at all. Look, I mean, everyone's heart bleeds for the stories that you have been highlighting today, and you hope that in the decisions that are being made, the law of common sense and the best medical advice is what are the factors at play in terms of making those decisions. But that is exactly what Annastacia Palaszczuk is saying she is considering in making each of these decisions and I take her at face value. I think to suggest that this is all about an election is actually completely unfair. At the end of the day these are really difficult decisions. The Queensland Government have an entire population to manage, and, in truth, they have done that well in terms of the management of the disease in the state, and that is their primary concern. I am sure that Annastacia Palaszczuk is as moved by all of the individual cases as anyone, but these are difficult calls.

LANGDON: The issue, Richard, and I think the borders, they are popular in

Queensland, you are absolutely right. The issue that we have seen yesterday is that people now think that she is coming across as being mean, that she is not showing compassion. It is not just stories we have shown today and yesterday, there have now been these consistent stories that have come out for weeks, even months now, where we need to fix the exemption process so that these people, people who are dying, people who need urgent medical care can get what they need, surely.

MARLES: Look, I think the law of common sense needs to apply when we are talking about individual situations, and there needs to be a way in which these things can be worked through, provided they comply with the best medical advice. But let me say this; Anastacia Palaszczuk is not mean. I know Anastacia Palaszczuk and she is a deeply compassionate person. And what I said earlier, I don't think it is about whether or not the borders is popular is an issue, it is the question is whether or not it is the right thing to do in terms of the right thing to do in terms of the health of the Queensland public and that is the basis on which Anastacia is making her decisions. And you would have to say when you take a step back and have a look at it, she has managed that pretty well because the disease has been handled very well in Queensland. So, these are really difficult calls and, you know, our heart breaks for the individuals. It is also at the same time pretty easy to pile on in respect of those who have the responsibility of making really tough decisions. At the end of the day I can only take the Queensland Government and Anastacia Palaszczuk at face value and they are saying that they bringing to bear the best medical advice, along with common sense, in coming up with the determinations that they do.

LANGDON: I agree that she is not mean but when she compared yesterday a dying father not being able to see her four kids to her not being able to see her uncle who has lung cancer she lost a lot of support. Peter, she says these exemptions are not her call. So are the Chief Health Officers running the States?

DUTTON: I think the Chief Health Officer is quite frankly the fall guy here and I think that is unfortunate at the moment. Richard's point is right. Any Premier looks good in comparison to Daniel Andrews at the moment, but the reality is that the frustration for people here is the inconsistency. The Premier has made a decision to bring the AFL executives to the Gold Coast, to hang out by the pool and the golf course. She has made a decision to bring Hollywood stars into the state and to be given the red carpet treatment, and yet Queenslanders and people who are relatives that live across the border in New South Wales or the ACT, for example, don't get into the

state to come to a funeral. That is the inconsistency. I don't think she is a mean person. I don't think Annastacia Palaszczuk is a bad person, but I think she is making bad calls and I think the inconsistency is what really annoys people. These are moments that families will never get back, and the point is they pose no health risk from a COVID perspective at all.

LANGDON: Okay look, there is plenty of talk about the Melbourne curfew. The Chief Health Officer didn't ask for it, neither did the Police. So it is not based on medical evidence. Richard, why is it in place?

MARLES: I don't know the details of who made this particular decision-

LANGDON: I don't think anybody does. This is the point!

MARLES: Let's take a step back. Are we saying that the whole system of measures that have been put in place by the Victorian Government over the last few weeks isn't working? The truth of the matter is, it is. We have had a really desperate situation in this State. A regime of measures was put in place. It is working and numbers are dramatically down. And again, Peter takes a cheap shot at Daniel Andrews before. The Prime Minister is basically the leader of a cheer squad in terms of piling on to Daniel Andrews as the Premier of Victoria in this moment. Actually, what would be really good is to hear the Federal Government stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Victorian Government in the midst of a crisis rather than relegate themselves to hecklers on the sideline. The fact of the matter is difficult decisions are being made. It is getting us through it. The numbers are coming down and none of the heckling that we are seeing from Scott Morrison is doing anything to get rid of the virus in this state which is what needs to happen in order for us to be able to see our loved ones in aged care or for us to get our businesses going again. That is what has to happen.

LANGDON: To be honest, from the outside it feels like you are all playing politics at the moment. I want to talk about changes to JobKeeper and JobSeeker at the end of this month which will see already struggling families \$300 less off each fortnight. Peter, when this package was designed no-one expected Victoria to still be in lockdown, with the borders to be shut. I know there is no money tree, but is it cruel to reduce it now?

DUTTON: Ally, it is not. We put in place the program for six months which has saved 700,000 jobs and the reality is that JobKeeper is needed, it needs to be extended and we are extending it. So it will go for another six months and we will review it at that time. But I hope that with the clean-up that is taking place in Victoria at the moment that this will get down to single digits within a couple of weeks and the borders can reopen. There is no reason for the border between New South Wales and Queensland to be closed. There is no reason for the border between Queensland and the ACT to be closed. There is no reason for the borders in WA or Tasmania to be closed. *(Inaudible)* And the fact is as quickly as possible.

LANGDON: Richard, just very quickly, could you live off \$800 a fortnight?

MARLES: No, and one of the issues here is- I mean JobKeeper is really important, you can understand the timing that was put in place originally. But this has been a more prolonged phenomenon than we thought, particularly here in Victoria. I have been speaking to a travel agent in my electorate yesterday. Think about their business. They have got absolutely nothing. You wind down JobKeeper now and you are turning the lights out for that business. It has been around since 1940. We are gonna need travel agents in the future but to get us across this we need JobKeeper to continue for a while and I think that's just common sense.

LANGDON: And just before we go, Peter, I believe you have a very special message for a very special person.

DUTTON: It is Kirilly's birthday today. So I am in isolation and hopefully I will see her a little bit later on. But happy birthday, Krill. Love you lots. You are a great- amazing wife and mum and she will be very embarrassed by this call but I am very grateful. So, Richard I am *(Inaudible)*

MARLES: There is a soft heart deep down there after all.

LANGDON: Who knew?!

KARL STEFANOVIC: He's a big teddy bear.

MARLES: He is a big teddy bear.

LANGDON: I hope she has a beautiful day, beautiful day, Peter and Richard, thanks for joining us. You guys have a nice weekend.

ENDS

Authorised by Paul Erickson, ALP, Canberra.