



PRIME MINISTER

11 June 2014

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MP
DOORSTOP INTERVIEW,
P-TECH, BROOKLYN**

Subjects: Visit to the USA; visit to P-TECH school; medical research future fund; Rupert Murdoch; the Government's commitment to a paid parental leave scheme; direct action plan to reduce carbon emissions; the Government's commitment to repeal the carbon tax.

E&OE.....

PRIME MINISTER:

It's really good to be here at this P-TECH school here in Brooklyn. I was very impressed by the extraordinary work that these youngsters are doing and the understandings that they are developing of the real world of business.

I also think it is terrific that at this particular school we have got a major business – IBM – involved in a very hands on way so that the graduates of this school will be immediately job ready and indeed are being offered preferential hiring if you like, preferential entry-level hiring by a major, significant employer.

As I said to the students that I addressed a moment ago, there are so many young people about to leave school wondering where their job will come from – wondering what they have actually been equipped to do. There are so many employers out there wondering where they are going to get work-ready, entry-level staff from and the partnership between the New York City Education Department, between the City University of New York and between IBM is a good and innovative way of addressing the needs of the students and the needs of businesses.

Every country has this kind of difficulty and I am grateful for the opportunity to see what is being done here in New York, particularly when the Government is in the process of preparing our competitiveness statement which will come out in a month or so time. We do need to strengthen our effort in science, in technology and engineering and in math and schools like this are a very appropriate way of doing it.

I am determined when I go overseas not just to meet with leaders, not just to meet with experts, not just to advance Australia's commercial interests through business to business meetings but also to look at what other countries are doing, where they are doing things that we can learn from and obviously a school like this does have all sorts of potential for application in a country like our own.

QUESTION:

What industries do you think you see this applying in Australia?

PRIME MINISTER:

It is the kind of thing that we want to look at and consider. It is not entirely dissimilar from the Australian Technical College model which the Howard Government introduced in its last couple of years, but it seems there is a more hands on business role here than there was in the ATC model.

QUESTION:

The resources industry is a classic case where skilled workers are needed. Would you want companies like Woodside to be putting money into programmes like this?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it is the sort of thing that I think we ought to be willing to explore. Interestingly one of the ideas that Andrew Forrest has been perusing very, very strongly is this idea of taking indigenous people, putting them through a training programme which is designed by the company rather than by a traditional training provider and guaranteeing – provided the indigenous person finishes the training – guaranteeing that person a job at the end of it.

This is not only rather similar in some respects to the Australian Technical College model but it has substantial echoes of what Andrew Forrest is trying to do in Australia.

QUESTION:

Who would pay for this new Australian scenario? Would it be Government or corporate?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, again if you look at the Australian Technical College model the states funded the traditional classroom education and the Commonwealth funded the more technical side of the education and training that people were getting.

QUESTION:

When it comes to that model of having more corporate involvement in the curriculum, the difference in Australia, I suppose, is that has traditionally happened after the schooling years are done at the tertiary level. Is there any danger in your mind in extending that as has happened here to the secondary school level? What are some of the cautions you would have to have around that?

PRIME MINISTER:

What we want to do is ensure that youngsters are getting an education which is relevant to their needs and that we are investing in education and training systems that are going to have appropriate economic pay-offs for our country so I am not being prescriptive here. What I am doing is, I guess, exposing myself to what is being done creatively and innovatively here in the United States so that it can inform the kind of policy that we will be bringing forward as part of our competitiveness statement in a month or so time.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, the kids here leave at the age of 19 with Applied Science degrees but no debt. Now, in your federal Budget you have increased student debt for university students. You have also got debt schemes for trade skills. So, how does your plan in Australia sit with the low debt or no debt option here at a time when Barack Obama is warning about the crippling load of student debt?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am not saying that everything that is being done here is going to be immediately applicable to what we might do in Australia but I do think it is important for us to learn what is being done in other countries and see where there might be some applicability to our own country. Now, as you know, the whole idea of HECS funded or now FEE-HELP funded tertiary education has been something that has enjoyed bipartisan support for a couple of decades and I am not proposing to change that. As you know, in fact, we have made decisions in the Budget to make the FEE-HELP system available to people doing sub-degree courses and make that system available to a much wider range of students in a much wider range of institutions than is currently the case. I see that as an extension of a strong policy that will actually help to broaden the access and availability of post-school learning.

QUESTION:

If you had P-TECH in Australia would students have to pay?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it would depend on whether this was done in a school setting or whether this was done in a post-school setting. If it was done in a post-school setting there would be fees involved. If it was done in a school setting there wouldn't be fees involved.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, what can you tell us more broadly about your competitiveness agenda about education and training. More broadly, what will that statement include?

PRIME MINISTER:

There will be a significant emphasis in boosting our focus on science, technology, engineering and maths because science is at the heart of a country's competitiveness and it is important that we do not neglect science as we look at the general educational and training schemes.

QUESTION:

How does that sit with the cuts to the CSIRO and other science agencies? Doesn't that give a mixed message?

PRIME MINISTER:

We can be strongly focused on science without necessarily spending more in every particular institution that is in this space. We have made some modest savings in the area of the CSIRO but as you know we are setting up one of the world's largest medical research endowment funds because we do want to boost our overall research and science effort. As I said that is perfectly consistent with changing the funding allocation for individual entities in the mix.

QUESTION:

Is it your view, I guess Mr Abbott, if you do adopt this model which it sounds like you are leaning towards to do it in a school setting or not a school setting or both? Are you thinking of a combination of colleges?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, obviously if it is being done in a school setting we would have to work closely with the states. If it is being done beyond a school setting we would be working more closely with a whole range of providers.

QUESTION:

Where could it be done?

PRIME MINISTER:

It could be done, Lane, anywhere but the important thing is to learn from good and innovative programmes that have been put into place, successfully put into place, in other countries.

QUESTION:

Mr Abbott, you had dinner with Rupert Murdoch last night. Can you tell us what you discussed and are you any closer to securing a meeting with Hillary Clinton?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, as I said yesterday I understand that Hillary Clinton is on a book tour so it probably will be difficult to get a face to face meeting with the former Secretary of State but I do hope, if possible, to speak with her while I am here. She is busy, it is a very full programme as you have seen – I will do my best.

QUESTION:

And Mr Murdoch, what did you discuss with Mr Murdoch?

PRIME MINISTER:

You know I have met with Rupert Murdoch on a number of occasions. I have had dinner with him at least once before in New York. He is a very, very senior Australian mostly living in New York. The News group is obviously a very significant international business with strong Australian connections and I have met with him before and I will meet with him again. I have had dinner with him before and I will have dinner with him again. This is what people in my position do. We should do it because our country is helped by the success of organisations like News Corporation abroad.

QUESTION:

Are you disappointed that some of your backbenchers have decided to campaign against the paid parental leave scheme while you are overseas?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am not surprised that people have gone and asked Members of Parliament questions and I am not surprised that Members of Parliament being expansive and outgoing individuals have from time to time answered those questions. I am not at all surprised and look we are a broad church, a big tent inside the Coalition. As is well known there have always been a range of views on the paid parental leave policy that the Coalition -

I stress - has taken not just one, but to two elections. I say again - I am totally committed to it, the Government is totally committed to it, it is very important that we give the women of Australia a real choice to have a career and a family. It is very important that we have a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme because parental leave is a workplace entitlement, not a welfare entitlement.

This is a very significant social and economic advance. If we are serious about driving up productivity and boosting participation this is the kind of policy we want.

QUESTION:

Just back on this programme are you more inclined to have it operate in a school or a post-school system. Do you think it works well here and can I also ask at the end of the day do you think some kids in areas where they are going to struggle to find jobs are not studying the right curriculum?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am here to learn and I am not going to flag detailed policy on the basis of one visit today but it is very important that when people in a Government go abroad they learn what they can from the experiences of other countries and we do need to boost our science, technology and engineering and maths effort.

We do need to try and ensure that young Australians leave school job ready if they are going into the labour market. We do need to try and ensure that businesses can get the skills that they need as readily as possible and this is an interesting and innovative programme which I feel very honoured to have experienced.

The other point I want to make is that one of the encouraging dimensions of this school is that they are not just studying business skills - but as we saw in the classroom we visited- they are actually learning how to run a business, It has been my experience over the years that one of the great strengths of America is that entrepreneurial spirit. Your typical young American won't expect someone to hand him or her a job on a platter. Your typical young American will be interested in creating his or her own job, starting his or her own business. Again, that is something that I think we could well learn from.

QUESTION:

Can I ask ahead of your meeting tomorrow with Barack Obama what sort of agenda have you got for that meeting? What are your priorities? For example Indonesia or China or Syria, that sort of thing and what do you expect for him to ask of you?

PRIME MINISTER:

I will be indicating to the President that Australia is a very reliable friend – a very, very reliable friend. I doubt that America would have a more reliable friend anywhere in the world and in what have been, in some ways, difficult and troubling times for this country and for others it is important that friends stand by each other. I guess that will be my main message for the President. I would be surprised if we don't discuss a whole range of different issues around the world. Some of the subjects that you have mentioned, Andrew, may well have come up but I am not going to pre-empt those discussions and I look forward to having something to say after.

QUESTION:

Mr Abbott, you are due to see House Republican Eric Cantor today and he has lost pre-selection overnight to a Tea Party candidate. How do you feel about being thrust into the middle of that drama and are there any lessons for the Liberal Party at home from the divisions that have emerged from the Republican Party here?

PRIME MINISTER:

I am hopeful that meeting will go ahead because whatever has happened inside the Republican Party organisation he remains a very senior member of the Congress. All politicians have to face a democratic process. If you are in a democracy, if you are an elected representative in a democratic system you have got to face a democratic process and often there is a Party process as well as an electoral process that you face and we all take our chances. Sometimes things don't work out the way we want, they don't work out the way we expect and that is just life in a democracy.

QUESTION:

President Obama has given an interview in which he has said that climate change is a national security issue. He receives briefings from his science adviser on recent climate reports and he is also said that if possible he would like carbon pricing as a policy. What do you say to those kinds of ideas? Do you think climate change really is a threat to national global security?

PRIME MINISTER:

Paul, climate change is an important issue. I have always said that this is an important issue. I have always said that it is real, that humanity is making a contribution and we have got to take strong and effective action to deal with that. There is a very legitimate argument about what the best action is and I am absolutely determined that the action that we take to deal with climate change will be consistent with the maintenance of a strong economy. I am not going to take action on climate change which clobbers our economy. I am just not and I don't expect that any other country, whatever they might say, will take action on climate change that will clobber their economy and cost jobs.

I also want to put in perspective the scale of the effort that we are proposing to make in Australia. As you know, we are proposing to spend some \$2.5 billion on direct action climate change measures. If this was to translate to the United States that would be a \$40 billion – a \$40 billion programme – over four years. Now, I think that would be a very, very substantial programme should something like that be put into place here in the United States...

QUESTION:

Is that your challenge to President Obama?

PRIME MINISTER:

So, if climate change does come up in further discussions here in the United States I will be pointing to the scale of what we are doing in Australia as evidence of our deep seriousness of this issue.

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