

Schmitke, Shaun

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28 February 2014

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. TONY ABBOTT MP
JOINT DOORSTOP INTERVIEW WITH THE HON. SCOTT MORRISON MP,
MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION AND BORDER PROTECTION,
DARWIN**

Subjects: Operation Sovereign Borders; Hazelwood coal mine fire; Qantas;

E&OE.....

PRIME MINISTER:

It's good to be here at Larrakeyah Barracks to talk to those who have been involved in the work of Operation Sovereign Borders and to thank them for everything they've done.

This has been a difficult and dangerous job, but it's been carried out with great professionalism and skill by our Naval, Customs, Army and Air Force personnel. All of them have been operating together very effectively to give us the quite extraordinary result of 71 days now without a successful illegal people smuggling operation to Australia.

So, from the Government to the Border Protection personnel; an enormous thank you and from the people of Australia to our Border Protection personnel, a big salute – an extraordinary job being very professionally carried out right now.

Just before I ask Scott Morrison to say a few words, I should also just observe that the writs have been issued for a WA Senate election on April 5th. This will be an opportunity for the people of Western Australia to vote for candidates who will stand up for their state and who will vote to abolish these anti-West Australian taxes – the mining tax and the carbon tax. I certainly look forward to being in Western Australia quite a bit over the next few weeks and doing what I can to reinforce the message that the Government of Australia is a pro-Western Australian government and the best way we can demonstrate that we are pro-Western Australia is by abolishing these anti-Western Australian taxes – the carbon tax and the mining tax.

Scott?

IMMIGRATION MINISTER:

Thanks Prime Minister. It has been a great pleasure and privilege to be here with the Prime Minister and Natasha Griggs to say thank you.

The faith that we have put in our Navy, our Customs and Border Protection Service, our Air Force, our Army and all of those who have been involved in Operation Sovereign Borders has been repaid in full and with interest. 71 days now without a successful people smuggling venture having reached Australia is an

enormous achievement, but they know and we know there is more work to be done and we thank them not only for their efforts and for their success, but we thank them for the decency and the way they've gone about this very difficult task. These are incredibly impressive men and women who are serving here and in all the roles associated with Operation Sovereign Borders and we thank them for their service.

PRIME MINISTER:

Ok, do we have any question?

QUESTION:

Just quickly Prime Minister, Morwell, the town, might be evacuated this afternoon – the whole town – because of the mine fire. Do you think the company's doing enough to put out that fire and can I also ask whether the Federal Government will consider tipping in some Federal assistance in that case?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the company is doing its best - I think everyone is doing their best - and as far as the Federal Government is concerned, as far as the national Government is concerned, we stand ready to receive a request from Victoria for assistance under the Natural Disaster Arrangements and we will activate our part immediately.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, can I just go back to Qantas as I had before. I wonder what your message is to workers of Qantas as they sit down with management, is there more that they can be looking at doing to help a company that's obviously struggling with the cost base?

PRIME MINISTER:

Obviously, everyone involved with Qantas has got to work together constructively to rise to the competitive challenge that Qantas faces. It's a very tough market; airlines are competing furiously against each other. That's not all bad news; it means lower prices and better services for passengers, but obviously both Qantas and Virgin are facing profitability issues.

Now, the only way to maximise the number of jobs is to have profitable businesses that can employ people and that's why it is important that the staff and the management at Qantas work together as harmoniously as possible, so that Qantas can have the great future that this Government wants for it and that I think every Australian wants for this iconic airline.

QUESTION:

You're putting \$50 million into a new police force, or recommitting \$50 million to a police force over two years to deal with disturbances at Darwin detention centres. Do you feel as though there's an undue pressure put on Darwin to deal with the Operation Sovereign Borders issues that arise?

PRIME MINISTER:

I think the people of Darwin understand that it's very important that we have strong border protection policies in place and the best way to ensure that we can ultimately close down the facilities here in Darwin and spend the money on much more productive things is to stop the boats. Thank God they're stopping, but we aren't resting on our laurels, there's still a long way to go and you can be confident that this Government will do whatever is necessary to once more ensure that our borders and totally and fully secure.

IMMIGRATION MINISTER:

When can we expect to see the first detention centre shut down?

PRIME MINISTER:

We've already had quite a few shut down. I'll get Scott to elaborate, but we've already had detention centres shut down. The detention centre on the edge of Adelaide has shut down. The detention centre in Perth, I think it is Pontville that shut down in Hobart – Pontville has shut down in Hobart. The one on the outskirts of Adelaide has shut down and as the situation improves, continues to improve more can be done.

Scott?

QUESTION:

What about the ones [inaudible]?

IMMIGRATION MINISTER:

Well, the Prime Minister has said that there are four that have been shut down. That is Scherger up in North Queensland, Pontville, also down in South Australia but as well the Leonora facility in Western Australia. We are reviewing the detention estate here in Darwin but the commitment I made this morning was about ensuring over the next two years the Northern Territory police force has the support to conduct its operations to support our detention footprint here in Darwin without having any impact on its more general responsibilities here. I mean that is why we are committing those funds, to make sure the Northern Territory police can do both jobs and there is no impact on their normal job of law enforcement here in the Territory. Now, we are reviewing all of those centres that are here in Darwin but that commitment through that MOU, I think, indicates very strongly that there will continue to be a detention footprint here in Darwin.

QUESTION:

Mr Morrison, can I ask you what is next for the body of Reza Berati, whether there are plans to send him back to Iran and can I also ask whether you have been updated about the man with critical head injuries – from last week's riot – in a Brisbane hospital?

IMMIGRATION MINISTER:

Well, I can confirm that once the formalities have been completed in Papua New Guinea and the appropriate discharges are acquitted with the Papua New Guinea authorities then the Australian Government with the cooperation of Papua New Guinea will be repatriating Mr Berati's body to the family in Iran. That is the process we are working through right now. I get updates on the status of the other injuries but at this stage I am advised that people are being attended to and are making a recovery.

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