

TV interview with Karl Stefanovic – Today, Nine Network

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Prime Minister, thanks for joining us.

PRIME MINISTER:

Good morning Karl.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

You are dreaming aren't you, if you think you can get this past the states?

PRIME MINISTER:

We will get a good outcome here Karl. This plan is a game changer, believe me, this is for the first time creating a level playing field. It's getting rid of all the ideology and the subsidies. This will ensure that energy is affordable – people can afford to pay their bills – it's reliable – the lights will stay on, and it's responsible, because we will be meeting our commitments to cut our emissions under the Paris agreement.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

It's a game-changer if the players are willing to change the game. The states won't play the game. They're not even on the board.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Karl, we will see. We will see. Believe me, this policy has come as the advice of the experts on the Energy Security Board. These are the people that actually run the electricity market. This is an expert board that the COAG and the states of course, set up. You know what? They've asked them for advice too. What advice do you think they'll give? They'll give the states the same advice they gave us.

So we've got to decide whether we're going to have a market, an energy market that works for consumers, works for families and businesses to keep prices low.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Okay, we already know what the states think of it. This is the thing. South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill blasted the policy as a subsidy to the coal industry. The Queensland Labor Minister Mark Bailey said it was pathetic and the Victorian Premier Dan Andrews says it's Tony Abbott's devious work. It doesn't sound like they're on board.

PRIME MINISTER:

Karl, Premier's often say ferocious things before COAG meetings. They will get the same advice from the Energy Security Board gave us. And you know what? As far as subsidies are concerned, this is an end to subsidies. We don't need to subsidise renewable energy, wind and solar, because it's competitive now. The energy industry and the wind and solar guys, they're always saying they are competitive, their costs are coming down. All of that is true, so lets have a level playing field that works for the customers, works for consumers, works for families and businesses. That's what we need. We need affordable and reliable electricity.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

I agree with you on that. You're promising savings of \$115 from 2020, how much for example will that bring your power bill down by?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well Karl, I've got a big power bill but not least because I've got a small police station in my garden, as you know.

[Laughter]

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Lucky you.

PRIME MINISTER:

Well indeed, lucky I've got, there it is, I won't go into that. But I'll just say this to you. The advice we have about reducing wholesale power costs, comes from the Energy Security Board. They are forecasting a reduction in wholesale costs, this is the cost of generation right? Which is only part of our power bill at home, because there's network costs – we're bringing those down – there's retail costs, they're being carefully examined by the ACCC. You know, there's a bunch of things.

But what they're saying, and these are people Karl, that have forgotten more about the electricity market than we'll ever know. These are the real brains of the electricity market. It's their advice.

Now, what the Labor Party has got to decide to do, having lectured everybody about the need to rely on expert advice, now that we've got it, are they going to ignore it? Substitute their own political prejudices for the smartest advice from the smartest people in the room?

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Okay.

PRIME MINISTER:

We're following that advice and that's why it will work for Australian families.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

I guess the point is, that most people remember what their bill is. I don't expect you to as the Prime Minister, but the point is you can't possibly guarantee something that has little or no key details.

PRIME MINISTER:

I know what my bill is Karl, believe me –

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Yeah, what is it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, let's talk about the average. The average bill is around \$2500 – \$2700, okay? What we've been able to secure already, is reductions for thousands of Australians of \$300, \$400, \$500 by getting them onto the right plan. That is something we have done now.

Now, a big part of the cost of electricity is the high price of gas, driven by a shortage on the east coast, driven by a failure in Labor policy when they allowed exports to go out from the east coast without reserving any gas for Australian consumers.

Again, we fixed that because we've got the big gas exporters – as you know, we talked about it – to guarantee that there will be enough gas for the local market.

Another big factor in that energy bill that everyone faces, is the cost of the poles and wires. The network owners have been gaming the system, constantly appealing against the energy regulator. We have actually just passed legislation to abolish those appeals.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Yep.

PRIME MINISTER:

So they will have to live with the decisions of the regulator. All of those things, every single one of those measures.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

It's bringing costs down.

PRIME MINISTER:

It's putting downward pressure on electricity prices.

Now, the big difference with Labor, Karl, is that everything they want to do is putting upward pressure on prices. So we're working to make electricity affordable. Labor is working to make it unaffordable and unreliable.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Two quick ones before we move on, I know you are a busy man. The Telecommunications Ombudsman's Annual Report out today. It's grim reading. There were 27,195 complaints to the ombudsman about the NBN. That was up about 159 per cent. 16,200 complaints about faults over the NBN. That's 6.7 per cent complaints per 1,000 households activated. You are Mr NBN. This isn't good enough, is it?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, it's never good enough to have complaints, Karl, and that is why I'm working closely, talking to the management at the NBN, as is the minister, Mitch Fifield, to improve both the installation experience and to ensure that people are getting from the retailers, the plans they deliver.

But just a fact of life, it's a bit like television you know; if you've got hardly any viewers, you won't get a lot of complaints.

With NBN, what we have now got is about 3 million people are actively connected on to the network. We are connecting more people every 10 days than Labor did in six years.

So you get a lot more customers, they're rolling on and around 30,000, 40,000 a week. Clearly you are going to get more complaints. But you know what, we aim to have 100 per cent satisfaction. It can't be achieved, I know that, but the goal is to ensure that the installation experience is a good one and obviously that people are satisfied with the service when they get it.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Finally and very quickly, a new poll out today reveals 59 per cent claim to have voted 'yes' for gay marriage, while 38 per cent say they voted 'no'. You must like the sound of that, 'yes'?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well certainly, Lucy and I voted 'yes' and I'd be delighted if there was a 'yes' vote recorded. But above all, I am so pleased that Australians are embracing this survey. Already we know from the ABS that over 67 per cent have returned their ballot papers. So we may well see a participation rate over 70 per cent. That would be extraordinary. That will prove that we were right; Australians did want to have their say and they're having their say.

KARL STEFANOVIC:

Let's hope so. PM, thanks so much for your time this morning. Always appreciate it, you're a busy man.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thanks Karl.

[ENDS]