



PAUL FLETCHER MP

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TRANSCRIPT ABC RN WITH PATRICIA KARVELAS 30 September 2022

Subject/s: Optus breach, Anti-corruption commission

Patricia Karvelas:

Paul Fletcher is the Manager of Opposition Business and the former Communications Minister. He was also Optus's director of corporate and regulatory affairs between 2000 and 2008 and he's our guest this morning. Welcome.

Paul Fletcher:

Good to be with you Patricia.

Karvelas:

We can just first talk about this data breach. You left the company well over a decade ago, but I'm just wondering how shocked you were about the hacking incident at Optus given your long time there?

Fletcher:

Well, as David Thodey was reported as saying earlier this week, he's a former Chief Executive of Telstra this is a reminder of the threat that faces every company and of course their customers because companies, government departments, others, gather data about their customers, identity data and so on, and store it. And indeed the telecommunications companies face some specific requirements about how long they have to store that data. So clearly it's very important that companies have systems in place to protect that data. This is obviously a disappointing outcome. It's bad for Optus, most importantly, it's bad for their customers and I know the company is working very hard to keep customers informed and to seek to support them, and I acknowledge the work being done by agencies like the Australian Signals Directorate and the Australian Cybersecurity Centre in working with the company, but this is an important lesson for all companies and it raises obviously important issues about cyber security. The Morrison government passed the security of Critical Infrastructure

Act, which covers 11 sectors, including the telco sector, and gives the Minister for Home Affairs very strong powers as is appropriate. It's also appropriate to consider...

Karvelas:

But do you believe this was a basic hack that left the window open for data to be stolen or a sophisticated one?

Fletcher:

Well, the Minister, Minister for Home Affairs called it a basic attack. The company does has described it in a different way. I don't have the facts. We obviously we need to carefully examine what happened here and learn from what happened here.

Karvelas:

No, but but clearly our own, I mean, the Minister doesn't come up with these theories on her own. Our own, our own officials are giving her advice that this was actually a basic attack, which meant that Optus wasn't prepared. Does that concern you?

Fletcher:

That is what the Minister has said. The company has said something different. I don't know the facts. What I do know is that the Minister was missing in action for several days after this happened and she's then been.

Karvelas:

Do you think the company has missing in action?

Fletcher:

She's been very keen to point the blame in all kinds of directions, including seeking to suggest that in some way you know, she didn't have sufficient powers here, but under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act she has very extensive powers and each even has the power to order a step in to the company. She can declare critical assets, including telcos, as systems of national significance. Under the act that the Morrison Government passed...

Karvelas:

Sure, but back to Optus, who really are in charge of this data and have left it vulnerable? Have they failed?

Fletcher:

You're right that the responsibility sits with Optus. I don't have the facts. I'm not currently the Minister, so I'm not going to comment other than.

Karvelas:

No, but you have previously worked there and you were the Communications Minister. You've seen the way that they've handled this. Do you think they have mishandled this?

Fletcher:

I think Optus was right to come out as early as they did and provide as much information as they had available to them. So I've seen what they've said publicly, but beyond that, Patricia, I don't have the facts. What is important is that there's a detailed investigation of exactly what happened, how the breach occurred. That is very important for the company and for the broader cyber security and public policy considerations, but I'm not going to comment on things that I do not have the facts about.

Karvelas:

The government has released its National Anti-Corruption Commission Bill and your leader Peter Dutton says it's got the balance right. But your colleague Dan Tehan tweeted the body will become a knackery. Who's right?

Fletcher:

The Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Attorney General have stated the Coalition's position. Of course, there's a range of important questions that need to be worked through in the committee process that the government has announced. There are important questions, as the Leader of the Opposition has said, we don't want to see show trials, we don't want to see people reputations being destroyed. It's important that we learn from the lessons of the various anti-corruption commissions around the country. The sad fact is that in several on several occasions people that have been called as witnesses have subsequently committed suicide, so it's important to make sure there are appropriate protections. These are all factors that need to be weighed up, but we have made it clear we support an anti-corruption commission, but there's a lot of detail and we need to.

Karvelas:

Paul Fletcher, we're out of time. Paul Fletcher is the Manager of Opposition Business and the former Communications Minister. He was also Optus's director of corporate and regulatory affairs.

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