



PAUL FLETCHER MP

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TRANSCRIPT RADIO 2GB RAY HADLEY INTERVIEW

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Topics: Question Time, Standing Orders, Ministerial Code, Minister McBain

RAY HADLEY: Paul Fletcher is the Manager of Opposition Business and the Shadow Minister under Peter Dutton. And there's been a deal done between the government, the federal Labor Government and the teals, which is got up the nose of the federal Opposition for good reason and joining us from our Canberra studio is the Manager of Opposition Business Paul Fletcher. Paul good morning to you.

FLETCHER: Good to be with you Ray.

HADLEY: Now a deal's been done between the Labor Government and the teals, explain to my listeners what's happened.

FLETCHER: There was a deal done which the Coalition became aware of about 20 past two in Question Time yesterday, essentially for a change to the order of questions between the Coalition and between the crossbench about a couple sitting weeks ago the government made some changes to the standing orders they said there's going to be 22 questions 11 to the government, eight to the opposition and three to the crossbench. Yesterday the government and the crossbench reached a deal and passed a motion which changed that effectively so that one of the Opposition questions gets pushed down the order and one of the crossbench questions gets pushed up the order now the key thing here is the Prime Minister has been cutting off Question Time not after 22 questions as was contemplated in that standing order that the government moved a few weeks ago but after 20 or even 18 so effectively this means a loss of a question to the opposition which is very disappointing because obviously it's our job to hold the government to account but we stood up immediately after that went through after that surprise act occurred and we moved for another change which would be to extend Question Time to 3:30, from 2:00 to 3:30 a bit longer than it normally goes at the moment so that would allow more questions to be dealt with and that would have dealt with this problem that this change this deal that was agreed between the crossbench and the government without consulting with the Opposition effectively reduces the number of questions the Opposition is likely to be able to ask on a typical Question Time.

HADLEY: Well if the limit is really reached at 22 and you're saying sometimes you only get 18, am I right in assuming that instead of eight questions that you're only getting five questions...

FLETCHER: It would go from 8 to 7, it could be less than that it depends upon when the Prime Minister chooses to cut off Question Time and that's been happening earlier over recent Question Times. Now earlier in terms of the number of questions that have elapsed now we heard a lot from Mr Albanese about wanting to do politics differently, about accountability and transparency and yet this deal was done between the crossbench and the government, no notice to the Opposition which is pretty discourteous and it will have the effect of reducing on a typical day the number of questions we're able to ask.

HADLEY: You say the crossbench but obviously driven by the teals now would it be fair to say that while you might get a reduction to seven or maybe six on a bad day, they'll get a reduction from three to two.

FLETCHER: No, in fact it has the opposite impact the government made these changes a couple of sitting weeks ago, now their claim was this would allow eight for the Opposition, three for the crossbench, what this has now done is moved up one of the crossbench questions so it makes it more likely that they will get there three and less likely that we will get our eight, even though of course the Opposition led by Peter Dutton has 58 members in a parliament of 151, so it's very important that that our constituents are heard and that we get the chance to ask questions and hold the government to account.

HADLEY: Well if there's 58 out of 151 and we know the government has the numbers in the lower house, the percentages for your questions as opposed to the percentage of the crossbenchers doesn't quite workout the way it should.

FLETCHER: Look it's clearly been done, where the government has a choice it's choosing to give more opportunities to the crossbench, less opportunities to the Liberal and National parties and you can understand why because we've got a team a very experienced shadow ministers and members or well placed to ask questions of the government, indeed we asked a question yesterday about Mr Albanese's ministerial code he told us a lot about before the election a new approach to politics more accountability, more transparency, more scrutiny. He released a ministerial code a few weeks ago which said ministers are not allowed to own shares- black and white, no ifs no buts. We've since learned that Kristy McBain his Minister for Regional Development did in fact own shares in eight companies, she then transferred them to her husband even though the code says specifically it is not satisfactory to transfer shares to a family member as a means of dealing with the requirement that ministers do not own shares. We ask the question of Mr Albanese about that yesterday didn't seem very fussed at all, this is a big test, this is a significant moment, his ministerial code, an admission in the parliament yesterday from the Minister and that she was in breach of the code and yet Mr Albanese seems to be not worried about this at all I can tell you under previous governments matters like this typically been referred to the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet who would have given the Prime Minister advice as to whether there was a breach of the code and there would have been consequences. So this is a significant moment if Mr Albanese is not going to hold his ministers to the bar that is specifically set out in the code now, that suggests he's never going to do it. It is not living up to his rhetoric about transparency and accountability of ministers.

HADLEY: So she revealed yesterday she divested her shares to her husband which she can't do under the rules, when she found that she be sworn as a Minister then she realised that was not sufficient.

FLETCHER: Yes.

HADLEY: Are the shares now sold? Is that where we stand at the moment?

FLETCHER: It is not entirely clear but that's the statement she made to the parliament yesterday but there's no doubt that for a period of time she was holding shares as a Minister in breach of the ministerial code there's also no doubt that the because she's admitted it that her first step in seeking to deal with that was to transfer them to her husband and the key question here is Mr Albanese has talked about doing politics differently, about a higher standard transparency and scrutiny and accountability, he's released this ministerial code says all his ministers have to comply with it, we now have a minister who is not, who has admitted she did not comply with it for we don't know exactly how long but for certainly a significant period of time and based upon the way Mr Albanese spoke about this in parliament yesterday he doesn't seem to think any consequences should apply at all

HADLEY: Ok, to just go back to the original point given that the changes have been made and the teals and crossbenchers supported it, I suspect there's nothing you can do about Question Time is that correct?

FLETCHER: Well what we did do was move a motion suggesting that Question Time should go longer to 3:30 and indeed the crossbench supported us, so the government had to use their numbers to prevent that being passed, so that was an alignment of the Opposition and the crossbench in support of greater transparency and scrutiny but you're right the government has numbers they've used ruthlessly to shut down further scrutiny.

HADLEY: Okay, I appreciate your time thanks very much Paul

FLETCHER: Thanks Ray

HADLEY: Paul Fletcher there, who is the Manager of Opposition Business federally.

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