



## **PAUL FLETCHER MP**

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### **TRANSCRIPT Sky News Tom Connell 14 November 2022**

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**TOM CONNELL:** Medibank private is not paying the ransom, which has been backed by the federal government, which says it's taking steps to try to avoid such instances of this happening in the future. Joining me live is Shadow Government Services Minister and also Manager of Opposition Business, Paul Fletcher. Thanks very much for your time. I guess just starting with the overall Medibank situation and the government response since it's happened, is there anything you would have done differently?

**PAUL FLETCHER:** Well, good to be with you, Tom. And we have seen from this Government in relation to both the Optus and now the Medibank data breaches. It's taken them a long time to work out their position. There's been a finger of blame being pointed around at everybody except the government, Home Affairs Minister Clare O'Neil seems to be focused on finding a way others to blame rather than finding a way forward. And of course our government did pass very strong measures to security, critical infrastructure legislation, which is a vital part of the Home Affairs Minister. She's got wide powers under that. And of course, just recently we've introduced private members legislation dealing with ransomware. That's in fact something we introduced as a government bill earlier in the year to increase the penalties in this area. So what Australians need is confidence. They need to know that their government has got a plan to deal with these issues working of course with private sector companies that the boards and management have a critical role to play. But when government is not showing that, it seems to be on top of what's going on. That doesn't really increase confidence on the part of Australians. One thing that troubles me as Shadow Minister for Government Services, is that quite some weeks ago the Minister Bill Shorten, said that Services Australia would be monitoring and examining where people's government issued identity data, such as for example, Medicare numbers, had been obtained by hackers. He said this would be investigated but there's been nothing more, no information provided to Australians as to whose information may have been compromised. So I think we need to see a better plan from the government. We need to see them keeping Australians

informed and when we need to see them having a clearer action plan rather than simply seeking to point the finger of blame at others.

**TOM CONNELL:** One thing that happened under the Coalition is it was, you know, not so long ago, a big sort of national security threat. Big focus with terrorism. And some laws were actually passed to make companies retain more data. The idea being up to trace potential criminals. When we look back and it's easy in hindsight, I know that. But when we look back, was it too much of a rush to do that and not think about the responsibility where the companies were best placed to retain some of this data? And if you had your time again, maybe you would've had a different focus or done it differently.

**PAUL FLETCHER:** Well in fact, those laws requiring the retention of data had been in place for quite a long time. Certainly in a previous life, quite a few years ago. Now, as an Optus executive, I had responsibility for the companies in compliance with Australian government requirements in relation to these matters. For example, also under the Telecommunications Interception Act and so the notion that telecommunication companies in particular are required to retain certain data, that's been around for a long time and reflects I guess the central role, the communications system plays in our economy and in our society. But what I do think is an issue that has been highlighted by these recent data breaches is the extent to which we are all routinely asked as customers to hand over identity information to companies. We're doing business with, whether it's our bank, whether it's our telco, whether it's a hire car company. And there is an opportunity, I think, to have a different approach. We did a lot of work in government on the trust and digital identity framework, and indeed there's legislation ready to be introduced on this. But the idea here is that you establish your identity once with a trusted digital identity provider. So it might well be services Australia and your identity is established on a one time basis using, say, your tax records, your passport records, your Medicare records, and then, you know, if you go to Hertz to book a car rather than handing over your drivers licence or other I.D. entity data, instead you'd provide a one time code that your trusted digital identity provider had given to you that would then allow the Hertz computer to interrogate the computer of the trusted digital identity provider to verify that you were who you said you were. So those are a ways in which we can keep less personally sensitive data. So I think there are some things we can do and certainly the Coalition Government had a lot of work underway on this front.

**TOM CONNELL:** Alright, well underway is the key word look what you say sounds pretty logical. It's also worth noting it wasn't something you actually did. So maybe it's a fast changing environment, but maybe there'll be some bipartisanship on the two sides. I want to touch on IR changes. So I guess just starting with the premise before we say what should change, the premise is that workers are not getting a fair share of the money companies are earning. Do you agree with that premise?

**PAUL FLETCHER:** Well, the premise that I agree with is that the Labor Party within a few days or a few weeks or a few months of getting into government, has been jumping to meet the requirements of their union masters, who provide much of their funding, \$100 million of funding over the last few years for the unions movement. And that's why the government has the Labor government, the Albanese government has moved very quickly to decide...

**TOM CONNELL:** ... We're a bit short on time. I did ask the question you can have your own premise. That's fine, but I ask you about the premise that Labor's arguing and unions are arguing very specifically that workers are not getting a fair share of the money companies earning. Do you agree with that premise?

**PAUL FLETCHER:** We're very clear in the Coalition. We do want to see people taking home more money and what that needs is productivity gains across the economy. What we want to avoid is a wage price spiral in an inflationary environment that could be very damaging indeed. And part of what's a bad about this legislation, there's a lot that's bad, but it really with the idea of multi-employer bargaining, which is compulsory, it gets forced on employers whether they want to do it or not. We're on track to go back to the bad old days of 1970s industrial relations arrangements pattern bargaining and wage increases at one company being replicated across the whole economy. And you just find you're chasing your tail because that drives economy wide increases in inflation and rather than achieving that, we all want, which is increases in real wages for workers, you actually go backwards. That is one of the real risks of what's being done here. So it's a false premise that Labor is using in arguing why they're doing this. [inaudible]...

**TOM CONNELL:** ... Just to clarify . So you're you're what? What you believe is happening is simply a dip in productivity that it's not a case of workers are no longer getting a fair share of the money companies are earning.

**PAUL FLETCHER:** Look the great that Labor and the unions make a whole series of claims, they claim, for example, that there has been an increase in casualisation in the workforce. That's absolutely incorrect. The statistics on the percentage of people who are casual, for example, those percentages haven't moved very much over the last ten or 20 years. Similarly the number of people working for labour hire firms, those percentages haven't moved very much either, but Labor hates them because the unions don't like them. What the unions want is more workers, more delegateships, more control at Labor Party State conferences. That's what's going on here. And there's all kinds of smokescreen arguments being used by the Labor Party. But the reality is that getting rid of the Australian Building and Construction Commission because the CFMEU wants them to get rid of it, they're getting rid of the Registered organisations Commission because they don't want the unions to be subject to the scrutiny of an independent government organisation. And this is about giving effect to the agenda of the union bosses. You know, less than 10% of all workers are in the private sector are members of unions, and so Labor's about using government coercion to try and force up the number of people are in unions because in the marketplace those workers are saying, I don't seem to be in the union now we support unions. There's a role for unions in the economy, but it shouldn't be on the table having your arms twisted to join them.

**TOM CONNELL:** Got to leave it there. Paul Fletcher, we will talk again soon, thank you.

**PAUL FLETCHER:** Thanks Tom.

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