SENATOR THE HON JAMES McGRATH
SHADOW SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE
SHADOW MINISTER FOR URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CITIES
SHADOW MINISTER FOR BRISBANE 2032 OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES
SENATOR FOR QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT

NEWS24 POLITICS NOW

TOPICS: MIGRATION CAPS, GAS RESERVATION SCHEME, VICTORIAN ELECTION, REAL WAGES DECLINE

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E&OE.....

Ashleigh Gillon
Joining us live now is the Shadow Urban Infrastructure and Cities Minister, James McGrath. James, thanks so much for your time. We really appreciate it. Just firstly on that story from Ruben Spargo, we've learnt One Nation wants to slash Australia's humanitarian intake, reducing the number of refugees and those parent visas given out. We heard Pauline Hanson on News 24 earlier saying it will save millions and millions of dollars. But do you agree that the move would just be too harsh on Australian families?

Senator James McGrath
I think you've got to get the right balance. And the Coalition have done that. We've said we will reduce the refugee intake from 20,000 to 10,000. We've said that we're going to keep the parents' visas as is. So, we think we've got the right balance. We've made sure that our policies have been costed by the Parliamentary Budget Office. This is another One Nation immigration policy, I think it's probably the fifth or sixth policy that they've had in as many weeks or months. We're unsure whether David Farley has endorsed this particular policy. You've got to make sure that when you're running to be Prime Minister of this country that you have sincere, sober, sensible policies and the policy put forward by One Nation this morning certainly isn't that.

Ashleigh Gillon
I'm keen to get your view on this gas reservation scheme. We've been reporting today the WA Premier saying his state's secured this carve-out, which essentially means Western Australia can run its own race when it comes to reserving gas in that state.

Where does that leave the Coalition in terms of whether or not you'll now support that gas reservation plan as it's amended in the Senate?

Senator James McGrath
Well, Senator McDonald, who has the lead for this, put out a number of principles back in September. One of them was in relation to existing schemes, such as the WA one. So, as a Coalition, we welcome that. But there are a number of other issues that need to be dealt with through the proposal that the government have put on the table. Those discussions, I understand, are taking place, but we need to make sure that there is gas for Australians, we need make sure there is certainty for business, and we need to make sure that it does contribute to affordable energy.

Ashleigh Gillon
Where does it leave your home state of Queensland? I've seen the LNP Treasurer there saying that Queensland would be the biggest loser from WA being carved out because it means that Queensland would bear a disproportionate share of the scheme's costs and risks.

Senator James McGrath
Well, what it shows is that Queensland, once again, is doing the heavy lifting because we've had a Labor government in Victoria who've done nothing for 12 years and haven't approved any projects. We've got a New South Wales government who is also just treading water. But in Queensland, we've got a state government who are pushing ahead. Dale Last, the minister, is signing off on approvals as quick as he possibly can. And we would want to make sure that no state is disadvantaged, and that's something that'll be taken into account. We need the other states to lift their game, and that is why it is very good to hear Jess Wilson say that she wants to get applications from appropriate companies within six months so she can give approval, so Victoria can also contribute to the energy solution for Australia.

Ashleigh Gillon
You mentioned Jess Wilson and how the Liberals are going there in Victoria. What's your take on what's likely to happen in the next couple of weeks and when Victorians head to the polls? How big a win are you expecting Jess Wilson might have?

Senator James McGrath
Well, Alison Hannon is the campaign director down in Victoria. And to speak as a former campaign director, what Alison is saying to everybody at headquarters, to all the Liberal Party and National Party members and all the candidates is: “today is the first day of pre-poll. We've got 10 days until polling day. Everybody get out there and work hard”. The Labor Party have run a corrupt cabal of a government there for the last 12 years. But one thing the Labor Party can do is run dirty campaigns. We've seen them focus on what school Jess went to, what her dad did, things like that. They've got to win 16 seats to get

a majority of one. The Liberals not only have to beat the Labor Party, they have to beat history. It is a big, big ask. It is certainly the case that I think there will be change in Victoria. But if you want to get rid of the Labor Party, you've got to vote for the Liberal Party or the National Party, and it's 10 days to go.

Ashleigh Gillon
Yep, we'll be watching very closely as we edge closer and closer, of course. Plenty of coverage coming up here on News 24 over those next 10 days and of course on election night. James, I did want to get your take on the wages data out today. What was your read on what it means for the economic outlook as we look towards 2027?

Senator James McGrath
What was really interesting about the data today was how the Labor Party government chose to interpret it. The wages data today showed that real wages growth has gone backwards over the last two quarters. But we had Labor ministers in the Senate today, just being cock-a-hoop because real wages growth has gone backwards and they're talking about nominal wages growth. Well, Australians don't live in a nominal universe. They live in the real world. They live the real universe. And real wages have gone backwards. So, there's a real disconnect between what is happening in Canberra, what's happening in the Senate with the Labor ministers, and what people are experiencing out in the real world, where there is a cost-of-living crisis - pushed along by government inflation - where people are doing it tough. They've had 17 interest rate rises, and you've got Labor ministers doing poor impersonations of Marie Antoinette, saying: “let them eat cake”. I think the Labor Party need to wake up to themselves. It is tough out there and admit it is tough. Admit that your policies have contributed to the pain that is being felt by Australians.

Ashleigh Gillon James McGrath, I appreciate you making the time for us. Thank you.

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Media contact: Jack Manning – 0408 059 639 – jack.manning@aph.gov.au