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TELEVISION INTERVIEW
SKY NEWS WITH PETER STEFANOVIC
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SUBJECTS: Parliament's return; wage subsidies.

PETER STEFANOVIC, HOST: Joining me now is Tony Burke, Manager of Opposition Business. Tony Burke good morning to you. Thanks so much for joining us So how much of a logistical challenge is this?

TONY BURKE, MANAGER OF OPPOSITION BUSINESS: Look we need to be able to get in the order of about 60 members of Parliament, between 50 and 60 members of Parliament, for the House of Representatives. It's a smaller number for the Senate. So there's no doubt we'll be able to do it. Some members of Parliament who come no doubt will be in a situation where they then have to self-quarantine when they get back home, under the current rules. One of the things that we were able to do last time, because we had fewer people, was spread everyone about, keep doors open, make sure that there

are no joint touch points anywhere – because the last thing you want to do is have Parliament be a cause of the virus spreading. And by all accounts, through all the evidence we've had so far, the systems we put in place last time did work.

STEFANOVIC: So how many MPs are actually required?

BURKE: Technically you can get down to the House of Reps to as low as 31. There's 151 of us altogether and you can get down to as low as 31 and it's still a constitutional sitting. Now we don't need to go that low, and certainly the challenge is saying to Members of Parliament that they shouldn't come because they want to be there. This is really important legislation. There are aspects of it that we're still going through in terms of how precisely it's targeted to some people. But there is no doubt the impact, the net impact of this legislation, is going to be to change a whole lot of lives – that's why we were calling for it for so long. So we're going to make sure that we get there and we get this done.

STEFANOVIC: Well I mean last time I think is about 90 MPs that were able to make it but there has obviously since been some changes. Just run us through some of those logistical challenges – I mean we're talking about some border restrictions that are in place, there are limited flights as well, particularly that involve other parts of Australia more so.

BURKE: Yeah look there's a few key challenges. The first is there are some Members of Parliament where the groups that they deal with everyday are just too high risk to be able to come. So a number of Members of Parliament where, by the nature of their seats or their job, who are constantly in contact with people from remote Indigenous communities, or regularly in contact, they made a decision last time that it was best for them to not come. You've then got the

challenge of just physically how do you get there? If you're coming for example from Tasmania or Western Australia in particular, or even from a whole lot of regional areas, it's very difficult to physically get there. And then different states have different rules as to whether or not federal Members of Parliament then need to self-quarantine for fourteen days the moment they get back.

STEFANOVIC: Well they all do don't they?

BURKE: I live in New South Wales so the rule, I technically haven't moved across any border. And if we only needed 31 then you could in fact do it without people from every state. But you know, it still needs to be a national Parliament so as much as possible there will be some people who make the decision to self-quarantine on the other side of it.

STEFANOVIC: Okay, will Labor push next Wednesday to keep Parliament sitting?

BURKE: Our view has been that the Parliament should be sitting now. That's been our view and we don't stop for a minute, regardless of what legislation there is in making that call. Now more than ever Parliament should be sitting. People are in a situation where there's a crisis and they want to be able to know that the Government is fully accountable and we're monitoring the rollout of all the different programs. The grab you ran a little bit earlier from Josh Frydenberg about how much money is being spent is in fact the reason why Parliament should be sitting. To not have oversight over expenditure of that magnitude is a pretty extraordinary situation. Now under the rules the Government can cancel sittings. We're not happy about that. We are a minority in the House of Representatives, so when they voted that we want sit until August, I spoke against that for the Labor Party, as did Jim Chalmers. We voted against that. We divided against that. But the government has the

numbers on the floor. We said at the time it was ridiculous to think that we would not be coming back before August and here we are now, we'll be back next week. But let's not pretend that one question time for one day does the job on accountability – it doesn't.

STEFANOVIC: Okay well what about going beyond that? Because like you mentioned there, Parliament will only be sitting in a limited capacity for the rest of the year.

BURKE: Well that's right and that's why I continue on your program now Peter to make the call that we've been making ever since the Government moved to change the parliamentary calendar. Yes, getting Parliament together is logistically harder than it normally has been. But it's more important than it's ever been. And we should not be taking backward steps on accountability in the middle of a crisis. So we should be continuing to sit. It shouldn't just be a one day sitting, it should be longer than that. We can't force that but the Government should hear that. To say to the Australian people in the middle of a crisis that accountability has gone missing is not the right message. And particularly at a time where a whole lot of these measures, you've got both sides of Parliament working together to make sure that they happen. It's absurd that the Government's insisting on basics like not having not having a week where you can continually ask questions and let the public know that the Government's accountable.

STEFANOVIC: Tony Burke has Parliament, or the sitting of Parliament, ever been this complicated?

BURKE: No. No. Well certainly not in our lifetime. You know when Federation first started and a whole lot of members had to get there by rail or by ship, yep, those days would have been complicated with very long lead times. But in our

lifetime – the wars didn't bring on this sort of complication. The Parliament continued to sit during the first and second world wars. And the challenge this time isn't that it's really difficult to get parliament to sit. It's simply not practical to get all 151 members of the House of Reps and all 76 senators there. It means that we have to sit in a scaled-back way but we can still meet and we can still hold the Government to account and we can still debate issues that need to be debated on the impact that this is happening. And there are different points where there are gaps. Let's not forget, only a couple of weeks ago the Government was ruling out a wage subsidy when we were calling for it. It's now the policy of the nation. Having debate is the way to make sure we get the outcomes that the people need during all of this.

STEFANOVIC: There's no doubt that this legislation will pass right?

BURKE: Well that's right. That's right. But we reserve the right to move amendments. We reserve the right to fine tune any of the detail. And look there's a few areas at the moment in terms of people who miss out that have been raised really constantly. I've had both workers and business people I've got to say contact me where the 12 month rule on casuals knocks out a majority of a workforce at different places, and particularly when you think of the industries that have been hardest hit like hospitality and retail. They're highly casualised, high turnover industries. If you're a really big business then it might be less of a problem for you because you have more full- and part-timers. There are lots of small businesses where the design of this means that where they hoped they might be saved, on its current design the way it looks – and we're still yet to see the legislation and get a full briefing – but there's some businesses that still miss out in a big way, particularly on the 12-month casual rule. Similarly there are people in the arts and entertainment industry where their jobs are provided by forward contracts, who have been completely smashed by this and were the first industry to be smashed. And it looks on the

face of it like a lot of those companies won't be able to do anything for their workforce. So there's still room to work these details through.

STEFANOVIC: Okay, we're going to leave it there. But Tony Burke, Manager of Opposition Business, appreciate your time. Thanks so much for joining us this morning.

BURKE: Great to be able to talk.

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