

Transcript

Event: Jennifer Westacott interview with Kieran Gilbert, Afternoon Agenda Sky News

Speakers: Kieran Gilbert; Jennifer Westacott, chief executive Business Council of Australia

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E&OE

Kieran Gilbert, Host: Let's go live to the chief executive of the Business Council, Jennifer Westacott. Jennifer, I know the BCA has already made this commitment from your perspective, do you welcome the fact that the federal government's shifting in that direction as well?

Jennifer Westacott, Business Council chief executive: Absolutely. It was a really important signal from the PM last night. Business is very committed to that target, companies are getting on and doing things to get towards that target. What was really important about the PM's speech last night though, Kieran, was not just that signal, which is very important because it will draw in investment and it gives companies that certainty, but his very strong message that this had to be part of a broader economic transformation, a broader diversification of what we're doing to create new industries and new jobs. And his critical recognition that businesses are already getting on and doing things, but that it has to be business driving this through innovation and technology.

Kieran: He made it in a fairly colorful way. He said it won't be achieved by those in inner city wine bars, it's going to be led by industry. How was that received?

Jennifer: Look, I think he's reflecting a really important point, which is that we have to make sure that this is something that the whole community can relate to. Particularly people in regional Australia who don't want to be told how to live their lives and how to do things in their communities. And that's why one of the things we'd like to see going forward in any kind of climate strategy is that we have regional transition plans. That we actually go out, we look at the assets in regions, can they be converted? Can they be substituted? How do we skill people up? How do we manage that adjustment as we change from one technology to the other? And how do we make sure that regional Australia gets a really good share of those new jobs and new industries? And that's got to be front of mind, that just can't happen by accident. So he's right to say, look, all Australians have got to be part of this, but we've really got to, Kieran, and work hard

to make sure that regional Australians get access to those new jobs and new industries that he talked about last night.

Kieran: He announced a \$120 million deregulation package for business ahead of the budget next month. Is that a down payment or is that enough to deal with what has been, I know something that you've spoken about many times in terms of making it easier for people to do business in this country?

Jennifer: Look, it's an important contribution. Don't forget, deregulation doesn't always require spending money. In fact, sometimes it just requires people not to do things and to remove the layers of red tape. That doesn't always cost money. So look, it's an important down payment. I think he acknowledged this was an ongoing piece of work for the government. I think he acknowledged that it's one thing to say it, it's another thing to do it and that the government's on a long journey here as part of Ben Morton's taskforce. And we're very keen to work with the government on that because what was clear throughout the pandemic, and obviously the pandemic is still going but Australia is being spared very significant infection rates, is how much regulation was put to one side so that we can get on with keeping people in their jobs and keeping industries going. So, my question is always, don't put it back, let's ask the question, do we really need that? Before we actually jump to the natural inclination to, well let's reinstate those regulations. So it's an important announcement he made last night. The government's very focused on this. We're very keen to work with them. It's going to be thousands of little things we do in getting rid of that regulation and that red tape that is going to free business up to create jobs and to keep that momentum that everyone in the room last night felt, that energy. The economy is bouncing back, people were back in the room together and there's going to be lots and lots of those de-reg steps that are going to build on that momentum.

Kieran: Speaking of those little things, some of these things that you recognised last night weren't so little but done without the glare of publicity. This was the Big Heart award that I was really interested that the BCA was undertaking this and some of the measures to honour people who did some incredible things over the last 12 months. Who won that award?

Jennifer: So, John Appleby from Coles won it in two categories. He won it from the judges, we had some pretty esteemed judges, Dame Quentin Bryce, Sir Peter Cosgrove, Shane Fitzsimmons and he won it from the people's choice awards. We had over 12,000 people vote. Look, what we were trying to do with those awards, Kieran, is a couple of things. As we were doing our work on our BizRebuild initiative, it became really clear to us the incredible things that people had done, particularly during the bush fires, but also in COVID. And we wanted to celebrate and recognise that. And the second part of it is just to remind everybody that business is about people. It's about communities. It's not some abstract concept of a whole pile of people sitting around a board table. It's the people who work at Coles and Woolies, the people who put food on our table during COVID. John Appleby from Coles, who slept in the shop to keep it open, who had loaves of bread baked so that people could come into the shop and be fed. We want to celebrate those people and be proud of them. And we should be really proud of what business is doing and making it clear, business is people. It is the community.

Kieran: Yeah. Well, John Appleby, congratulations on winning that Big Heart award. Wonderful effort during the fires. And a good initiative too, well done to the BCA. Thanks Jennifer. Talk to you soon.

Jennifer: Thanks very much, Kieran.

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