

Barnaby Joyce takes personal leave after horror day

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

Former deputy prime minister Barnaby Joyce has abruptly gone on personal leave until the end of June, after a horror day in which he shifted the onus to partner Vikki Campion for the widely-criticised sale of their TV interview.

Facing a mounting public backlash from colleagues, Joyce blamed media intrusion and said Campion had felt “screwed over” by it.

A [clip](#) of the interview, for which Channel 7 reportedly paid \$150,000, was shown on Tuesday night, with a emotional Campion saying “I couldn’t help it. You can’t help who you fall in love with.”

The full interview, which features the couple and their new baby Sebastian, will be aired on Sunday. They say the money will be put in a trust fund for Sebastian.

Joyce looked visibly under strain during the day and sources said he was not in a good head space.

He sought leave from the Nationals whip, Michelle Landry, and he has been granted a parliamentary pair by Labor – which means the numbers in the House of Representatives will not be affected.

He will miss the June sittings, not returning to parliament until it resumes in August, after the winter recess. Government sources said his actual leave from work was until the end of June.

He immediately drove from Canberra on Tuesday evening.

Joyce said that he would not charge for an interview if it was just with him as a politician.

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But “they wanted an interview obviously to get Vikki’s side of the story and like most mothers she said, ‘seeing as I am being screwed over and there are drones and everything over my house in the last fortnight, paparazzi waiting for me, if everybody else is making money then [I am] going to make money out of it’,” he [told](#) the Australian.

He said they had “tried just burning this out and that didn’t work,” and argued privacy protections were inadequate.

“If we had a proper tort of privacy we would never have had to do this.”

Senior Coalition figures, picking up the public reaction, have come out in open criticism of the deal. Prime Minister Turnbull, speaking on Tasmanian radio station LAFM, said the paid interview was “not a course of action that I would’ve encouraged him to take”. Turnbull said he would leave the matter for a “private discussion” with Joyce. But in the event, the two did not talk on Tuesday.

Revenue Minister Kelly O’Dwyer [told](#) the ABC “most Australians are pretty disgusted” by Joyce’s action.

Nationals leader Michael McCormack said “I wouldn’t do it”, [telling](#) Fairfax Media: “At the end of the day all politicians are judged by the court of public opinion and that is what people think of them at the ballot box on election day.”

McCormack had particular reason to be angry at Joyce – the controversy took attention from the recruitment of crossbench senator Steve Martin to the Nationals, which was [announced](#) on Monday.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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