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Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon
 ABC Radio 'Early AM'
 Wednesday 6 July 2016

Subjects: Federal Election, Medicare
 [*includes comments from Julie Bishop and Bill Shorten]

MICHAEL BRISSENDEN : The Federal Coalition has now pulled three seats in front of Labor, but it's still not clear if it will be able to form a majority government. As counting continues, the Prime Minister has conceded that the Coalition will have to work harder to rebuild the trust of voters when it comes to Medicare. The Australian Medical Association says that should mean an end to the freeze on GP rebates, and it wants long term decisions on health funding. From Canberra, Naomi Woodley reports.

REPORTER: The Deputy Liberal Leader Julie Bishop has joined the Prime Minister and others in trying to understand why voters are deserting the major parties.

JULIE BISHOP: *There's a level of frustration, a level of disillusionment. They want to be heard, they want their concerns heard. Of course, different people have different concerns, but it's a question of listening more, responding more acutely to the issues that they raise.*

REPORTER: She's told 7:30 she believed the Coalition was on track to win up until Labor switched its focus to Medicare.

JULIE BISHOP: *Two weeks of unrelenting, ferocious campaigning to save Medicare, when everybody knew that Medicare was not going to be privatised.*

REPORTER: The Government calls Labor's campaign an outrageous lie, but the Opposition leader Bill Shorten isn't backing down.

BILL SHORTEN: *I accept that what he's doing with his cuts is moving the burden of Medicare from the Government to the private individuals. If you can't guarantee Medicare, well you're making it more expensive to get an x-ray or a blood test. You can't be guaranteeing Medicare when a third of GPs will be unable to offer bulk billing. You can't guarantee Medicare when you're increasing the price of prescription drugs, and you certainly don't guarantee Medicare by not properly funding the hospitals of Australia.*

- REPORTER: The Prime Minister says the Coalition laid fertile ground for Labor's attack, and he says it'll need to work much harder to rebuild the trust of voters. That's welcome news to the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Michael Gannon.
- MICHAEL GANNON: What this election has shown to us is that health is at the centre of everyone's thinking when they cast their vote. It is a moral imperative of government to prioritise the health of its citizens. I think what we've seen in the last few days is that it's a political imperative as well.
- REPORTER: Dr Gannon says the AMA has been calling for changes to the Coalition's policy throughout the campaign.
- MICHAEL GANNON: Most notably of those is the freeze on patient rebates for seeing GPs and other specialists. That was number one in the AMA's campaign; we repeatedly asked the Coalition to unwind the freeze.
- REPORTER: He says the extension of the rebate freeze, combined with the Government's previous attempts to introduce a GP co-payment meant Labor's campaign resonated with voters, even after the Coalition ruled out privatising Medicare.
- MICHAEL GANNON: Other elements of Coalition policy lent themselves to the scare, and I think they paid for it at the polling booth.
- REPORTER: During the campaign, the Prime Minister ruled out any outsourcing of the Medicare payment system, but the AMA says it is antiquated and out of date. Dr Gannon says he's ready to work with all sides of politics to find sustainable ways to fund the health system.
- MICHAEL GANNON: We want to see decisions made that make Medicare safe, not just for the next three years, but for the next ten or fifteen years. Now that's going to involve some difficult conversations about how we fund the health system, but fixing the payment system and protecting those most vulnerable in our community, those who felt so scared that it affected their vote last Saturday, and that's a good starting point.

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