

Malcolm Turnbull caught on tape slamming Tony Abbott, Kevin Rudd

Turnbull slams government in secret audio (TODAY)1:45



Malcolm Turnbull has lashed out in a secret recording in which he criticises the government over the recent leadership spill. CREDIT: TODAY

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Scott Morrison says he would prefer to “leave all of the ghosts in the past”, after Malcolm Turnbull described their predecessors Tony Abbott and Kevin Rudd as “miserable ghosts” who hung around politics because they were “driven by hate” after losing the prime ministership.

The former prime minister was recorded describing the coup which saw him lose his job on August 24 as “crazy” in an address to a group of young leaders in New York on Friday. In the recording, obtained by the Nine Network, Mr Turnbull said the government was trailing Labor 51-49 in the published polls, but claimed they were ahead 52-48 according to internal polls focused on Labor and the Coalition’s 20 most marginal seats.

“But for reasons that they’ve not been able to explain, you know, there was an element of the party, of the media, that wanted to blow the government up, and they did,” Mr Turnbull said.

“And of course, they didn’t get their guy up, they got ScoMo.”

Mr Turnbull said it was important in life “not to be driven by hate”, saying Mr Abbott and Mr Rudd had failed to move on after losing the top job. “When you stop being prime minister, that’s it,” Mr Turnbull said. “There is no way I would be hanging around embittered — Kevin Rudd or Tony Abbott — well seriously, these people are like, sort of miserable, miserable ghosts.”

Nine initially interpreted Mr Turnbull as accusing Mr Rudd and Mr Abbott of “hanging around like a lipid”, in the poor quality recording, while The Australian interpreted the utterance as “like a limpet”.

Mr Turnbull issued a tweet this morning clarifying that he had in fact used the adjective “embittered”.

“I hate to spoil a good lipid or limpet (or lipidinous limpet) story — but the adjective mistaken for, variously, an indissoluble fat or a tenacious sea slug is “embittered”, the former Prime Minister tweeted at Nine political editor Chris Uhlmann. “I guess an iPhone at 50 paces is not an ideal recording device!”

Mr Morrison said he would “leave all of the ghosts in the past”. “That’s where ghosts best remain,” the Prime Minister told a press conference in Western Australia. Mr Morrison said his focus was on ensuring the new generation of Liberal leadership delivered for the Australian people. “I know others will go off on some tangents in commentary, but that’s not our focus,” he said.

Asked whether he would prefer Mr Turnbull kept quiet, Mr Morrison said: “Oh look, I talk to Malcolm quite regularly actually, and we keep in touch.” Mr Morrison said he was very pleased Mr Turnbull had been able to represent Australia at a recent United Nations event. “We really appreciated his involvement in that and he’s shown a preparedness to continue to do things like this where there’s an opportunity to do so, and I want to thank him very much for continuing to serve his country in that way,” he said.

“I mean he’s no longer in politics, he’s made that pretty clear, and he’s not interested in offering political commentary, but you know he still has a lot to offer the country, I have no doubt, and he will make a big contribution in his post-political career.”

Asked whether he saw Mr Abbott as a “miserable ghost”, Mr Morrison said the former prime minister and indigenous education envoy would be running at the next election. “He’s running for Warringah. He’s out there right now in

remote and regional Australia working on one of the most — and in Western Australia, you know this better than most states — one of our most intractable problems we have, and that is to ensure we get and keep indigenous kids in school,” Mr Morrison said. “That’s what Tony Abbott’s working on. So I’m glad he’s running again.”

Asked what he made of Mr Turnbull’s comments about the Coalition being ahead according to private polling when he was ousted as prime minister, Mr Morrison said only: “Well I expressed my views on that yesterday.” Mr Morrison yesterday declared the Coalition would have won the next election under Mr Turnbull.

His comments contrast with those of leadership rival Peter Dutton, who last week said he had no regrets about challenging Mr Turnbull for the leadership of the Liberal Party, arguing the Coalition was on its way to a significant defeat under the former prime minister.

Mr Morrison made a joking comparison between the West Coast Eagles’ fortunes in Saturday’s AFL grand final and his own. “They’ve had a great win. I was there on the weekend, and you know, it says something, doesn’t it?” he said. “You can be behind in the first quarter by a fair way, but what matters is where you are when the siren sounds, and even if that means that you’ve got to put in a pretty amazing kick from right along the boundary line there ... just goes to show, you know, when you have someone who is in front of you and they think they’ve got it all sewn up, you never know, do you?”

‘We would have won with Malcolm’: ScoMo

Yesterday, Mr Morrison said he was confident that the government would have won the next election under Mr Turnbull. Asked whether an economic growth rate of 3.4 per cent, strong revenue and record job numbers were Mr Turnbull’s legacy, Mr Morrison said they were “our government’s legacy”. “I’ve been part of this government for five years. I’ve been on the ERC for four of the five,” Mr Morrison told ABC TV. “I was the treasurer.

“This is a Coalition government. We’ve stopped the boats, we’ve balanced the budget, we’re driving the economy forward, we’ve got unemployment for young people down to 11.2 per cent — the strongest it’s been in years. This is our government. “Yes, we’ve had three leaders over that period of time and I’m proud to have served in all of that period of government. I acknowledge

Malcolm, I acknowledge (former prime minister) Tony (Abbott), I acknowledge (former treasurer) Joe (Hockey), I acknowledge (Foreign Affairs Minister and former defence minister) Marise (Payne), I acknowledge (former foreign affairs minister) Julie (Bishop).

“What a great team we’ve had.”

The Turnbull government trailed Labor 49-51 in the three Newspolls preceding the August leadership spills. Asked whether he was confident at that point that the government would win the next election under Mr Turnbull, Mr Morrison said: “Yes.” Asked why Mr Turnbull had been deposed, Mr Morrison said: “I didn’t vote for the spill.” “I wasn’t part of the movement that sought to change the government,” he said.

WA Labor MP Anne Aly said she agreed with Mr Turnbull that it was disappointing to a lot of Australians that former prime ministers had engaged in “white-anting” their colleagues.

“If you have a look at what recently happened with the demise of Malcolm Turnbull and Scott Morrison coming in, it wasn’t just Tony Abbott,” Dr Aly told Sky News. “It seems to be much bigger than Tony Abbott. “There seems to be quite a cohort within the Coalition government that is being disruptive and that caused the recent spill, so yeah look I kind of agree with Malcolm Turnbull.

“I think he’s probably got more experience in politics than I have, so I think him pointing it out is correct. “The fact is that Tony Abbott has been fairly disruptive, but it’s not just him. There are deep schisms within the Coalition,” the first-term MP and former academic said.

Rachel Baxendale