

## David Cameron: Let's win it for Britain

Speaking today at the Conservative Party Spring Forum in Brighton, David Cameron said:

(Check against delivery)

“Thank you. So here we all are again, conference time, the polls closing, a general election in the offing, and I've got to make another speech without any notes! So I hope you'll bear with me, but I want to talk to you very directly today. They don't hand general election victories and governments on a plate to people in this country, and quite right too. And I know how important it is that we recognise something I've always said, which is this election was always going to be close. This election was always going to be a real choice. Labour or Conservative, Gordon Brown or me. And this election was always going to be a real fight for our party, a fight to make sure we serve the country we love and that's the fight we're going to have.

Now before I start, there are a couple of things I wanted to say. The first is about the people sitting behind me, I'm really proud of the team in the shadow cabinet that we have put together. I'm proud of the fact that we work together, we work with each other, we actually like working with each other. Now it's wrong to single people out, but I think the British people can see that in George Osborne, there's someone who's got the courage to deal with our deficit and with our debt.

I think people can see in Ken Clarke someone who's got all the experience of how we're really going to get our economy growing again. I think people can see in Theresa May someone who's got the passion to get our country working again. And there's something else: when you think of the incredible chopping and changing that there's been with government ministers, just think about it, since we've been at war in

Afghanistan, we've had five different Defence Secretaries, one of them part-time. I think we've had about eight Energy Ministers. I believe in finding good people, trusting them and letting them get on with the job. We have just had one Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, and he would be a brilliant Secretary of State for Defence.

We've had just one Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley, who knows more about our NHS than I think anyone else alive, and he would make a great Health Secretary.

And I've only had one Shadow Foreign Secretary, and William Hague I think would be the finest Foreign Secretary this country has had for a generation.

There was something else I wanted to say, which is about people engaged in a real fight, on the other side of the world, in Afghanistan. One of the great privileges that I've had as leader of our party is each year, I've been able to go to Afghanistan and see for myself what our troops are doing, and whether it's talking with the Coldstream Guards in Central Helmand or the Paras in Sangin, or the RAF Regiment guarding the base at Kandahar or Bastion, you just come away struck with the dedication, the professionalism, the brilliance, the courage of these people, and I know that everyone at this conference will want to send the clearest possible signal to all those in our armed services, we salute you, we honour you, we support, we will always equip you properly, we will back your families, we will help you in all our circumstances, because frankly, you are the best of British.

Now we've got a maximum of 70 days between now and the general election that we must win. And you know what, this isn't an election that it would be quite nice to win, because we've got some quite good policies, or quite good to win, because some of these people would make quite good ministers. It is an election we have to win because our country is in a complete mess, and it is our patriotic duty to turn it around and give this country a

better future, and I think everyone in this country knows ...

I think everyone knows that another five years of Gordon Brown would be a disaster for our country. Another five years of spending and bloat and waste and debt and taxes. Another five years of failing to get to grips with our big social problems. Another five years in our politics of that big, top-down, bossy "I know best" sort of approach. And another five years of a government that is so dysfunctional, so divided, so weak, you've got a bunch of ministers that can't work with him, but can't get rid of him; you've got a Prime Minister who can't work with them, but can't make his government work. They're just locked in this dangerous dance of death that is dragging our whole country down. And it is only the Conservative Party that can give people the hope of a different future. And as we leave this conference today, we must resolve, we will not let you down.

We've had a great conference here in Brighton, we've had a great year in our party, you've heard about some of the things we've achieved in local government and in Parliament and elsewhere, but I think we all know, we all know that the British people have still got some big questions that they want to ask us, and that we've got to answer. They want to know what sort of party we are. They want to know what we stand for. They want to know the changes that we'll make, and the difference those changes will make, and they want to know some things about me. Are you really up for it? Are you really up to it? Are you really going to make that difference? And it's those four questions that I want to take the time to answer today.

First of all, what sort of party are we? Well, you decided that four and a half years ago when you elected me as your leader. We decided then that we wanted to modernise our party to get back in touch with the country that we wanted to govern. Now I didn't do that on my own, you did it. It was you that wrote out the placards, that marched on the streets, that campaigned to save

our community hospitals, our maternity units, our GPs' surgeries. It was you that made sure that for the first time in our history, we could look the British people in the face and say, yes, we are the party of the National Health Service, and you should be proud of that.

It was you who campaigned at local election after local election, under the slogan, "Vote blue, go green", that have demonstrated our councils are the greenest and the best in Britain, and that we are the new environmental party in Britain, and you should be proud of that too. And it was you, it wasn't me, it was you who selected those brilliant women candidates, including Charlotte Vere, right here in Brighton Pavilion, which we're going to win at the next election.

It was you who selected those candidates, so if we win that general election, instead of 18 women MPs on the Conservative side, there will be more than 60. And you've done something else, you have selected black and minority ethnic candidates, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, right across our country. Not in Labour seats, not in marginal seats, but in safe Conservative seats. And to people who say to me that this modernisation, that this change was just some sort of paint job, I would say this: think of the young black British boy, looking at Parliament, looking at Britain and thinking, "What's my role? Do I belong? How am I going to get on?" He can look at the Tory party, yes, the Tory party, and he can see Kwasi Kwarteng, Sam Gyimah, Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, Shaun Bailey, Helen Grant and say, "They've got to the top of British politics, I belong here, and so can I".

And think about that young Muslim woman, living in Britain, wondering what her role is in modern Britain, who is able to switch on the television and watch, in primetime TV, on Question Time, as Sayeeda Warsi destroyed that ghastly piece of filth, Nick Griffin, and think yes, yes, I belong here, it's my country too.

That's what we've done as a party, we can now look the British people in the eye and say: this country, our country, this tolerant, compassionate, brilliant, multi-racial country, we are with you, we are like you, we are for you, we are ready to serve you, this modern Conservative Party made its choice and it's never going back.

So that's what this party is. Now what do we stand for? Well, first of all, let's get something straight about this election. This election is not a referendum on the government, this election is not a referendum on the Conservative Party, this election is a choice. It is a choice between five more years of Gordon Brown or change with the Conservative Party that has got the energy, that has got the leadership, that has got the values to really get this country going.

And this change that we talk about, it's not some airy fairy concept, it's not undefined, it is based on some very clear and conservative values. Take our economy. What we need in our economy today is the value of aspiration, we're not going to get a recovery from the government, we need a recovery from the private sector, from business, from individuals. We need this to be a country where people want to set up a business, take people on, make money, get ahead, have a sense, once again, that this country is about opportunity for all. I had a small businessman come to my surgery the other day, and he said every year, every year I have to try and drive down my costs and improve the quality of the goods that I sell to my customers. Why on earth can't my government try and do the same thing? That is the value we need.

The change we need in our society, it's not some sort of vague change, it's based on a very clear principle, a very clear value of responsibility. We think the responsible society is the good society. We believe in standing up and helping those people who

want to do the right thing, not the wrong thing.

I was on a radio phone-in in Kent the other day, and a young man rang up and said that he had got his girlfriend pregnant, and he wanted to move in with her, and together to bring up that child and give it the best start in life, but he had found out that if he moved in with his girlfriend, she would lose her benefits, and be much worse off, so he couldn't do it. What sort of crazy country sends a signal like that to people who want to do the best for their families? That's the change we've got to bring in this party, that's the value that we aspire to.

When it comes to change in our politics, again, it's not some vague change, it's not changing one group of politicians for another group of politicians, it is real change that says it is time to give people power and control over their lives. I think of all the people I meet in their 20s and 30s who say to me, "I can have so much freedom and choice and control about where I live, about how I work, about where I shop, about where I travel, why, when it comes to my school or my hospital or my government or my parliament or my politics, do I have so little control over what's done in my name?" This party has always believed in people power, not state power, and that's the change we need in our politics. So those are the principles, those are the values that we believe in. Aspiration and opportunity for all. Responsibility and backing people who do the right thing. And giving people more power and control over their lives.

Now let me try and answer the third question, the specific changes that we're going to bring, and the differences that they will make to people's lives. Let us start with the economy, because that is going to be the key issue in this election. That is why our country is in such danger at the moment. And let me say something very directly to Gordon Brown: Gordon Brown thinks he's the economy man, he wants everyone to believe that he's some sort of economic genius. What sort of genius is it that doubles the national debt? What sort of genius is it that takes

one of the best pension systems in Europe and wrecks it? What sort of genius is it that complicates the tax system, that furs up the benefits system, that drives down our competitiveness and drives up our tax rates? That is not genius, that's incompetence, and at this coming election, we're going to take out your record and we're going to tear it apart piece by piece.

Now the big argument, as you heard from George Osborne yesterday, is going to be about our deficit, and the clear and present danger it holds over our whole economy. And there's going to be a big argument about this deficit. Labour will say that if you do anything, literally anything to cut any piece of government spending immediately, you will somehow tip the country back into recession. We say that is nonsense. We say that if you don't do anything, you will see interest rates go up, you will see mortgage rates go up, you will see confidence drained away from our economy, and the country will go back into a deeper and darker recession. And on our side, we have a growing number of not just economists but also business people like Richard Branson and frankly half the country's retailers, who never stop telling me that they the government to get to grips with its own finances.

Now the government will produce its own economists, and there will be a great argument, but I think we should be confident about this: I think the British people know that we're right. They know that when you've maxed out on one credit card, it's not the right thing to rush off and get another one. They know with their own debts, the longer you leave it, the worse it gets. And as we make this argument, this bold, brave argument, that we've got to roll up our sleeves and get to deal with our deficit and deal with our debts, we should have the confidence that we're right and we're going to win that argument with the British people.

But dealing with the deficit isn't the only change that we're going

to bring, because to get our economy growing, we've got to do more than just deal with the deficit with early action and a proper plan, we've got to get this economy moving again, we've got to get people investing again, and that's why we're going to have that emergency budget in 50 days. That's why we're going to cut the main rate of corporation tax, cut the small company rate of corporation tax. That's why we're going to scrap the national insurance on the new businesses setting up on the first ten jobs that they take on. That is why we're going to unleash enterprise, not the forces of hell, but enterprise again in this country.

And you know what, Gordon Brown sometimes says that I'm a bit of a salesman. And do you know what? I plead guilty. And I'll tell you why, because in this country, with all our difficulties, we are going to need some salesmanship. I want to get out round the world, not filling up the aeroplane with journalists, but filling it up with businessmen. I want to get out there and sell our country to the world, say these are the companies you should be doing business with, this is the place you should be investing, Britain's the best place in the world to come and set up and invest. I want a really clear message to go out, that Britain is under new economic management, and we are open for business again.

Those are the changes we want to bring to our economy, changes based on the value of aspiration, changes that will get our country moving again, but in this party, we don't just dream of a stronger economy, we dream of a stronger and richer society. And some people say to me that I'm wrong to talk about the broken society, but I say when you've got the highest rate of family breakdown in Europe, when you've got one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy, when there are a million violent crimes committed every year, when there are 100 knife crimes committed every day, when a seven years old child starves to death in Birmingham, our second biggest city, and no one does anything about it, which bit of broken society don't these people

understand?

And we want to make big changes, really big changes, to build the stronger society. We're going to start with the most family-friendly manifesto that any party has produced in British political history. We're going to set out how we're going to recognise marriage in the tax system, how we're going to support couples in the benefits system, how we're going to give the right to flexibility to everyone with children up to the age of 18, how we're going to have a new army of health visitors to help mum and dad when the new child arrives, how we're going to do all these things to help all our families in all of our country.

But we know that helping families is not just about tax or benefit or regulation or laws, it's also about culture. Anyone bringing up children like me has that dread of switching on the television and you're bombarded with commercial messages, of going down to the shops and there are things you wouldn't want a 25-year old to wear, let alone a five year old, and the worry you have for the future, are they going to be sold alcohol and cigarettes and everything at an age before they're allowed to? So we've got to change the culture as well as the law. We've got to say to those television companies, think about the messages that you're putting out to our children. We've got to say to those retailers, think about the messages you send with the products that you sell. And to our licensed premises and bars and convenience stores and supermarkets and the rest of it, stop selling alcohol to people under age. To all those people who have been trashing family values in our country for too long, this has got to change.

The most important thing to Britain's families, and the most important thing to my family, has been the National Health Service, and it was at a conference like this that I stood up and said that you could sum up my priorities in just three letters, N-H-S, and if anything, the feeling has got stronger ever since then. I'm not saying our NHS is perfect, I've seen in recent years the great side of our NHS in the treatment my own family received, but I have also seen what happens when it goes wrong.

I don't think I will ever forget going to Stafford and meeting with some of the families whose relatives had been into that hospital, sometimes with minor ailments, and they had been treated so badly by a hospital that was pursuing targets and wasn't managing itself, and had bad standards of care, and those people had died completely unnecessarily.

So I know we've got a lot to do to improve our National Health Service, but I believe we've got the ideas to change it. Let's get rid of that process, target, bureaucratic, top-down, bossy, interfering culture, and judge our professionals by the results that they achieve, that's what we need. But I want everyone to know in this country, as they go up to put that cross in the box at the next election, that if I am their Prime Minister, as a politician, as a parent, as a husband, as a person, I love the NHS and I will always stand up and protect it.

If families are the first line of defence in trying to mend the broken society, then our schools and our education system must be the second line of defence, because some people don't get the best start in life, and I think when you look at our plans, you can see the most radical programme for reforming education that any party has produced at a recent election. And I tell you why it's so important: it makes me really angry that here we are, the sixth richest country in the world, and yet there are so many parents who can't get a good school for their child. There are people who mortgage themselves to go private, when they have paid their taxes, they should get a great state education. And above all, there is so much talent in our country that is left untapped because we don't have great schools in every part of our country.

Well, we are going to bust open the state monopoly, we are going to say to the churches, the charities, the voluntary bodies, come in and set up new great schools, sometimes small schools, so that we can have the diversity, the choice and the competition

that's there in the private sector for the wealthy, I want it in the state sector for everyone, especially the poorest in our country.

It's not magic, what a good school looks like. We all know, it's a school with a uniform, with a discipline, with children who get up from their seats when an adult walks into the room, where teachers set and teach by ability, where we get the basics right, these are things we should have in all our schools for all our children, and with the team led by Michael Gove, that is exactly what we are going to get.

To those who doubt us, I would just say this, to those who say, well, Labour tried some of those things but it hasn't happened, I would say this: imagine what you could achieve if you're not having to placate some left wing Labour MPs, if you're not having to cut deals with the teaching unions, if you're prepared to be clear to local education authorities about what their role would be. Just imagine what you could achieve. And we will have the attention to detail that has been so lacking.

Michael Gove and I were looking at the history curriculum recently for 11 to 13-year olds. There are only two historical figures mentioned: Wilberforce and Equiano. Now I'm a huge fan of Wilberforce, he was a Conservative. William has written a brilliant book about him. It's still available at all good bookshops. I think there are probably still some unsigned copies!

But what happened to Churchill, what happened to Florence Nightingale, what happened to the heroes of the Industrial Revolution? Britain has got the proudest, the most incredible history of any country in the world. Is it too much to ask that we teach our children about it?

As we need to be radical in reforming our schools, so we need to be radical in reforming our welfare system. It's simple, we are

compassionate Conservatives, we believe in helping those who cannot help themselves. If you cannot work, you deserve to be supported, you deserve support that can allow you to lead a reasonable and good quality of life. If you can work, and find it hard to work, we will help you, we will train you, we will unleash the private and voluntary sectors, who will often do it better than the state. But if you can work, you are offered work, and you don't choose to work, you cannot go on claiming benefits as before.

There's one group of people who I know want to hear very specifically from us about the benefits and the pensions that they receive, and that is Britain's pensioners. And I share their frustration. They have been told by party after party, in manifesto after manifesto, in document after document, that we are going to link the pension back with earnings rather than prices. But I believe we in this party really can look them in the eye and say that we'll do it. Why? Because we've made a tough choice. We have said that from 2016, we're going to move the retirement age a year later. Believe me, I've had e-mails, quite a lot of e-mails, from people in their late 50s who are not happy about this. But I believe we have the right argument. People are living longer in this country, people are having longer and happier retirements, and I think it is right to say we should move that retirement age. But above all, it enables us to look Britain's pensioners in the eye and say: you deserve security, dignity and a good quality of life in your old age, and we will link the pension back with earnings, that's a promise.

So those are some of the changes we're going to bring to our economy, and bring to our society. And I think we all know after the last year, we need some big changes, some really big changes when it comes to our politics. Now I'm proud of the fact that when it came to the expenses scandal, it was this party that acted first. It was this party that was the first to get MPs to pay back money, it was this party that was the first to make MPs put

openly, transparently, everything they claimed on the internet, and it was this party that was the first party to say these perks and benefits, like the MPs' pension scheme, which will close, have got to go.

But if we think that just dealing with expenses will solve the problem, we haven't understood what's wrong. People are incredibly frustrated with our political system. They see this great big expensive bloated bureaucracy at the top, and then they see so many things where they have so little control, and our radical plan is to deal with all of these things. We're going to start at the top, and we're going to say it's time to cut the size of the House of Commons, it's time to freeze ministers' pay, having cut it by 5 per cent, it is time to cut a third of the Whitehall bureaucracy, it is time to put our government on a diet. And we're going to look at those regions, yes, we really are going to look at those regions, and we're going to say those spatial strategies, those transport plans, those assemblies, most of those regional development agencies, those regional targets, the whole lot is going.

And when you look at our plans, when you look at almost any one of our policies, they are all about giving people more power and control over their lives. Look at our housing policy, it's about scrapping the housing targets, and allowing local areas to decide what to build and where to build it. When you look at our energy policy, it's about saying to people, if you generate some of your own electricity, you'll be paid for it, to make you more independent. When you look at any one of our policies, it's about driving power downwards and outwards, giving people power and control over their lives. Those are the changes that we want to bring.

So I've talked to you a bit about our party and what it stands for, I've talked to you about the values that we're going to stand up for, and I've talked to you about the specific changes that we're

going to make. The fourth thing, if I remember this rightly, was about me, and what people should expect.

All I can say is in the four and a half years of doing this job, every day that goes by, I feel more confident that I have what it takes, with this team behind me, to turn this country round and get it moving again, and that is what we badly need to do.

And I want to tell you some of the things that people should expect from me every day between now and polling day, and every day that I'm in government if we win that election. And the first thing is a sense of urgency. We are in a deep hole right now, in this country. Our deficit is a dark cloud hanging over us. We cannot put off what needs to be done. We've got to roll up our sleeves and get on with it, and I want people to know that from day one, that is exactly what we'd do.

But I think people also want a frankness, the fact is people are fed up with the soft soaping and the slogans and the soundbites, and the attempt to simplify it all, that we're all guilty of. People I think really understand that the economic changes we're going to have to make to deal with our deficit will be tough and will be hard, and they don't want that hidden from them. I think people know that the changes we need to make in our society will be difficult, and we'll have to confront some really deep vested interests. And frankly, the same goes for turning round our politics.

And when I say we need to be frank about Britain's problems, I mean all of them. We've got an energy crisis looming, and we need to tell people, if we don't invest in some extra capacity now, the lights are going to go out, and we will set out that clearly. People want us to be frank about the issue of immigration, it has been too high for too long, and it needs to be cut, and I will cut it, and we've set out reasonably, sensibly, calmly, how that should be done.

As well as frankness, I think people are right to expect

radicalism. Let's be frank about it, we're not going to turn around the performance of our schools and our education system unless we're radical from day one. We're not going to sort out the welfare system and make sure that it genuinely helps people but doesn't allow you to live an idle life through choice unless we are radical. People want to hear that from us, and it is actually what inspires all of these people sitting behind me. They're not in this to have some comfortable limousine, and a red box and a life as a minister, we're doing this because we want to change our country for the better.

The final thing people expect from me, and they should expect from me, is a sense of optimism. Yes, sometimes in this country, with all our difficulties of the deficit and the debt and the social problems and the political system that's gone so wrong, it can feel like we're looking down some dark tunnel, but there is a bright light at the end of it.

Just imagine, just imagine, if you can, what our country could be like if we did all of the things we've been talking about today at this conference and in our manifestos? Imagine what it would be like if instead of having so many sink schools, we've got the best state schools in Europe, that people really want to send their children to. Imagine if instead of a country where we've got a closed sign over our economy, it's the best place again to do business, to invest, to set up, to get things moving again. Imagine if we had a welfare system that really gave people a hand up rather than just a hand-out. We've got to inspire people with the potential of what we can about in this country, and how optimistic we are that if we take the country on this journey, we can achieve it.

Add it all together, what does it mean, this sense of optimism, this urgency, this radicalism? I think we need to give people a sense that if we make these difficult decisions, we will say yes, we did these difficult things, but we came through it together.

We need to give people a sense that being a citizen of Britain is not just about paying your taxes and obeying the law, it's about being part of something bigger than yourself, a sense that when you're growing up in this country, you really are part of a big and rich and vibrant society. I want us to be a country that feels like a community. That is what our optimistic ambitions should be all about.

So there it is, that is what we've got to do in these last 70 days, remind people what sort of a party we now are, tell them about the values that we stand for. Set out the changes we're going to make to make this country a better place, and demonstrate that we've got the leadership, we've got the values, we've got the ambition to make this country great again.

And as you go out there and campaign, I want you to do it fortified with two things in your mind. The first is that every day Gordon Brown is running this country is a grey day for Britain. Every day he is in charge is another day we're not gripping our problems, another day we are wasting our opportunities, another day when this country is not being all that it could be. But I also want you to think of this, to think of the great changes we can make in this country.

We're an amazing people in this country, when we get knocked down, we don't roll over and die, we get up and fight. So as you go out and campaign, I want you to think of the small businessman who's got a great dream to make his business take on the world and win it for him. I want you to think of the mother with the young child desperate for a great school, so that her child can fulfil all her dreams and ambitions, and win it for her. I want you to think of the nurse, of the doctor, of the teacher, of the probation officer, all of whom went into public service with a great vocation, but feel crushed by the weight of bureaucracy and government targets, who we're going to set free, and I want you to win it for them.

And while you do it, I want you to think of the incredible dark depression of another five years of Gordon Brown and say no, no, we're not going to do that, so come on then, let's get out there and win it for Britain!"