

David Cameron response to the Queen's Speech

Responding to the Queen's Speech today, David Cameron, said:

(Please check against delivery)

Mr Speaker, let me start by paying tribute to the firefighters who lost their lives in the tragedy in Warwickshire on Friday evening.

It is a reminder of the great risk our emergency services take on all our behalf, and our thoughts and prayers will be with their families.

Let me congratulate the proposer and seconder of the Loyal Address.

The Rt Hon member for Sheffield Central spoke powerfully about his constituency - and about the city he loves.

He was a popular and successful sports minister.

But things didn't start so well.

Few of us will forget the Radio Five Live quiz with which he launched his career as Sports Minister.

For greater accuracy, Mr Speaker, I have obtained a copy.

He was asked: "Can you name the four players in today's semi-finals of the Stella Artois?"

He replied "Henman. I can't, no."

Radio 5: "Can you name three jockeys who will be riding at Royal Ascot this week?"

"No. I know nothing about horse racing at all."

"Can you name three European golfers playing in the U.S. Open?"

There was, the transcript says, an "audible sigh".

And then, he said: "... uummm, uurrrr... No. I haven't been watching the golf at all."

Question: Who is the captain of the British Lions?

Answer: "Don't know that one either. I'm terrible this morning."

The Daily Mail – charitable as we all know - ran a quiz entitled "Are you Dumb Enough to be Sports Minister?"

But the Rt Hon Gentleman brushed all this off and persevered.

He is a shining example of how there are times when you have to ignore the press and just get on with the job.

And he will always be remembered for launching - and continually re-launching - the career of another much loved national political figure.

He ran his deputy leadership campaign in 1992, his leadership campaign in 1994 and his deputy leadership campaign for the same year.

I refer of course to the Rt Hon Member for Kingston upon Hull East.

His determination to stick with unfashionable causes does him great credit.

No doubt that is why the Prime Minister asked him to propose the Loyal Address.

The Hon member for Brent South made an excellent speech.

She did a superb job. Her speech was not just witty and incisive, but passionate.

She may not welcome this, but we have something in common.

She has spoken positively about young people and told us to listen "to the voice behind the hood."

I am not sure she needs any advice from me, but after all my experience with the "h" word, I would say to her in all candour: "just leave it there".

Her predecessor as MP for Brent South, Paul Boateng, famously said on the night of his election: "today, Brent South – tomorrow, Soweto."

Her ambitions are rather different.

She is I understand in a fight to the death with her Liberal Democrat neighbour, for the new Brent seat created by boundary changes.

So for her it's more a case of "today, Brent South – tomorrow, Brent Central."

As many of us have fought Liberal Democrats, and know the appalling depths to which they will stoop, as she continues her fight she will have support on all sides of the House.

The Proposer and Seconder have upheld the traditions of the House and I congratulate them both.

I would also like to pay tribute to Piara Khabra, who died earlier this year.

He led an extraordinary life.

Born in the Punjab in the 1920s, he fought in the second world war against the Japanese.

He then marched for Gandhi and Nehru, taking part in the great struggle for Indian independence.

Coming to Britain, he was elected to this House as a pensioner.

Piara Khabra served his constituents and his country well - and will be remembered fondly on all sides of the House.

There is one other member of this House who left us recently.

I am referring to the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

I thought I'd better mention him, in case the current Prime Minister just omitted to mention him in his speech.

Although Tony Blair achieved great mastery of this House, he couldn't wait to get out of here.

Many have asked: "What was the hurry?"

I think I've found the answer.

The new book by Dr Anthony Seldon, with the appropriate title "Blair Unbound", tells us about the former Prime Minister's fears for the future.

It says: "He was worried about Gordon's character and personality, the dark side of his nature, his paranoia and his inability to collaborate."

No wonder he has retired to the comparative safety of East Jerusalem.

As we meet at the start of this Parliament, it is right that we should pay tribute to our Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This goes beyond party.

Everyone in this House - whether they supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or not - knows that our troops are a huge source of pride for the whole country.

If the Government comes forward with measures to improve their welfare, it will have our full support.

As we draw down the troops in Iraq the focus on our mission in Afghanistan should intensify.

I've been to Helmand twice to see the work they are doing.

I know the Prime Minister agrees they are fulfilling their mission with bravery and professionalism.

But where we may be winning the battle in a tactical, short-term and military sense, we need to make more progress in a long-term, strategic and political sense.

I hope the Prime Minister is able to update us on encouraging President Karzai to make further progress, including in tackling corruption.

I hope he will be able to tell us about progress on unifying the several overlapping military commands.

And I also hope he'll be able to comment on the proposal made for one person to co-ordinate the civilian, political and humanitarian efforts for the EU, NATO and the UN.

In terms of this Parliament, we should avoid the situation where a gap opens up between the facts on the ground and the information supplied by the Government.

So I hope when the Prime Minister speaks he will give a guarantee that there will be full quarterly reports to Parliament on the progress being made in Afghanistan.

I'm sure also the House would welcome an update on Pakistan, and the pressure we are bringing to bear to make sure much-needed elections take place.

I turn now to legislative proposals in the Gracious Speech.

There are parts of the Gracious Speech we welcome.

There are Bills we will support – not least because we proposed them in the first place.

So we welcome the Climate Change Bill, just as we welcomed it when it was proposed in last year's Gracious Speech.

No doubt we'll all come back and welcome it again next year.

But it's not the only measure that's been recycled.

There is the Bill on unclaimed assets.

He's announced that twice before.

And the Crossrail Bill.

Announced eleven times before.

We also welcome the draft Constitutional Renewal Bill.

We support giving Parliament the right to vote on war and the

strengthening of select committees.

These are our ideas and we'll back them.

But it's time to go further, abolishing routine guillotining of bills and giving the Commons more control of its timetable.

That would be a real package for strengthening Parliament.

The Counter-Terrorism Bill takes up our proposal that it should be possible to interview suspects after they have been charged.

We welcome this.

We will press the Government to go further and include the use of intercept evidence in court, and the introduction of a proper border police force.

The Gracious Speech includes proposals on Party funding.

In our view there can be no justification for more state funding of political parties unless there is a tough cap on donations that applies to individuals, businesses and trade unions.

So far, Labour have not been able to back the cap.

So what we are likely to see is a one-sided Bill.

If that happens, people will conclude that, having tried to put off the election, now he's trying to fix its outcome.

On the subject of our democracy, we look forward to debating the European Reform Treaty.

We will be proposing many amendments but one in particular: to give the British people the referendum that they were promised.

The Gracious Speech talked of the importance of economic stability.

We welcome the Bill on deposit insurance.

But let us be clear.

The problems go further than that.

We have the largest budget deficit in Europe.

And our competitiveness is in decline.

In these times of uncertainty, we need a competitive tax system.

Yet this Chancellor seems hell-bent on increasing tax on enterprise by 80 per cent.

Since it's quite obvious the Chancellor doesn't run the Treasury, when the Prime Minister stands up, can he do a u-turn on capital gains tax as he has done on so many other things?

The real problem with this Queen's speech is simple.

It's the same as the problem with this Prime Minister.

Whether it's on housing, immigration, or youth unemployment, it's all short-term tricks instead of solving long-term problems.

Let me take just one example.

The Prime Minister's pledge to 'deep clean' our hospitals.

Here was the headline in one newspaper: "I'll wipe the wards clean - PM's amazing pledge on MRSA"

When we look at it more closely, it certainly is amazing.

The Prime Minister said that "deep cleaning" would, and I quote, happen in "every hospital."

But listen to what the Department of Health then said:

"There are no plans to centrally monitor the deep cleaning of hospitals. Arrangements for the programme are entirely a matter for local determination..."

Undertaking deep-clean is just one of a number of approaches trusts may take in tackling healthcare associated infections."

The Prime Minister said deep cleaning would happen, and I quote, “over the next year.”

But the Department of Health said: “no specific date has been set for either the commencement or completion of the deep-clean programme.”

The Prime Minister said deep cleaning would be repeated “at least every 18 months.”

But the Health Department said: “The success of the first programme of deep cleaning will be fully evaluated before a decision is made about whether to repeat.”

And then they said “There are also no plans to assess the effectiveness of deep-cleaning.”

So all the things the Prime Minister told us - that it would happen in every hospital; that it would start immediately; that it would be repeated every 18 months – turned out not to be true.

What a shambles.

People are worried about going to hospital and catching a disease which might kill them, and all they get from this Government are short-term tricks.

I'll tell you what needs a deep clean – the culture of spin, deceit and half-truths the people get from this Prime Minister and this Government.

This Queen's Speech doesn't represent – and he doesn't represent – any real change.

He knows he has to talk about change.

The trouble is, he can't deliver change.

That's what the whole country discovered this Autumn.

Yes, he can do the gestures.

He can wear a blue tie.

He can speak in front of a blue background.

He can even invite Lady Thatcher round to tea.

But when it comes to real, substantive change this Prime Minister is not capable of offering anything new.

On education, his Government is actually going backwards.

Instead of taking on the establishment and standing up for rigour and standards – they're caving in and abolishing the A level.

Instead of developing the programme of City Technology Colleges and City Academies - they're slamming on the brakes and putting the LEAs back in charge.

He talks about a culture change in education but then all we get is more top-down centralising targets.

He talks about change but the reality is more of the same.

And it's more of the same on welfare.

With millions on benefit, and youth unemployment higher than when they came to power, still they refuse to introduce the kind of welfare reform that has worked in other parts of the world.

It was recommended by his own welfare adviser. But he rejected it.

This Prime Minister can't be the change that Britain needs.

That's why people are beginning to wonder what is the point of this Government.

Where is the Prime Minister's vision for Britain?

We were told he would use the Budget to, and I quote, "flesh out a vision for his planned premiership".

But all we got was a tax cut that turned out to be a tax con.

Then they said his vision would be in his party conference speech.

And there was a vision.

The only problem is it wasn't his.

It was nicked from the speech of an American politician.

It wasn't his vision, it was John Kerry's.

And it didn't work for him, either.

So after the disappointment of a conference speech that everyone can now see was just a laundry list of populist gimmicks, they said don't worry, the Prime Minister will set out his vision in the Comprehensive Spending Review and Pre-Budget Report.

But with flight tax and Inheritance Tax and non-dom tax, it was our vision, not his.

Finally they said we'd see it in this Queen's Speech.

And once again people are asking: "is that it?"

Yet another re-launch that's yet another re-hash of short-term gimmicks and the same old thinking.

Top-down targets.

Central control.

A hyperactive state trying to run everybody's lives.

The truth about this Queen's Speech is that this Prime Minister has got nothing new to offer.

We are told there will be a right to request flexible working for anyone with children.

We announced that in our Conference last year.

A member of his own Cabinet said the other week: "We've had Downing Street on the phone asking us to do statements when we haven't really got anything to say."

No wonder he didn't want an election.

Listen to what a Labour Party spokesman said:

"The manifesto was thin. The Labour 'war book' for the election was empty. The truth is, we have no new policies.... The fact is that if we had called the election we were intellectually as well as financially bankrupt."

But you cannot put it better than the Prime Minister's good friend and old Cabinet colleague, Lord Falconer:

If this Government doesn't "set out... our vision for the future of the UK..., then we will be offering drift not leadership, and the past not the future."

I couldn't have put it better myself.

No wonder he's not getting his pension.

Bereft of vision, we now see a Prime Minister bending with the wind, buffeted by events.

Day after day of dithering and indecision.

School surpluses are going to be confiscated, then they're not.

Bins are going to be taxed, then they're not... then again maybe they are.

Entrepreneurs are going to pay more capital gains tax, then they're not, but look at the small print and actually they are.

And then the biggest U-turn of them all, with the Prime Minister inviting a hand-picked journalist into the bunker at Number 10 to tell the nation the general election that he had planned for, prepared for and paid for was off.

Say what you like about Tony Blair, at least he was decisive.

Isn't it the case that the only real change we've had is to swap a strong Prime Minister for a weak one?

Mr Speaker, the lack of vision, the embarrassing weakness wouldn't matter so much if they were half-way competent.

But this is a Government that's letting 2,000 prisoners out of jail early every month.

That's allowed 8,000 people to die from hospital infections.

And that somehow lost track of 300,000 migrant workers inside a week.

So I think we were all pretty astonished to read this from one of his spin doctors in a Sunday newspaper:

“We've established our competence at running the country...”

Hold on a minute.

These are the people whose own laboratory caused the outbreak of foot and mouth; who've seen the first run on a British bank for 140 years; and who can't tell us from one day to the next how many migrant workers there are in our country.

And if you want one example of the absolute bankruptcy of this Government, take the slogan the Prime Minister wheels out every week – “British jobs for British workers.”

If he could only see how embarrassed Labour MPs are, how they shudder whenever he says those words.

Well, I've done a bit of work on this slogan of the Prime Minister's.

First, let's be clear what they want us to think.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has told us that there should be no doubt.

It is – and I quote – “explicitly a British jobs for British people campaign...”

So we asked the House of Commons library.

They said this: “There is apparently nothing in the detail of the proposals to suggest that foreign nationals will be excluded from any of the initiatives if they happen to live in the area where the locally based schemes

operate.”

So there we have it.

In reality, the Prime Minister has no intention of providing British jobs for British workers because he knows it would be illegal under EU law.

His proposals won't help British people working in Britain any more than they will help Italian people working in Britain or Polish people working in Britain.

That is the truth about “British Jobs for British Workers.”

Here are your slogans....

What does his moral compass say about that?

I'll tell you what should have been in this Queen's Speech.

In this new age of freedom we need to give people more opportunity and power over their lives. A supply-side revolution in schools. Cutting Stamp Duty to help people onto the housing ladder. More power for local government.

In this new age of unease we need to strengthen families and make our society more responsible. Ending the couple penalty in the benefits system. Backing marriage in the tax system. Radical welfare reform to get people off benefits and into work.

And in this new age of insecurity we need to make our country safer and greener. That means proper prison reform. It means real police reform.

That's what Britain needs.

Solving long-term problems, not short-term political tricks.

A clear vision for the future instead of a tired and cynical Prime Minister who's forgotten what he's in office trying to achieve.

Consistent, strong leadership instead of a weak Prime Minister who can't

stick to anything for more than five minutes.

Mr Speaker that's the change people want and that's the change this Party will deliver.

Ends