

David Cameron: Speech to Conservative Spring Forum

Speaking to the Conservative Spring Forum on Sunday 18th March, Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron, said:

(Check against delivery)

"This has been a great Spring Forum.

We've seen the progress we're making in our Policy Review.

We've shown our commitment to community campaigning and making a real difference locally, in every part of the country.

We've focused on our new priorities - public services, the environment, improving everyone's quality of life.

And today I want to explain why I'm optimistic - for our Party and our country.

I want to set out what we're doing and where we're going.

Why we're making progress.

The new priorities we're focusing on.

And how we're going to win the big argument in British politics today.

PARTY CHANGE

This Party is changing - and we're doing it together.

People said we'd never get more women candidates without compulsion.

But you selected them.

Over a third of our candidates are women - up from just nine per cent in Parliament today.

And you've selected six black and minority ethnic candidates in winnable seats - three times more than we have in Parliament today and six more than the Liberal Democrats who don't have any.

But let's be honest.

It's not nearly enough.

I'll tell you why this is so important.

We believe in opportunity and aspiration, and in bringing our country together.

That means making sure that in every part of our national life - the army, the media, business, the City, Parliament...

...there are role models that young people in every community can look to and say yes, they made it so I can make it, I can go for it, I can do it too.

We're changing our approach to politics too.

People are fed up with politicians who disagree just for the sake of it.

They want us to work together for the good of the country.

We did it last year when we put parents and pupils before party politics and backed the Education Bill.

We did it again last week.

This Party has always believed that strong defence is vital.

So when I saw a big rebellion in the Labour Party, I knew it was right to line up our forces and march them through the division lobby in support of replacing Trident.

And we can be proud that it's thanks to this Party that Britain's future defences are secure.

It's not just in Parliament that we're changing the way we do politics.

Look at what our candidates are doing, leading social action projects in their communities, getting things done instead of just talking about it.

Those social action projects aren't just an add-on extra.

They're at the heart of what our Party needs to be.

BROWN SPIN

What a contrast with Gordon Brown.

His idea of social action is dinner with Kylie Minogue.

Now he says he wants to end the culture of spin.

We should be so lucky.

Do you think we've forgotten you announcing the same spending over and over and over again?

Do you think we've forgotten the budgets when the big changes - the clobbering of the self-employed and the hammering of pensions - haven't even been mentioned by you in the budget speech itself?

Don't worry, we'll be looking out for it next week

And do you think we've forgotten the stealth taxes and council tax rises that are hammering every home in Britain?

Gordon, you are not the answer to spin.

You are spin - and we won't let people forget it.

REAL SUBSTANCE

But our progress will depend not on what he does, but on what we do.

And if last year was all about change, then this year is more about grit.

The gritty determination to say where we stand on the big issues.

To stick to our guns.

To take tough decisions.

And when the right thing to say is unpopular, to say it anyway - because it's right.

Take the environment.

Anyone can say they're green.

It's easy to do the softer things like ride your bike, visit glaciers and rebuild your house to make it green.

But it's only clear you mean it when you do the tough things as well.

Like telling the truth about climate change.

The truth is that you can't be serious about climate change unless you're serious about aviation.

Everybody knows that.

There's a price for progress, and leadership is about making that clear.

We don't have to stop people flying.

But we do have to take action on emissions.

So yes we will curb the growth of carbon emissions from aviation.

Yes we'll find ways of doing it that are fair and reasonable.

But no, we will not use green taxes as a stealth tax, because with a Conservative Government green taxes will be replacement taxes, not extra taxes.

Every penny we raise in taxes on bad things like pollution will be used to cut taxes on good things like enterprise and families.

Look at the difference between our approach to the environment and Gordon Brown's.

He says he's against green taxes.

He's telling people what they want to hear - that you can go green without paying the price.

That's not leadership.

That's not substance.

It's the same on the family.

Anyone can say they're family-friendly.

It's easy to do the softer things, like talk about how much your family means to you.

But it's only when you do the tough things that people know you're serious.

That's why we've said that business and the public sector need to do more to help parents with flexible working.

I've also said clearly that this Party backs marriage and will support it in the tax system.

Many people don't agree with it.

But I think it's vital, and that's why I say it.

It's another challenge ducked by Gordon Brown.

He knows that family breakdown is at the heart of the social breakdown we see around us.

Kids without qualifications.

Teenage pregnancy.

Rising crime.

But Gordon Brown won't do anything about family breakdown.

We've got a tax system that doesn't recognise marriage.

And a benefits system which does recognise marriage - but penalises it.

In fact it penalises any form of commitment between two people.

What sort of system is it that pays people to live apart?

It's got to change.

We're leading political debate in this country for the first time in many years.

On strengthening families, while Tony Blair pretends there's no problem and papers over the cracks...

...we're the ones making the substantial arguments about family breakdown and its effects.

On protecting the environment, it is only because we made the case for annual targets on carbon emissions that we saw the Climate Change Bill published last week.

And on the NHS, while Labour has been closing Accident and Emergency units ...

...we're the ones campaigning against NHS cuts..

...developing the serious ideas to improve our health service by putting power in the hands of patients and professionals.

LABOUR AND THE NHS

It used to be said that Labour were the party of the NHS.

Not any more.

Labour are the party that is undermining the NHS.

There's a simple reason why.

It's not deliberate.

It's not that they don't care.

But it is because of their values and their philosophy.

Labour's mania for controlling and directing things from the centre.

Labour's pessimism about human nature.

Their belief that if you don't tell people what to do, they'll do the wrong thing.

Labour just don't trust people.

And the NHS is all about people - the nurses, the doctors, the cleaners, the therapists, the porters, the many thousands of people who are motivated by one thing above all else: to give patients the best possible care.

Labour don't trust them.

Instead they're spending six hundred million pounds a year on management consultants in the health service.

They've turned the NHS into a vast, inhuman machine, a pen-pusher's paradise at the mercy of the management consultants' latest wheeze...

...dreamt up, rolled out, cut back - then finally written off when the next ludicrous 'strategy' appears.

Labour have ripped the heart out of our NHS and replaced it with a computer.

Targets.

Reorganisations.

Endlessly asking people to reapply for their own jobs.

Mind-blowing waste in the name of modernisation and efficiency.

But they don't count the human cost.

I think of the pensioners raising money through the league of friends for their local hospital, just to see it close.

I think of the emergency nurse practitioner in Surrey, still in his overalls, telling me that closing A&E means an hour long drive to hospital for some people, and potentially lives lost.

I think of the young mums told their maternity unit could be closing when they've always wanted to have their children in the hospital they love, near their home.

And look what Labour are doing to people who choose a medical career, who have made the decision to give the best part of their lives to looking after us.

Junior doctors who have already spent years working in the NHS, having to apply for their jobs by computer...

They're not allowed to say what areas of medicine they're passionate about.

They're not allowed to describe any voluntary work they've done.

They're not even allowed to send in their CV.

They have to fill in forms on the internet, describing ethical dilemmas in a hundred and fifty words, treated like cogs in a machine.

I don't think ministers have the slightest idea how angry these doctors are.

Their applications lost as the computer system crashes.

Their future at risk from chaotic central planning.

Their dedication questioned and their morale undermined by the latest mechanical, impersonal, inhuman Labour scheme.

Why are we treating people like this?

Yesterday I met a doctor who after six years of training in the NHS wants to be a surgeon in London.

Instead they're telling her to be a psychiatrist in Edinburgh.

Why can't Labour see the harm they are doing?

They have no idea how ridiculous they now look.

We now have the grotesque spectacle of Labour MPs, including the chairman of the Labour Party, protesting pathetically outside their own local hospitals, against their own party's health policy.

They used to say they would save the NHS.

Now they're trying to save it from themselves.

What a way to run a health service.

What an absolute and shameful disgrace.

CONSERVATIVES AND THE NHS

So let me tell you how we would be different.

There are three things I want you to remember - three steps on our journey towards being the trusted custodians of our National Health Service.

First, today's Conservative Party backs the NHS, heart and soul.

We will do all we can to protect and improve it.

No ifs, no buts, no opt-outs.

The NHS is our priority.

Second, we will not repeat Labour's mistakes.

They came to power and destructively scrapped all the reforms that had gone before.

It wasted time, wasted money, wasted goodwill.

So we will put an end to the pointless reorganisations.

We will wave goodbye to the armies of management consultants with their morale-destroying blueprints.

The next Conservative Government will build on and improve the NHS we inherit.

Foundation hospitals won't go, they'll stay - and we'll improve them.

Commissioning by GPs is right - and we'll make it really mean something.

Patient choice is essential - and we'll make it actually work.

The third step on our journey is perhaps the most important.

We will put people back at the heart of the NHS.

We will trust the professionals.

We will get rid of the top-down, centralising, interfering, insulting targets that drive our doctors and nurses mad.

Progressively, patiently, carefully, we will usher in a new era of quality and care.

Where money is allocated on the basis of clinical need, not political priority.

Where hospitals succeed because people want to use them; where they're not closed by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen.

That is our goal: an independent NHS, where we get politicians out of the day to day running of the health service we all cherish.

The NHS is my passion.

Our priority.

We'll back it.

Build it.

Improve it for everyone.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC SERVICES

That is what we mean when we talk about social responsibility.

We understand that government doesn't have all the answers.

We're optimistic about human nature.

We believe that if you trust people, they'll do the right thing.

That's how we will improve the NHS and schools and social care - trusting the professionals and giving them responsibility.

Delivering first class public services is one of the great tests of modern government.

I believe that this Party is now ready to pass that test.

We have the right approach - social responsibility.

And we have the right priorities - like the NHS, schools, families, crime, transport, the environment.

CLEARING UP AFTER LABOUR

They are the battleground on which the next election will be fought, and it's vital we understand that.

Last month, I had the honour of standing with Margaret Thatcher after her new statue was unveiled in the House of Commons.

She didn't spend her time in office like Tony Blair, fretting about her legacy.

Do you know something - she achieved more for this country in ten weeks than Tony Blair has achieved in ten years.

She spent her time as Leader of the Opposition developing a clear analysis of what the country needed.

She knew what the battleground was and she knew how to win the war.

In the 1970s Britain faced economic breakdown.

Businesses that couldn't deliver the goods.

Rampant inflation.

Irresponsible trades unions.

An over-taxed and over-regulated economy that was the sick man of Europe.

Margaret Thatcher focused on these challenges, applied Conservative ideas and values, and engineered Britain's great economic revival.

The result was something we can all be proud of.

A free enterprise economy - the envy of Europe and the world.

Today, our country does not face economic breakdown.

Yes, Labour have undermined our competitiveness.

Yes, the economy is over-taxed and over-regulated.

Yes, the next Conservative government must act to promote enterprise and wealth creation.

And yes, we must rebuild the pensions system broken by Gordon Brown.

We instinctively understand these things, and unlike Labour we know how to deliver them.

But the big argument in British politics today is not about the free enterprise economy.

It's about our society.

Because it's not economic breakdown that Britain now faces, but social breakdown.

Not businesses that aren't delivering, but public services.

Not rampant inflation but rampant crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour.

Not irresponsible unions - it's irresponsible parents.

And as a recent report from UNICEF showed - a report which put Britain at the bottom of the international league table for the well-being of children...

...it's not that Britain is the sick man of Europe.

We're becoming the sick family of Europe.

So my focus today, and the mission of the modern Conservative Party, could not be clearer.

It is to bring about Britain's social revival.

To improve the quality of life for everyone in our country, increasing our well-being, not just our wealth.

Yes it means changes for this Party.

And I will not shy away from the changes that need to be made.

But what we are doing is reconnecting with values that inspire us all as Conservatives.

That there is more to life than money.

That there is a we in politics, as well as a me.

And that we are all in this together.

This is a Party committed not just to helping people get on in life, but to helping those who get left behind.

In this Party we admire not just Adam Smith and free markets, but Wilberforce who freed the slaves; Chamberlain who cleared the slums; Disraeli who extended suffrage.

So we must speak once again for the people of Britain who are sick and tired of living in a country that is economically rich but socially so poor.

Quality of life - that is the modern mission of the Conservative Party.

Just as we helped clear up the economic mess that Labour left in 1979, so the next Conservative government will have to clear up the mess that these Labour politicians have made of our society.

So as the Labour Party loses touch with the people of this country and moves away from the centre ground...

...divided on defence...

...dependent on the unions...

...distant from the daily struggle of paying the soaring council tax bills.

As they forget how hard it is to find a GP who'll see you out of hours...

...to find someone to look after the kids...

...to get back from work in time for you to actually see the kids...

Let us be the party that speaks for the working people of Britain and says to them:

We're as fed up as you are with paying a lot more tax and getting little in return.

We're as fed up as you are with ministers who spin and twist but never get anything done.

We're as fed up as you are with this government of dashed hopes and disappointment.

But now we can offer not just anger, but hope.

Hope because we have made this Party a contender once again.

Hope because we can lead this country in a new direction.

The pace is getting quicker.

In a matter of months, Blair will be gone and Brown will be here.

Our Policy Groups will complete their reports.

In October we'll debate them.

Next year we'll shape them into a programme for government.

By the next election there'll be a new President in the White House.

A new President in the Elysee Palace.

And then Britain too will have the chance to vote for change.

Let us be ready for that moment.

Let us have faith that this time we'll do it.

And let each and every one of us in this great Party...

...here in this hall and out in the country...

...resolve today to fight with passion and pride for a better tomorrow."