

DAVID CAMERON'S RESPONSE TO THE QUEEN'S SPEECH

“Mr Speaker I start by paying tribute to the four service men and women who were killed in Basra on Sunday: Lee Hopkins, Sharron Elliott, Ben Nowak and Jason Hylton.

And I also pay tribute to Jamie Hancock who was killed in Basra last week.

Our thoughts are with their families. They died serving our country and we honour their memory.

I also pay tribute to those members of the House who have left us since the last Gracious Speech.

Patsy Calton lost her courageous fight with cancer shortly after the general election last year.

In spite of her illness she came back to the House to continue her work. None of us will forget her bravery in doing so.

Rachel Squire will be sorely missed by both sides of the House and by her constituents.

I believe the whole House will miss Peter Law.

A Labour man for decades, he will be fondly remembered on that side of the House.

And for overturning one of the biggest Labour majorities in the whole of the country – in the seat of Michael Foot and Nye Bevan – he will fondly remembered on this side of the House.

Since the last Gracious Speech the House has lost two of its greatest champions in Eric Forth and Robin Cook.

It was a measure of Robin Cook's effectiveness that on this side of the House we still remember his brilliant attack on the Arms to Iraq issue.

And on that side of the House, who can forget his withering criticism of the decision to go to war in Iraq?

My first job in Parliament was as Eric Forth's deputy.

I remember being summoned to his office to find that, while he wasn't there, there was a lifesize cut-out of Elvis Presley. You never knew quite what to expect with Eric.

Once again both sides have cause to remember him.

He had complete scorn for everything done by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, and only a bit less than complete scorn for everything done by me.

But we all miss him.

Let me congratulate the proposer and seconder of the Loyal Address on their speeches.

Some have said unfairly that the Rt Hon Member for Cardiff South and Penarth is lacking in charisma. I profoundly disagree.

He may not look like it, but the Rt Hon Member is the Labour Party's answer to Tom Cruise.

He is always being sent on Mission Impossible.

The Prime Minister sent him to Wales as the Downing Street choice for First Secretary.

No-one told him that the job would self-destruct in 10 seconds.

He was the first Minister in history whose resignation was announced in this Chamber by the Leader of the Opposition.

No sooner had he stepped free from the wreckage, he was sent on Mission Impossible II.

As the countryside rose in revolt and anger, and hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets, he was made Minister for Rural Affairs.

The Rt Hon Gentleman should take heart. He has always been called for

when the Government faces a crisis.

Today his career opportunities must be almost limitless.

I also congratulate the Hon Lady who seconded the Address.

She is a staunch Blairite.

And I gather her favourite album is Saturday Night Fever.

When the Chancellor takes over, for Blairites like her, “Stayin’ Alive” won’t be a song on her iPod – it will be a daily challenge.

The proposer and the seconder have upheld the tradition of this House and made excellent speeches.

Of course there are things in this Gracious Speech which we welcome.

In fact we proposed some of them.

I am delighted the Government is to link the basic state pension with earnings – our proposal at the last election.

The Treasury has finally been forced to make the provision of statistics independent.

Again, something we called for at the last election.

And then there’s the Climate Change Bill – proposed over and over again by Conservatives, and opposed by the Prime Minister.

Can I say how delighted I am to see a Bill in the Gracious Speech?

I hope it will be a proper Bill and not a watered down Bill.

Government has to give a lead by setting a proper framework.

That must mean an independent body with annual targets and an annual report from government on its progress.

Let me turn to foreign policy.

I welcome the specific mention for Darfur in the Gracious Speech.

The Prime Minister will be acutely aware that this is a political crisis and a humanitarian disaster which is now crossing international borders.

Much of our discussion will inevitably be on Iraq and Afghanistan.

I supported both actions.

I support both democratically elected governments.

And I support the work our troops are doing today.

What matters now is that, with our allies, we take the right actions to maximise the chances for stability and progress in both countries.

First, Afghanistan.

I have seen for myself the extraordinary work that our troops are doing, as part of a NATO operation now involving 37 countries.

Backing a democratically elected government. Entrenching stability. Ensuring development. Thwarting the Taliban.

These are legitimate British interests.

I hope that the Prime Minister in his speech today will tell the House how these efforts will be better equipped and - with our allies - strategically reinforced.

Turning to Iraq, we all have a profound interest in preventing that country from sliding further into bloodshed.

So does the wider world.

The options are stark.

Simply cutting and running would cause mayhem.

But the prospect of an open-ended commitment serves neither Iraq's

interests nor our own, and anyway is simply not practical.

There are no easy options.

Militarily, we must do all we can to build up the Iraqi army.

Diplomatically, we need to involve the regional powers.

While there is merit in contact with Syria and Iran – after all, the point of diplomacy is to talk to countries well beyond our traditional friends – it is on the moderate Arab governments that our efforts should concentrate.

Their support for stability in Iraq is what we most need.

And the key to securing that support is a fresh and unremitting push to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict.

I hope the Prime Minister will press President Bush to use America's influence to the full to achieve this, as well as enlisting the support of Europe.

Taking these steps and maximising stability is the right background to bringing our troops home.

But we should not set an artificial timetable.

I hope that the Prime Minister will be able to tell us today about how he plans to make progress towards these goals.

And I hope that during the course of this session the Government will think again about how we can best ensure that the lessons are learnt from this conflict.

After the Falklands War a committee of privy Councillors carried out this task in the Franks Report.

The same should happen again.

Turning to Northern Ireland, we back the efforts to restore power-sharing devolution in Northern Ireland.

We are clear that if it is going to succeed then Sinn Fein must support the police, the courts and the rule of law.

They could start by telling their supporters to co-operate with the police investigation into the brutal and callous murder of Robert McCartney.

When people look back at the Prime Minister's time in office, they will give him enormous credit for his unstinting efforts to bring peace to Northern Ireland.

But this will be the Prime Minister's last Gracious Speech.

Indeed, this is the 13th time the Prime Minister has taken part in the Queen's Speech debate as either Leader of the Opposition or Prime Minister.

Many of that side of the House are relieved that he is going.

But I tell you, Mr Speaker, they're not half as relieved as we are.

I have to say, I checked he was going before I applied for this job.

A couple of days ago he and I were talking about his first response to the Gracious Speech, twelve years ago.

Yes, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been sitting there scowling and waiting that long.

I've read that speech from 1994 and so should the Prime Minister.

Because back then, when he was Leader of the Opposition, he said millions of people were desperate for changes in the Child Support Agency.

Yet today, under his Government, that system is more chaotic than ever.

Twelve years ago, as Leader of the Opposition, he said the pensions system was a "scandal".

Yet his Government has taken from every pension fund in the country.

Twelve years ago, as Leader of the Opposition, he said the Government was “so riven by faction” that it couldn’t “address the interests of the country”.

Mr Speaker, there could be no better description of his government today.

The tragedy of this Prime Minister is that he’s promised so much and delivered so little.

The tragedy of this Queen’s Speech is that all his successor offers is more of the same.

More laws on crime. Violent crime soars.

More laws on health. Hospitals close.

More laws on immigration. Our borders still out of control.

Every year the same promises.

Every year the same failures.

The paradox of New Labour is that, twelve years on, the Prime Minister is still desperately looking for a legacy.

After three massive majorities, almost a decade in power, 10 Gracious Speeches, and 370 pieces of legislation, the question they have to answer is why has so little been achieved?

It’s because they have put headlines above delivery.

They believe in centralised power, not social responsibility.

And, all too often, they’ve passed laws to score political points, rather than to achieve real change.

And Mr Speaker this Queen’s Speech is no different.

It’s so repetitive and so hollow that people know they’ve heard it all before.

And it’s so depressing they might think the Chancellor’s taken over

already.

The Labour Party gave the game away when they said it's all about "smoking out" the Opposition.

It's not about keeping hospitals open or our streets safe.

It's about trying to keep a tired, discredited and divided Labour Party in power.

The truth is they have simply failed to deliver.

Nowhere is the failure to deliver more clear than in the two vital areas of health and crime.

Nine years ago the Prime Minister claimed there were 24 hours to save the NHS.

Today 20,000 jobs are being cut.

They never had a clue how to improve the NHS.

They scrapped GP fund-holding.

Now they're trying to bring it back.

They abolished the internal market.

Now they want to recreate it.

16 Acts.

Nine reorganisations.

Health authorities abolished and then created again.

Community health councils scrapped.

Patients forums brought in.

Barely are they up and running, now they're being abolished too.

Morale sapped.

Money wasted.

Deficits at record levels.

The Chief Medical Officer tells us in public health there are declining numbers, inadequate recruitment and budgets raided to solve financial deficits.

The Royal College of Nursing say staff are often being placed under intolerable and unsustainable pressure.

And the Chairman of the British Medical Association says he is “dismayed” by what he calls “the incoherence of current Government policies”.

So much for 24 hours to save the NHS.

All over the country we are seeing departments closed, hospitals threatened, staff sacked.

To paraphrase a former Leader of the Labour Party, today we’ve ended up in the grotesque chaos of a Labour government - a Labour government - scuttling round the country handing out redundancy notices to NHS workers.

No wonder Labour isn’t trusted any more on the NHS.

Failure on health is matched by failure on crime.

After nine years, every part of the criminal justice system is a shambles.

The Chairman of the Youth Justice Board says the juvenile criminal system is in danger of meltdown.

The Chief Inspector of Prisons says the system is approaching breaking point.

The Lord Chancellor, the man actually in charge of the legal system, says there is general chaos.

Even the Home Secretary says the probation service is poor and mediocre, the immigration service is dysfunctional, and the home office isn't fit for purpose.

Today we've found Islamic extremists apparently found working in the Immigration Department.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir are banned in Egypt. Here they're running immigration policy.

And now we've got the extraordinary sight of the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer squabbling about how best to make this their winning message at the next election.

If they think they can win an election on this record, I say let's get on with it!

We've had more than 50 Home Office Bills.

Some openly contradictory.

Let's just take one Act.

The 2000 Criminal Justice Act.

Six years later, 110 of its provisions are not in force.

17 were repealed before the Act was brought in.

Another 39 have been repealed subsequently.

The Government likes to talk tough.

But they've been acting dumb.

That's the story of this Government.

More laws but less order.

Look at the mess today.

We've got paedophiles left unsupervised in bail hostels.

Dangerous criminals put in open prisons.

And a thousand foreign prisoners released when they should have been deported.

The Chancellor now tells us he's going to guarantee security in a dangerous world.

He told us he would freeze the assets of terrorists.

But couldn't even stop Abu Hamza playing the property market with public money while in Belmarsh prison.

They talk about security.

But it's their bungling incompetence that has made people feel so insecure.

At the beginning of his time, the Prime Minister offered the nation hope that he would tackle the causes of crime.

As we look at the measures placed before the House today, all we see is the betrayal and debasement of that vital agenda.

Nothing about family breakdown.

And nothing about tackling addiction and dependency.

The Prime Minister's simply given up on the causes of crime.

All we get is a series of eye-catching initiatives, which last about as long as a news bulletin.

Night courts.

Week-end prisons.

Even asbos for unborn children.

All launched in a blaze of publicity. All scrapped.

The Prime Minister and the Chancellor started out wanting to save the NHS and tackle the causes of crime.

But they ended closing hospitals and closing their minds on crime.

They started with hope. Now there's just fear.

They started with ambition. Now there's poverty of vision.

The Prime Minister will introduce the Queen's Speech.

But he won't be around to see its measures pass into law.

There will be a new power in the land.

Mr Speaker we've been lucky to have a unique insight from one of Britain's leading character actors, Keith Allen, about what to expect.

He plays the Sheriff of Nottingham in the BBC's new drama, Robin Hood.

Here's what he said about his character.

A "calculating political mind that will stop at nothing... The sheriff is a sociopath... very politically ambitious.... he sees himself as a future dictator of England".

"I've based him on Gordon Brown".

But we shouldn't expect anything different from the Chancellor.

Because if the problem with this Government is short-term gimmicks, politically motivated laws, and failed centralisation, the Chancellor of the Exchequer isn't the solution.

He's the biggest part of the problem.

The British Day, when people were meant to put flag-poles on their lawns.

Disappeared without a trace.

The e-university that was meant to link communities together.

No-one used it.

The national tour with the Chancellor visiting every part of the country.

It never happened.

Last December we were promised a comprehensive report on the financing of terror.

Almost a year later nothing has happened.

All typical hallmarks of the Chancellor.

And when it comes to centralisation, it's the Treasury that has complicated the tax system; confused the benefits system; and virtually bankrupted the pension system.

Today, they are promising action on immigration.

We've now had ten Gracious Speeches and it was the 4th time they've promised that.

The 5th time they've promised to tackle anti-social behaviour.

And the 7th time they've promised House of Lords reform.

All they are offering is more of the same. And it never happens.

People have heard it all before and they don't believe it anymore.

All we'll get from the Chancellor is a darker shade of fail.

With the Prime Minister being replaced by the Chancellor, the gloom will deepen.

But we will know that, for the British people, the darkest hour will be just before the dawn.

What this Queen's Speech should have been about is the long-term; the national interest; trusting people, not centralising power.

We need an NHS Independence Bill which gives responsibility to professionals in the health service.

We need a Communities Bill which gives local people control over money spent in their areas.

We need to build a stronger economy by trusting business, with cuts in regulation and simpler tax.

Action on climate change.

Backing Britain's families.

Real improvements in the health service.

Real standards in our schools.

It's the Conservative Party that's leading the debate in all these vital areas.

There's a big dividing line in British politics today.

Between hope and fear.

This was the Prime Minister's last chance to offer hope for a better society.

Instead he chose fear to try and cover up his failures.

The politics of fear from a government of failure.

In place of an exhausted Labour government, we need a fresh Conservative Government united in purpose and offering hope."