

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PRITI PATEL MP

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INTRO:

Good afternoon, friends.

A year ago, I had the privilege of speaking to you from the main conference stage.

As many of you know, nothing makes me happier than being with my friends from the grassroots of our magnificent Party; even as Home Secretary, my heart was, is and will always be with the grassroots of the Party.

So I am very grateful to Conservative Voice for inviting me to speak today – especially in this important year of your 10th anniversary.

Congratulations to Don, Brian, and all at Conservative Voice for the tremendous leadership YOU have given to our grassroots.

Over the last decade, you have been transformational in your impact, both in making an effective case for sound policy and in ensuring success on the doorstep.

You have been staunch advocates of our values...

...and a fearsome force, mobilising activists and supporting election campaigns and candidates.

Your commitment is deeply sincere and unwavering...

...rooted in the friendship, loyalty, sense of duty and public service - we as traditional Conservatives believe in for our country.

Without your dedication, we would not have achieved the success that brought us the most incredible Conservative GE majority since the 1980s.

And I'd like to give a personal mention to Don and Brian, my friends for as long as I have been in frontline politics.

You have been standard bearers of Conservatism.

Leading the National Convention, overseeing the architecture of Party governance, and supporting MPs - including me when I served on the Party Board.

Thank you for your service to our Party.

FUTURE OF OUR COUNTRY:

It is because of these bonds that I have the opportunity to join you today.

To set out how I see the future for our country and our Party – a future in which Conservative Voice has a vital part to play.

This is an extremely demanding time for our great country.

We are facing a wide range of short-term challenges with consequences that will change the future of our country and our way of life in the long term.

A crisis in energy supply and security against a historic backdrop of endless green and white papers that has not delivered the energy security we need today or will need in the future.

Food security, which in an era of rising prices, supply chain and labour market problems, and the lack of investment in technology only adds to the cost of living pressures confronting our country.

A skills deficit which is leading to calls once again to rely upon cheap unskilled migrant labour, rather than investing in our people through the development of a labour market strategy.

We are now in the era of looming strikes in the public sector, lengthening queues in the NHS and difficulties accessing primary care, even though we're now spending record levels on the NHS and our healthcare spending as a proportion of GDP is higher than most other developed countries^{*} [NB: OECD figures show UK among the highest around 12%) but others like France, Germany, Austria, Canada are similar or higher (around 12-13% GDP) and USA (around 18%):

<https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=SHA> and <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthcaresystem/articles/howdoesukhealthcarespendingcomparewithothercountries/2019-08-29>

Housing pressures and FALL-ING ownership rates set against the inflationary backdrop also threaten our ability to be ON THE SIDE OF THE PUBLIC.

I could go on.....but whatever the scale of the problems and the challenges we face as a country.....

.....I have and always will have total faith in the ingenuity and entrepreneurship of the British people.

I believe that Britain is at its best in times of crisis, when our backs are against the wall and our detractors tell us that the challenges are too great.

In 1940, as France fell to Nazi Germany, there were some who thought we should seek peace then – But Winston Churchill and our nation fought on...and that decision has given us the freedoms we have today.

In 1982, there were some who believed winning back the Falkland Islands would be an impossible task

..... but our brave Armed Forces and the leadership of Margaret Thatcher won back their freedoms...and proved that Britain was a force to be reckoned with.

And while I certainly would not want to see Covid lockdowns again...

... it was bold decisions that resulted in the vaccine, the roll out, and the unlocking of our economy and society quicker than the rest of the world.

I never revealed my views publicly while I was in Cabinet...the disciplines that enable Government to function are vitally important, but I can tell you now that I fought to ensure that restrictions were lifted quickly.

We respond well when times are tough.

We are bold and resolute.

We saw that spirit on display, amidst the sadness of mourning our late, great, Queen.

VISION

Today more than ever, I believe we need a compelling vision that can bring the Party and country together through tough times.

A bold, ambitious Conservative vision that address the challenges we face today - and prepares our nation for a future of success and prosperity.

As life-long Conservatives, I believe we understand, far more than others, what makes our Party and this country great.

We know what our Party stood for under leaders like Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher.

Now we need to translate our heritage and our values and our accomplishments to meet the challenges of our times. (SLOW)
We must be inspired by our past stories, while looking forward to the future.

CONSERVATIVE VISION

In my 12 years in Parliament a succession of Conservative Party leaders have been felled, not by defeat at a general election, but by internal disagreements.

This also happened to Margaret Thatcher – one of the finest leaders the world has ever known.

That can't keep happening. It is an affront to our democracy and to the trust of the British people.

We need to learn how to be a united Party again. A Party with shared beliefs and the will to win.

And that process starts by understanding what we stand for.

It's time to remember the values that inspire us.

It's time to win the hearts and minds of a new generation.

It's time to set out what it means to be a Conservative in this challenging, modern world.

And it's time for us to be an election-winning, values-fighting machine that inspires people to join, take part and contribute to our future.

That's my mission: to use my experience in our Party and in Government, and my time on the backbenches to set out my vision for the future of the Party.

I have always known what I stand for:

I have consistently stood for sound, fiscally responsible economics.

A strong and independent UK in charge of its own laws and borders.

No dilution of our freedoms and democracy.

The promotion of a property-owning democracy, where more people can own capital, pursue financial security, and be free to create businesses, jobs, and wealth.

The strengthening of the ladder of opportunity, where if you work hard you will have the freedom to succeed.

And ensuring that Britain is a country where everyone, regardless of wealth, has an equal opportunity to be as great as their talents and ability allow; and with it, receive the financial rewards.

Friends, it's time to inspire a new generation with the awesome power of these ideas.

After all, it is the coming generation who will have to pay back what we borrow today and whose opportunities and ambitions will be shaped by what we do today.

My move to the back benches is all about looking forward.

As much as I shall miss the opportunity to make a difference in Government, and working 100 hours a week, I will use this period to share thoughts and ideas.

I know that some felt able to break collective responsibility while in Boris's Cabinet...

....but I believe that in Government you are there to serve the Country, the British people, and not self-interest.....

The very values we need to reassert for Government to function as it should.

HOME OFFICE RECORD

It is a fact that Home Secretary is the toughest job in Government, but that is the kind of challenge I like; and one where I spent three years putting our Conservative values into action to make a difference.

When Boris appointed me Home Secretary, I faced a full in-tray of issues and challenges.

- Border reform...
- immigration controls...
- the EU settlement scheme...
- illegal migration...
- police performance and the manifesto winning increase the number of officers...
- organised and international crime...
- drugs and the establishment of my county lines gangs works...
- terrorist and national security threats and vulnerabilities...
- A falling Windrush compensation scheme...
- domestic abuse legislation, reform, and essential support to women... the need to deport foreign national offenders...

...This list went on and on. And that was before Covid.

And in the early days across Government there was an acceptance of a culture of decline, low standards, and inertia – when we needed action.

The post-2017 political situation was heavily responsible for allowing the machinery of Government to take control and seek wherever possible to override political decision-making.....

....resulting in a sheer disregard of the wishes of the British people and the mandate of democratically elected and accountable Ministers.

Getting Conservative reforms through and policies delivered was not always easy against this background.

Some of this has been reported and although I hate having unfinished business...

.....I have handed over to my successor a legacy where we, as Conservatives, can once again proudly call ourselves the Party of law and order.

....I oversaw the greatest ever reform of our national security and record investment in it...

Established the new national Counter terrorism Operations centre....

.....Boosted police numbers, reformed the College of Policing, brought in performance criteria for policing in England and Wales to get the basics of policing right and delivery for the public; and gave the police more powers, capabilities, training, and tools to keep the public safe...

.....I also gave greater support for victims of crime, terrorism and survivors of domestic abuse,

.....I can also justly say that we are fixing our broken immigration and asylum system, having brought in the most radical reforms in a generation...

I introduced the points-based immigration system, so that legal migration to our country is now based upon the skills needed by our economy, and not the colour of your passport.....

And took robust action to tackle illegal migration and abuse of the asylum system as outlined in my New Plan for Immigration.

The foundations I laid will deliver the most radical reforms of those policy areas....

...radical, but rooted in Conservative values...

but only if they are adequately and fully enacted.

RWANDA

And one example where this is urgently needed is my world-first Migration and Economic Development Partnership with Rwanda.

My innovative partnership means illegal migrants will be relocated to Rwanda to build a new and prosperous life there.

The number of people who can be relocated is unlimited and they will have support and care as their claims are considered.

It forms part of a comprehensive set of reforms, which include...

...my domestic reforms to build Greek-style reception centres in the UK to detain and remove migrants...

....Changing the National Referral Mechanism to end the Modern Day Slavery legal merry go round of barriers which stop the Government from removing people who should not be here

Together these measures will lead to a vastly more effective asylum and removals system.

They will deter illegal entry to the UK,

They will disrupt the business model of evil people smuggling gangs,

And they will give the public confidence that people cannot cheat their way into Britain and get away with it.

Just two years ago, people were saying it was politically impossible to do any of this.

And yet today, it's been backed by almost everyone – including as we saw over the summer - every leadership candidate.....

That's quite a turn-around.

We also overcame all the immediate challenges in our own British Courts – something else that people said would be impossible.

Well, we made it possible.

That was a great achievement, but it wasn't enough.

As we all know, it was the European courts which - to their discredit - ultimately stood in the way of the policy and the British people.

However, the hard work is done and it should be, as Boris might say, an 'oven-ready deal' to finish it.

With widespread support for my policy across the Country and with the British public, the Courts in Europe must realise the mistake they've made in standing in its way.....

.....and the Government must be robust in doing all it takes to get this policy implemented in full and those flights to Rwanda off of the ground.

HOME OFFICE ACHIEVEMENTS

To deliver change in one of the most significant department's like the Home Office requires detailed policy and operational planning across a wide number of teams, and my Rwanda policy shows that it can be done.

In fact, the last three years have seen progress across the board.

Much of what the Home Office does makes the news only when it fails.

So successes often go unnoticed.

Take terrorism.

If you don't hear about it, we're winning.

And thankfully, terrorism has been little in the news recently.

A lot of work has gone into making the UK safer over the last three years.

I established the Counter Terrorism Operations Centre, increased the funding for counter-terror police to over £1 billion, and introduced the Counter Terrorism and Sentencing Act so we can keep terrorists locked up for longer.

But that's just one of the quiet successes we've achieved:

- During my time as Home Secretary, we put a record £17 billion of investment into policing and recruited nearly 14,000 extra police officers, putting the Government well on course to hit our manifesto target of 20,000 more.
- Measures like reforms to stop and search have taken over 70,000 knives off our streets.
- Over 200,000 drug seizures a year are taking place at the border, more than 2,400 county lines have been closed by the police, and there have been over 700 organised crime group disruptions, leading to more than 12,500 arrests in just three years.

- I introduced the National Security Bill, which safeguards British interests by enabling robust action against those who disclose protected information, steal trade secrets, assist a foreign intelligence service, or help a hostile state to sabotage British assets.
- And I led international efforts to dismantle people smuggling gangs, including dozens of arrests in this country and in Europe.

Of course, not all the successes were quiet.

There was plenty of debate around the Public Order Bill.

We simply did not have laws with meaningful consequences to deal with the new breed of extreme, disruptive, and dangerous protests pioneered by groups like Extinction Rebellion and JSO.

I would not stand by when I saw emergency workers – our blue light services and ambulances being halted by protestors, with the potential for the loss of innocent lives.....

.....Or when I saw small businesses put at risk by the irresponsible actions of a callous minority.

.....Or when protestors superglued themselves to disrupt the economic life blood of country. Gluing themselves to offices, trains and roads.... disrupting journeys for hundreds of thousands of hard-pressed commuters.

Protests like this are not peaceful ways to draw attention to a deeply felt conviction or campaign.

They're cruel and dangerous.

They are designed solely to cause so much trouble that a few angry extremists can force the rest of society to give in to their unpopular views.

That couldn't be allowed to succeed.

We do not make policy by mob rule in the country.

SO I introduced the Bill to protect the public from these disruptive and dangerous protests and the misery they bring.

.....And with this the need for firm compensation orders to make sure that protestors using these tactics must pay for the damage they do....

There is a lesson to be learned here....

....If we want to fix the tough problems of today, it's not enough to think in the increasingly narrow confines of what the political bubble thinks is achievable.

We must dare to think bigger and let boldness be our friend. .

.....We must be prepared to challenge the consensus – and do what we're told is not politically possible.

.....Only that way will we give the people of the UK the leadership they want, with the laws and outcomes they rightly insist upon.

Friends, We need big, unifying ideas to fix the problems of today.

Again, we can learn from what has happened over migration. For too long it was an issue that political leaders simply didn't want to discuss.

When Tony Blair and European Union membership opened the floodgates to unprecedented numbers of migrants in the 2000s, many people felt the effects.

There were real issues around the effect of huge additional numbers of people on critical infrastructure - hospitals, housing, schools - that politicians simply ignored.

That was wrong.

The most deprived areas, the poorest people, the working classes – they were the people who felt the impact.

.If they raised concerns, they were sneered at, stigmatised and marginalised as racists by privileged politicians whose lives were untouched.

So much for the idea that Labour stands up for the working classes.

As politicians, it is our responsibility to listen to concerns like these and take action. When there is an elephant in the room, we have to talk about it.

CHALLENGES FACING BRITAIN

Right now, we don't merely have one elephant in the room. We have a whole herd.

There are fundamental issues we are not properly discussing. And the public are getting frustrated.

From NHS reform, to energy security and to food security – as I outlined earlier.

For a long time, our failure to invest properly in our domestic energy supply was one. Now it's grown so big we can't ignore it.

Our democracy itself is another.

People voted in 2016 for us to take back control.

As the challenges to the Rwanda policy show, we have further to go to achieve that. And it goes beyond Brexit.

There are too many unelected officials and organisations who want to stop democratic Governments from doing what they were voted in to do.

Over the years, they have acquired increasing power and left unchecked and un-reformed pose a danger to our democracy and to the exercise of the free will of the British people.

New Labour did much of the damage.... realising that they could embed the ideas of their brand of socialism and governance in the infrastructure of the state and international laws to prevent future Governments from changing them.

Let's face it, our institutions and quangos – from the BBC to the countless public bodies that exist – are flooded with big-state-sympathisers and EU-supporting left wing liberals.

As a result, the democracy we have today is far more limited than it was twenty-five years ago.

We saw the damage this causes when the establishment sought to block our exit from the European Union and defy the Brexit Referendum result.

We see it daily in the actions they take to restrict free speech, their embracing of cancel culture, and the shameless promotion of woke agendas.

And we see how they seek to curtail our powers to take effective action on issues like migration.

Friends, It's time to say: we're a nation that believes in democracy.

We want decision-making power to be in the hands of elected politicians, not foreign courts or faceless bureaucrats.

PUBLIC FINANCES

And then there is the elephants of elephants.

The one issue that can kill the credibility a Government

....the failure to sustainably manage the public finances.

We are spending today with no thought of tomorrow.

And like the Blob in the old horror film, the more resources are absorbed today.....

....the bigger the problem gets.....

....and the more resources it will need, to eat up tomorrow.

And there is zero accountability.

As I have always said...., every minister no matter their role in Government must always be able to follow the money, people and outcomes.

This rigorous approach is simply not being applied widely enough.

I was uncompromising about financial accountability in office myself.

The same high standards must apply across every arm of Government.

Imagine if a private company behaved in the same way as parts of the public sector.

Bigco Ltd is badly in debt, losing money, and missing its targets, so shareholders meet to discuss what to do.

“Cut costs, root out waste, and run the company better,” someone suggests.

Immediately everyone turns on her.

“That’s an outrageous suggestion,” they say.

And then the game of defence begins.

“No, instead we must spend more money and increase our debt, even though we can’t afford it, and if the managers miss their targets next year too, we’ll do the same again until it works.”

The shareholders would of course lose all their money and the company would fail.

It would be unthinkable in the private sector - why is it so often the default POSITION in the public sector?

In Scotland, the SNP has tested the theory that spending more money on public services automatically means better services - to destruction.

They generously receive much more funding per head than England does. The results?

This summer, we saw the streets of Edinburgh and Glasgow filled with uncollected waste.

A scandal over new ferry contracts that saw the Hebrides face food rationing.

The Think Scotland website rates their economic performance as DIRE – with all measures of poverty getting worse.

And Scots have lower life expectancy than people elsewhere in Britain.

More money is not the way to fix problems: the SNP has proved it.

And the by the way, Scotland’s future is best served by remaining in the United Kingdom, not by giving Nicola Sturgeon even more power to screw things up.

FINANCIAL CREDIBILITY

So I want to see our Party regain its credibility by restoring its commitment to sustainable public spending.

What I mean by that is setting a ceiling for spending on public services which is affordable today, tomorrow and for the foreseeable future.

Right now, we have got into a pattern of borrowing huge amounts to fix today's urgent problems or generate short term populist headlines.

Each time, it seems that there's a good case. But what does this mean for future generations?

Many of us have children. These short-term fixes are loading an unsustainable burden on their shoulders.

Most young people already struggle to save anything for homes, pensions, or to start a family. They don't feel they have a stake in society.

Their dreams are withering.

Saddled with repaying a record debt burden, their future looks grim.

Not surprisingly, few of them vote Conservative.....

And yet many of them, like us want radical change.

We can change that.

We need to show them an alternative vision.

One in which they can own homes, start families, save for their futures, and afford their taxes.

We need to give them back that stake in society.

We need to offer them a future in which they can believe. A Conservative future.

The danger is that today's lavish spending means that the weight on their shoulders is only going to increase....

.....Yet this generation has been taught to see sound public finances as a threat.

So we need to talk to them about sustainability in public finance.

A level of spending that the country can afford today, tomorrow, and throughout their lives.

So they can enjoy the same services in ten years or twenty years as they do today.

And the taxes they pay allow them to afford the things previous generations enjoyed: homes, families, a comfortable old age.

To get there, we have to prioritise sustainable spending and good management.

It is right that our Party in Government is making the case for low taxes and supply side reforms.

We understand the importance of growth in creating sustainable public finances – and how high taxation threatens it.

But as Margaret Thatcher showed us, we must ensure our spending and debt are sustainable in order to bring taxes down.

Otherwise, interest rate rises, inflation and instability may mean that the growth never arrives.....

.....debt balloons further,

And taxes go back up.

It is our responsibility to do what it takes to achieve that sustainably by careful management of public spending.

Because the Conservative Party lives or dies by its ability to manage the Nation's finances well.....

None of this will be easy.

It will involve difficult and bold decisions.

But just two years ago, people were saying that the Rwanda policy was a simple impossibility.

We made it a reality.

CONCLUSION:

Yes, we're in tough times - tougher than we've seen for decades.

And we are going to have to relearn some hard truths.

There is a limit to the amount of public spending we can afford, no matter how much we might want to put more into social care or the health service.

And once you get to that point, taxation is a law of diminishing returns.

But we can do it.

The Conservative Party has made these arguments with great success before.

We won election after election through the 1980s above all because we were trusted on the economy.

We can do that again for a new generation.

Today, I want to look forward, not back.

And I want to set an even tougher target.

I imagine nothing would make Lady Thatcher happier than to see us do even better than she did, transforming the future of our country.

Let us set out a new vision, a modern vision, a radical vision, but above all, a sound, Conservative vision.

A vision to make our country stronger than ever.

I hope you will all join me in shaping it and in making it a reality.

Thank you

...ENDS