

Business Secretary at the CBI 2020 Annual Conference

Good morning everyone,

And thank you Karan for that very kind introduction.

I'm absolutely delighted to be addressing such a wide and illustrious business audience today – although virtually and I think that's a sign of the times.

The Prime Minister will be offering his remarks to the CBI later this week.

But, let me start by paying tribute to Carolyn, for her leadership of the CBI over the last 5 years.

These have been turbulent times for businesses.

And Carolyn has led from the front.

Ensuring that your voices are heard loud and clear across the country and of course within government.

On a personal note, I am very grateful to Carolyn for the constructive and pragmatic discussions we have had over the past months.

We have worked together to help businesses become COVID-secure and deliver unprecedented support from government.

As President of the CBI, Lord Bilimoria will bring the experience and knowledge needed to steer businesses through choppy waters.

And I want to welcome Tony Danker, as the next Director General of the CBI.

These are extraordinary circumstances in which to assume this role.

And I wish Tony the very best. Because your success will be our shared success in supporting the economy.

My heartfelt thanks and admiration also goes to all of you, the CBI's members, and businesses up and down the country.

I have had over 1,500 conversations with businesses and business representative organisations across the country since I took on this role.

Including travelling to every part of the United Kingdom.

It is clear that this has not just been a tough year, but the toughest of years.

And we all know that the difficult days are not yet over.

Further lockdown measures

On Saturday evening, the Prime Minister announced further restrictions across England, to take action to control the virus and protect the NHS.

And to head off the need for even tougher or more enduring restrictions further down the line.

Which means that from Thursday 5 November, until Wednesday 2 December:

People may only leave home for specific reasons including work if they can't work from home.

Non-essential shops, personal care, indoor and outdoor leisure, and entertainment venues will close.

Although shops can continue to provide click and collect services and I know that's been appreciated by business.

Pubs, bars and restaurants will close, except for takeaway and delivery services.

However, people will be able to travel to work, where necessary to allow them to do continue to do their job.

And sectors such as construction and manufacturing will remain open.

And it's vital that scientists and engineers working in R&D including those fighting the virus continue to come together in labs and workplaces across the country.

I do not under-estimate just how difficult these measures will be for businesses.

Many of which have already had to endure hardship this year.

So, alongside these measures, we have announced further support.

These include an extension of the furlough scheme at 80% to protect jobs.

Grants of up to £3,000 per month for premises that are forced to close.

£1.1 billion for local authorities to enable them to support businesses.

I am grateful that the CBI, and so many of you, have welcomed these measures.

As business leaders told me on Saturday evening, after the Prime Minister's statement, these measures will save jobs.

And I will continue to speak to businesses and representative groups to champion your voice at the heart of government.

I do appreciate just how tough these restrictions are on businesses and workers across the country.

How hard it is not knowing when you may be able to trade.

Worrying about your order book and how you will pay your overheads.

It goes against every fibre of my being for us to tell entrepreneurs they must shut down tools.

Shut-down your businesses.

Limit your ability to do what you do so well.

Government support during COVID-19

But that is why, alongside the restrictions, we have taken historic steps this year to keep businesses afloat.

We have protected almost 10 million jobs through furlough.

Approved more than a million government-backed loans, to the tune of over £62 billion.

Paid out almost £14 billion in support of around 3 million self-employed people.

Cut VAT for the hospitality and tourism sector.

Waived over £10 billion of business rates, supporting close to 400,000 businesses.

Given £11 billion in grants covering almost 900,000 business properties.

Brought in a range of regulatory easements to help businesses.

And I'm pleased to say, we've already created thousands of placements through our ground-breaking Kick Start Scheme.

Creating jobs for young people, who are amongst the most at risk of long-term unemployment in these difficult times.

We have been there for you since the start.

We are here for you now.

And we'll be there for you, for as long as you need us.

A salute to British business

But for all the hundreds of billions of pounds of help from the taxpayer, it is you who have done the hard work to keep your businesses going.

You, and those working for the businesses you represent, have been straining every sinew on construction sites.

Powering our factories.

Keeping our transport system moving.

Serving us in supermarkets.

Delivering vital goods in droves.

Putting in shifts from the manufacturing to the service sectors.

Cramming your office work into flats, homes and studies.

And much, much more.

You have demonstrated levels of resolve, resilience, and community spirit the likes of which we have never seen in peacetime.

And innovation that we never dreamed of.

We saw Formula One teams throwing themselves into the ventilator challenge.

A Caerphilly packaging company that turned out 15 million bits of PPE.

We had gin distilleries making hand sanitiser.

High street shops have evolved into online retailers.

From the FTSE 100 to the corner shop, you simply refused to be beaten.

Without our fantastic private sector, without our entrepreneurs, our country would not, could not, have stayed on its feet this year.

I have been humbled at some of the personal sacrifices businesses have had to make to protect the livelihoods of their employees.

It is the absolute definition of responsible capitalism.

And for that I salute each and every one of you.

Vaccine and mass testing

And I want to bottle the hope and innovation you have demonstrated and unleash it as we move forward and beat this virus.

I have seen through my Department the brilliant collaborative work between business and our world-class scientists, in developing a vaccine.

As we speak, the Oxford-Astra Zeneca vaccine is in final-phase trials. With the prospect of a vaccine early next year.

Whilst there has been rapid progress, we recognise that a vaccine which fully eliminates the virus may never materialise.

So we plan to also protect the country in other ways.

As the Prime Minister set out on Saturday, we have the immediate prospect of using many millions of cheap, reliable and rapid turnaround tests.

Over the next few days and weeks, we will plan a steady but significant deployment of these tests.

There are paths out of this current predicament.

To eventually get business fully on its feet and the economy firing on all cylinders.

A great place for business

Because we all know that the United Kingdom is a great country to do business.

We have the lowest corporate tax rates in the G20.

The kind of lean regulation that puts us in the global top 10 for ease of doing business.

And a highly skilled workforce.

It is easy to see why the UK is consistently home to one of the largest, most resilient economies in the world.

All underlining precisely why the UK has long been a great place to do business.

Brexit

And we will open up further opportunities as we take advantage of our new political, legal and economic freedoms as the transition period ends this year.

The negotiations on our future relationship with the EU are ongoing.

At the same time, I urge you to prepare for the future trading relationship in 2 months' time.

Because whatever the outcome, things will change for businesses across our country.

As the transition period comes to an end, and it will not be extended, we are making preparations to ensure the economy is ready.

Such as legislating for a UK internal market to avoid trade barriers when EU legal structures fall away.

A step which, many of you have told us, removes a major item from your corporate risk registers.

My Department, and I, are communicating and engaging with millions of

businesses.

Providing information to help them prepare, as we accelerate towards our new trading relationship with the EU.

And whether we trade on the same terms as Canada or Australia, I know we will make it a success for British businesses and for the whole country.

Because Brexit was always about a better future.

About having the freedom to chart our own course.

And in doing so, bringing much-needed opportunities as we pursue our destiny as an independent nation.

Building back greener

We will take advantage of these opportunities to support our economic recovery from COVID.

I want to ensure we do so in a way that enables the economy to build back greener.

Because it is vital that we not only grow, but we grow sustainably.

UK businesses are at the forefront of this.

Over the last 30 years, the UK economy grew by 75%, and yet we also cut our emissions by 43%.

We were the first major economy to legislate for achieving Net Zero emissions by 2050.

Which not only has the buy-in from businesses across the UK, but increasingly our international partners.

I was in South Korea last week when President Moon announced his country's ambition to achieve Net Zero by 2050, following Japan just a few days earlier.

We will continue to use our COP26 leadership to extend these ambitions across the globe.

I sincerely believe that we are at an inflection point.

With governments, businesses and civil society all now recognising the imperative of tackling climate change.

Many of you already see Net Zero as an opportunity to grow.

Which is why we announced a £3 billion stimulus package over the summer to support the decarbonisation of buildings.

And why the Prime Minister announced last month, that we would aim to install

40GW of offshore wind by 2030.

Extending our position as the world's leading offshore wind producer.

I hope you take advantage of the immediate opportunities this green agenda brings, as we recover from the COVID pandemic.

Skills

And as we create the jobs of tomorrow, we need a laser-like focus on skills.

We are overhauling post-18 education with a new focus on technical courses, and providing £1.5 billion to upgrade and improve college buildings.

Our Lifetime Skills Guarantee is ending the absurd situation where someone's economic destiny is set in stone as a teenager.

The government's new Office for Talent will make it easier for the most skilled individuals in your sectors to come and work for you, wherever they may be in the world today.

Infrastructure

And our record-breaking investment in infrastructure will help connect us all.

Coronavirus has shown that, while we can all work a little more flexibly, people still want and need to come together to do business.

The watercooler moment that takes a seed of an idea and grows it into a new business opportunity cannot be replicated in a carefully scheduled online chat.

It is this government that is putting money into roads and trains and buses in every community across the country.

It is this government that has finally broken ground on HS2.

And it is this government that has launched Project Speed.

So that everything from new hospitals, to long-overdue flood defences, are given form rather than languishing for years on the drawing board.

We are investing almost £600 billion in our future prosperity, delivering infrastructure projects across the UK.

Levelling up

And we will build back better through levelling up across the country.

Because for all the success of our economy, that success has long been poorly spread.

No other city coming close to the economic heft of London, which outstrips Manchester six times over.

An imbalance that was intolerable before coronavirus.

But which takes on a fresh urgency, with our already fragile cities and towns taking the greatest hit from the pandemic.

So we will turbocharge our regions, to enable them to become global hubs in their own right.

The North East of England could become the home of choice for companies delivering carbon capture and storage.

Making hydrogen power a part of daily life.

And designing, building and maintaining offshore wind turbines.

Our brilliant life sciences sector will be propelled to even greater heights from Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh.

The factories of the Midlands will roar back into life, producing the advanced technologies of tomorrow.

As we broaden the geography of our economy, we will help you widen and deepen the range of businesses that comprise it.

With a more strategic approach to supporting research and innovation in areas where the UK has the potential to both lead and change the world.

We are doubling our investment in R&D.

Putting rocket boosters under technologies in clean energy, life sciences, AI and advanced manufacturing.

We will support businesses to scale up – securing a thriving hive of mid-sized businesses.

And I want to work with you to develop our new strategy for growth.

A refreshed and reinvigorated industrial strategy, putting the UK at the forefront of economic opportunity as we build back better.

Conclusion

This whole strategy, this plan, is not some hypothetical vision or academic exercise.

It is already underway.

Clean energy, the overhaul of technical education, the largest investment in infrastructure we've ever seen, it's all happening.

So as we work with you, and support you through the pandemic, we will lay the

foundations for future growth that will endure long after we have emerged from the shadow of coronavirus.

And I want you to help me build on those foundations.

To work together, as our new plan for growth takes shape in the months ahead and is published in the New Year.

Creating a more resilient economy.

A cleaner, greener economy, in which we have control of our own laws and trading policies.

Providing new opportunities for businesses across the UK.

Delivering growth and jobs.

So that a decade from now, when the CBI gathers for its 2030 conference, we will be able to say:

We built it together.

A revived, rejuvenated, sovereign and technology-leading United Kingdom.

With opportunity and prosperity spread equally across our great nation.

Thank you.