

Julian Smith: Speech to Conservative Party Conference 2019

Julian Smith, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The Manchester Convention Centre, said:

(Check against delivery)

Conference

– it is a privilege and an honour to be here as NI secretary today and a massive relief to no longer be the Government's Chief Whip. Northern Ireland is a unique part of the United Kingdom with an important and difficult history that all of us are familiar with...

Since

being appointed Secretary of State 70 days ago, I've been travelling to every corner of Northern Ireland meeting hundreds of people... And when talking to entrepreneurs, hospital staff, youth groups and volunteers...

I

have been struck by people's attitude... by their huge ambition and commitment despite the absence of political decision making from Stormont... ..Whether at Musgrave Park Hospital or Ashfield Boy's School in Belfast or at Derry City and Strabane District Council...

People

have not only been unfailingly challenging, engaged, and fair to me as a new Secretary of State... but there is a real entrepreneurial spirit, a desire for Northern Ireland to grow and prosper.

Just

a few weeks ago, I saw this first hand at an event organised by a new trade group... This trade group was formed just a year ago by three business people ... Glyn Roberts, Stephen Kelly and Colin Neill ... it

brought

350 businesses to Westminster... It was Northern Ireland's largest ever business delegation ...To represent the region's growing and self-confident business community...to convey a clear message – Northern Ireland is open for business.

This

message was heard very loudly yesterday when the energy company Infrastrata announced its acquisition of the iconic Belfast shipyard Harland and Wolff. Throughout the Summer I've been working with the unions, Gavin

Robinson the DUP local MP, the administrators and the workforce to save the yard from closure. Shipbuilding will now continue and thrive in Belfast thanks to a Conservative government. And this Conservative Government is supporting the ambition of all people...

and businesses across Northern Ireland – by investing in the nation's growing economy. ...through the biggest day-to-day funding settlement for Northern Ireland in a decade – £400M announced for NI in the spending review

...This morning I announced that the people and businesses of Mid-South West Northern Ireland and Causeway Coast and Glens will benefit from £163 million of UK Government funding ... supporting economic growth, job creation and investment in local projects.

This means that every part of Northern Ireland now benefits from Growth Deal funding. Under this Conservative Government, Northern Ireland's economy is growing. Ambition is being encouraged and

entrepreneurial spirit is thriving. We've seen unemployment fall to a record low of 2.8% and employment is at a near record high. ...And for this prosperity to continue, we must get Brexit done and deliver a stable devolved Government.

I am clear that the people of Northern Ireland, just like this Government, and this Prime Minister want a deal. And I will be doing everything I can in my role as Northern Ireland Secretary to help the Prime Minister secure a deal

– to protect the NI economy, the Good Friday Agreement and through that the hard-won peace process. And in the context of Brexit, the challenge of restoring

Stormont has become even more important...

...There has been no devolved government for over 1,000 days... ..political decisions impacting citizens lives left unmade ...Vital actions relating to health and social services, education, agriculture not taken.

We now must urgently do all we can to collectively invoke the spirit and trust of those who built the peace process... To listen to young people who have an inspiring and amazing hope for the future...

In spite of and because of the challenges they and their families have faced in the past... .. They will benefit from new jobs created in Northern Ireland as a result of this Government's commitment to attracting investment...

...From the increased university funding committed in those new city and growth deals... And if Stormont was up and running, even more could be achieved... apprenticeships and skills academies across the region...

...encouraging wealth creation and new jobs for school-leavers and graduates... ..delivering on health and social services. The Government stands ready to support a northern Irish political leader in all these aims.

Because above all... it is vital for those young people that we deliver a prosperous future for Northern Ireland. A future that can only be delivered through the union and by getting a good economy and security-protecting Brexit deal and getting Stormont back up

and running. And I'll be spending the rest of the coming weeks trying to do exactly that.

ENDS