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- BTP outlines 'extraordinary risks' of merging force with Police Scotland

6 Mar 2017



The British Transport Police has tabled explosive evidence ahead of appearing before MSPs tomorrow about the risks of merging the respected organisation with Police Scotland.

Ahead of the planned SNP move for the single force to take on BTP responsibilities north of the border, both the organisation itself and its authority will detail what the Scottish Conservatives have described as "extraordinary risks".

In its evidence, the BTP will say that dealing with fatalities could take 50 per cent longer under the new plans, and that "there is well-defined evidence that a non-specialist force is less able to provide the consistent levels of service that a dedicated policing commitment can offer".

Decades of experience in dealing with IRA threats would be lost, the evidence stated, meaning future terror incidents may cause significantly more disruption than previously.

There is also a "potential risk" of staff deciding to retire from the BTP or leave altogether, rather than joining Police Scotland under the new set-up, meaning considerable experience would be lost overnight.

A number of legal difficulties will also emerge.

The evidence states: "Officers would not have any legal jurisdiction to operate as constables in Scotland.

This would obviously create difficulties in policing any railway service that crosses the border, particularly as officers from other divisions will still need to carry personal protective equipment such as TASER type devices or incapacitant sprays, both of which are defined as weapons."

The submission goes on: "There is also a real risk that the investigation of crime will become more complicated, and possibly more costly."

The views, which will be heard at tomorrow's Holyrood justice committee, also refer to "specialist train services including nuclear trains, MOD trains and the Royal Train" which are currently operated on an "end-to-end" route basis by the BTP.

And on top of the BTP evidence, the BTP Authority will also weigh in on the SNP's plans. It will point out the skills of BTP officers "differentiate from their counterparts elsewhere", and that "transferring railway policing is not the same as merging eight police forces with the same function".

Later in the meeting, Police Scotland is expected to point out it has merger experience following the creation of the single force in 2013.

Scottish Conservative shadow justice secretary Douglas Ross said:

"The arguments set out here are extraordinary, and should leave the SNP in no doubt about why it should not pursue this merger.

"It is an utterly needless move, which is inspired by nationalism rather than national security.

"We completely agree that the British Transport Police should be more accountable to the Scottish Parliament, and the BTP itself has set out how that can be done.

"Instead, the SNP is using that reason to swallow up the organisation as a whole.

"And as we see from this evidence, that could have a range of desperately negative consequences.

"From coping with terrorist threats to a delay in dealing with complex fatalities, it's clear this is the wrong move.

"The Scottish Government should heed these warnings and shelve these unnecessary and unpopular plans immediately."

To see the evidence from both the BTP and the BTP Authority to be presented tomorrow, visit:

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_JusticeCommittee/Inquiries/British_Transport_Police1.pdf

http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S5_JusticeCommittee/Inquiries/BTP_Authority.pdf

[Ruth Davidson's speech to conference](#)

4 Mar 2017



Below is the full text of Ruth Davidson's keynote speech to the Scottish

Conservative conference.

"Thank-you conference for that wonderful welcome.

And thank-you to Glasgow for hosting us.

Being here takes me back to one of my very favourite moments of last year.

About six in the morning on May 6th.

Standing in the Royal Highland centre in Edinburgh as the votes are being counted.

Totally knackered.

And all over Scotland, the news has been coming in.

Aberdeenshire West – Alex Burnett, taking the seat off the SNP.

Eastwood – Jackson Carlaw, winning the seat from Labour.

Dumfriesshire – Oliver Mundell, triumphing over Joan McAlpine.

You know, some wins are just that little bit sweeter....

Five list seats bagged in the North-East.

John Scott winning in Ayr – John Scott ALWAYS wins in Ayr.

And then a phonecall from Glasgow.

Annie Wells saying they're just about to do the announcement and it's not just Adam Tomkins that's got in, she has, too.

The first time since devolution we've doubled our tally and got two MSPs here..

Now, I was always quietly confident about getting two in Glasgow.

But not everyone was.

I'll let you in on a secret.

Just between us.

Most of you will know that Annie used to work on the shop floor in her local Marks and Sparks.

She went to the count on election night playing down her chances, and had to phone up her boss the next day saying she'd got a new job and was handing in her notice.

From the shop floor straight to the chamber floor of the Scottish Parliament – that's what I call checking out.

Annie Wells – not just an MSP... she's an M and S, MSP...

...

Conference, the Scottish Conservatives don't shy away from Glasgow, not any more – we win in Glasgow.

Because this party – the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party – is back.

THANKYOU

Conference, I want to start today by saying thank-you to all of you.

You, who brought us that success last May.

And particularly to those of you for whom that taste of success was a long time coming.

All around this hall, I see people whose service to this party eclipses my own.

Who fought for this party during the toughest of times.

Who took part in campaigns in the expectation of defeat – but did it anyway.

You know who you are.

You deserved last May's result more than anybody.

Because if it hadn't been for people like Alec Johnstone and Marjorie Borthwick fighting campaigns over the years, regardless of their chance of victory, we might not have even made it this far.

If people like Diana McKenzie, Hamish McLeod or Elizabeth Walsh had packed it in and decided we were a lost cause back in the day, it would now be up to Labour to defend the Union – and God knows WHERE we'd be.

If Mark McInnes and his brilliant team in Northumberland street hadn't kept churning out the leaflets

...or had stopped nagging candidates to keep doing their canvass

...or had let the regular street stalls slide

...or hadn't organised another fundraiser – then Nicola Sturgeon would right now be even more cocky about her plans to separate our country in two.

...if that's even possible.

If it hadn't been for you – then this party, the only party which has the courage and the guts to stand up to the SNP – wouldn't be able to do that job right now.

So – from the bottom of my heart – thank you.

PROVIDING A STRONG OPPOSITION

And now – because of you – we CAN deliver.

Holding this failing and complacent SNP Government to account.

And providing the strong opposition this country needs.

Named persons – remember that? We – alone – said no. We – alone – demanded a re-think... the plans are now dumped in the long grass.

Just this week, we inflicted another defeat on the SNP in parliament over their plans for yet more centralisation, this time on education.

And last month on business rates – as hotels and pubs the length and breadth of Scotland were threatened with closure....,

...with SNP Ministers refusing to listen

...in a campaign led brilliantly by Murdo Fraser, WE fought it tooth and nail and WE forced the SNP to think again.

It's opposition with a purpose.

Testing the arguments, demanding change, representing people who don't get heard...

...not moaning from the sidelines like Labour...

... but leading from the front – and forcing this incompetent SNP Government to wake up and deliver.

Doing the job for Scotland we promised we'd do.

And, you know what? We're getting stronger day by day.

31 of us in all.

24 new to the job.

Conference, we brought on enough MSPs last year to have a proper 11-a -side football match.

And, thanks to Douglas Ross, we've even got somebody to referee.

It's been an amazing few months, watching them grow in the job.

Men and women from all walks of life.

Not career politicians. But people who just wanted to do their bit.

And who – over these last few months – have found their voice.

Who have stepped up to the plate and discovered – you know what? – we can do this.

We're good at this.

And let me tell you something.

The Nationalists have noticed.

They've noticed we're not cowed. That we're proud of our beliefs.

And they've noticed that we're ready to take them on.

It really confuses them.

We're Tories. We're supposed to just lie down and get whacked.

Well, not this bunch, conference.

The old hands and the fresh blood – this group of Scottish Conservative MSPs aren't for backing down.

This group of Scottish Conservatives are confident in their beliefs, clear in their values, and determined to stand up to the SNP every step of the way.

Day in day out they are doing our party proud and our country proud – and I could not be more proud to lead them. I want everyone here today to give them our thanks for all the work that they are doing.

...

And then there's David Mundell, our Secretary of State for Scotland.

Getting on with the business of making sure that Scotland's voice is heard loud and clear in the UK government.

From his early days as a backbench MSP to taking his seat around the Cabinet table, David has been a stouthearted servant of party and country.

Never fazed by the incoming fire from SNP MPs, but quietly, effectively getting on with the job.

We couldn't do it without him. David, Thank you.

OFFERING AN ALTERNATIVE

But, conference, if there is one thing that doesn't change in politics – no matter how frenzied things get – it's this.

You get no points for what you've done. No points for patting yourselves on the back.

It's always the next challenge that counts.

The next step is always the most important.

And so while it's been great this weekend to recognise last year's victories,

it's time to focus on the future.

Last year's election already feels light years away. We remember it, we enjoyed it – but we must move on.

For a vital reason

Because our country requires us to.

Last week, at Labour's conference in Perth, we saw what happens to political parties when they turn in on themselves.

Unalloyed negativity; total chaos; and no plan for the future.

But here's the truth: the mess we're seeing in Labour right now only serves to emphasise the responsibility that now lies on our shoulders. Both here and across the UK.

As the only party capable of governing Britain – and thank goodness we have Theresa May at the helm, steering us forward at this time.

I thought the last guy was pretty good, but didn't we see yesterday what a superb and steadfast Prime Minister she is turning out to be.

And Labour's chaos means that, here in Scotland, there now can be only one party which can offer the challenge that's required to the Nationalists.

One party which can credibly look the Scottish people in the eye and offer the country a different path.

...which can speak to people – people who might once have put their faith in Labour or Liberal or the SNP – and offer them something fresh.

And we must.

Because those people – people who once cast their votes elsewhere – they are our people.

Their concerns are our concerns.

And their priorities over these coming years must now be our priorities too.

We must reach out to them, listen to them, to understand their needs.

And we must show them – that this party, the Conservative party, is the one that will stand up for them. That we are a government in waiting.

I'll be honest with you conference – we're not there yet. Not by a long shot.

But by representing them, by serving them, we will reach that goal.

We're not in this for us. We're not a club. We're a party that aspires to govern for all of Scotland..

...a party that wants to show you don't have to pick between the old Labour-SNP establishment anymore.

...A party that says – the United Kingdom isn't a hindrance to Scotland's ambition, but the best way to realise it.

...A party that wants to champion aspiration, success, and old-fashioned Scottish get-up-and-go, and use that energy to tackle society's most intractable problems.

So we must now start, as a party, on that task.

And if we look at how,

We start by setting out clearly our purpose, our vision and the reasons why we are here, asking to serve.

OUR POLITICAL VISION

Conference, my reasons for getting into politics weren't forged in a boardroom, or in some kind of privileged dining club – my politics were forged in my Buckhaven High school classroom...

...A great school, with brilliant teachers, burning with ambition for their pupils...

...that gave me the chance to get on in life

...but where all around you, you could also see opportunities not being taken; potential not being realised; talents not being cradled...

...that wasn't the fault of the teachers, far from it – they went above and beyond to a man and woman...

...it was because it had been drummed into too many young people that to aspire was somehow wrong;

...that ambition was something only other people had;

...that we – the young people of Levenmouth and Kennoway and the Wemyss – we should just know our place, accept the way things are, settle for something second best.

And it is to challenge that – to change it – to bury that suffocating culture of lumping your lot. That's why I joined the Conservative Party.

A party that says to every young person that your place is wherever you want it to be;

...that you don't have to just shrug and accept the way things are;

...that there is nothing that you can't do.

That asks people – yes, to take personal responsibility for their own lives –

but that demands society offers them opportunity in return.

That takes what is best from our traditions, our country and our values – and uses that knowledge to ensure progress in the modern world.

Our purpose, our vision, our reason for being in politics is to ensure those same young people – the classmates I remember – can get on in life.

...it's to make Scotland the best place for them to study, to learn, to get a job, and to have the fulfilment they deserve.

And the sad truth is this.

For too many, Scotland is NOT that place right now.

Because, after ten years in office, this SNP Government has simply squandered the opportunity it has had to transform our country.

So let me set out where change must come.

And for those young people –for my classmates, my friends – it starts back in school.

EDUCATION REFORM

This SNP Government's handling of our education system over the last decade in power has been shameful – and change needs to happen.

Standards in reading, maths and science are now falling across the board in international surveys.

We do not perform above the international average in anything.

The Sutton Trust, a leading education charity, last month said this: "There is no specific area where able children in Scotland really excel."

What an absolute disgrace. What a mark of shame.

So much for your social justice, Nicola.

Now let me this clear: teachers are not to blame for this.

And you know what?: I'd like this conference, the Scottish Conservative conference, to record our thanks for the fantastic work they do day in day out – in spite of the SNP incompetence that's hampering them from doing their job.

No. The blame lies with a school system that, thanks to this SNP Government, simply isn't working.

Here's the thing though: we can change this.

So today, I can announce we are going to undertake a root-and-branch review of one part of the system that is failing –and that is Curriculum for

Excellence.

Here's what we're NOT going to do – teachers tell us they don't want yet another top-down reform, so we don't propose scrapping it altogether.

But what we have to do is to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy which has led to this collapse in standards.

... which thinks of facts and knowledge as of secondary importance

...which puts the latest fashionable theory before the basic need for a teacher to teach

...and which has left a generation of teachers, parents and pupils utterly confused about what is going on, or what Curriculum for Excellence even is.

Our review will insist on a better way.

Knowing this: that if we want to lift children out of poverty, they have no greater aid than an education that provides them with the knowledge and facts empowering them to do so.

We will report back with a set of practical recommendations.

But it is already clear: it is time to get rid of the waffle, and the theories that have failed – and restore Scotland's reputation as providing the best education in the world.

And we want more besides...

More innovation and freedom in our education system – so entrepreneurs like Jim McColl are encouraged, not put off, from building more brilliant junior colleges for kids who would otherwise leave school with nothing.

And when pupils have left school: more support where it's needed.

Let's never forget conference, that this SNP Government is the same government which slashed 150,000 College places so Alex Salmond could enjoy a photo-op with a rock.

Where the SNP guts vocational education, we say it is every bit as valuable as an academic one. So we would reverse those cuts.

For this simple reason.

Because we believe in opportunity.

We believe in a good education. In providing that positive start for all. And then handing on a country that shows our young people that they can grab those opportunities they crave.

That whatever course they want to plot, whichever industry they wish to pursue, whichever role they want to achieve, they can do that here at home.

And we have to ask ourselves, is Scotland, under the SNP, doing that?

The sad truth is again the same: no, it is not.

Economic growth: a third of what it is elsewhere in the UK.

Income taxes: now higher.

Business taxes: for many, doubling overnight.

What kind of message are we sending out?

Conference, I speak to job creators across Scotland every week. And they are worried...

...worried about an SNP Government gaining ever more power over our economy yet without an idea how to use it.

...and worried about a Scottish Government which has one plan for Brexit and one plan only – to use it to break up our United Kingdom.

Ask yourselves: is that the actions of a responsible government?

Look: you all know where I stand on our decision to leave the European Union.

And, if you don't, you can just ask Boris....

I'll be honest: I think the negotiations we face are going to be tough. We are going to be tested. It is not going to be easy.

But here's the difference between me and Nicola Sturgeon.

I want us to make a success of Brexit. She wants Britain to fail.

And irrespective of how I voted, I have to respect the result. She's never met a referendum she hasn't tried to overturn.

I say this here today – As we leave the EU, whether individually we were Remain or Leave, we deserve a Scottish Government that is focussed on helping Team UK get the best Brexit deal for all of us, not using it to revive its independence obsession.

Just look at our firms, small and large, manufacturing and services.

Across Scotland: are they wallowing in doom? No – they are planning how to tackle challenges and exploit opportunities.

And that's been our positive plan too.

Last week, our own expert group on Brexit reported back.

Made up of Remainers AND Leavers – because this Conservative party believes in bringing our country back together.

And what they said is clear. It's this: you don't sort Brexit by splitting the UK. You deal with Brexit by sticking together.

I'm a democrat, conference: we accepted the rules, we must now accept the result and we move on to implement it.

And I think the right path is now clear.

We must keep Scotland competitive – with taxes no higher than the rest of the UK.

We must keep Scotland in our own Union – so we can benefit from our own internal market.

And we must put all our efforts into striking a free trade deal with Europe to ensure our firms can continue to thrive.

And we need our Governments in both Edinburgh and London to seek out new markets for Scottish goods.

Because the potential for growth is enormous.

Our trade with the rest of the world is already more than the whole of the EU

And – if we really put our mind to it – Scotland's rest of the world exports could be double those to Europe over the coming years.

The fact is Scotland has the brilliant products and the high-end services that the world wants.

It's now our job to go out and sell them.

Wouldn't it be lovely, conference, if we had a Scottish Government that sought to use this time to talk up what we COULD do, rather than find or create all that we can't?

Wouldn't it be nice if we had a Scottish Government that focussed on how to grow Scotland's success in the coming years?

I say to the SNP:

Stop talking Scotland down – and go out to the world and talk our prospects up for once.

IGNORING THE DAY JOB

You know, when I look at our SNP Government, the truth is it just frustrates me.

All that energy, all that sense of purpose, all that work – and so little going where it's needed.

Not in education – only this week, John Swinney has delayed his reforms yet again.

Not on the economy. Where their answer to low growth is to tax firms more.
And not in so many other areas too.

Our job as Scotland's opposition has been to show there is an alternative.

In just the last six months:

We've campaigned – successfully – for more of NHS funding to go to family doctors – so we can tackle the nation's poor health at source.

We've set out a plan to cut Air Passenger Duty for long-haul – so Scotland can be better connected to the world.

We've set out a raft of proposals to finally achieve parity between mental and physical health treatment – and, crucially, to reduce health inequality.

And only last week, we set out a new paper making it clear that economic growth must go hand in hand with care for our environment.

But we must do more.

The NHS. Doctors and nurses doing their best from one day to the next. What's the SNP's plan?

To keep it going until the next winter crisis, or until after the next election, in the hope staff keep staggering on despite growing demand and ever higher expectations.

It's not good enough.

We need a long-term strategy which sets the course for the NHS to prosper for the rest of this century – not short term political fixes

So, led by Donald Cameron, our new health spokesman, we will soon announce our plans for a new independent advisory board on the NHS and social care – made up of practitioners, not placemen – to deliver a real long-term vision for our health service.

To offer a bold vision of how the founding values of the NHS can be renewed for the modern age.

And what about Local Government. What's the SNP's plan there?

It's to scoop up as much power as you can, and try and control everything from the centre.

It's not good enough.

You know where our challenge is coming from in local government?

It's coming from thriving metropolitan areas in Manchester, in Birmingham, in Liverpool.

And what Scotland needs isn't more local powers flowing to our First Minister: we need more powerful local leaders in OUR great cities to take on the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine.

Scotland's growth levels are lagging behind the UK and have done so for the last 3 years.

More centralisation isn't the answer to this – in fact, centralisation is the cause of this.

So in our manifesto for the Local Government elections we will be setting out plans to empower councils and give them a renewed purpose.

With a greater role to deliver economic growth – with incentives so local areas keep the rewards from that growth.

And, crucially, given more control over the way money is raised and spent.

Real devolution: not just to Holyrood, but to the communities and cities that matter.

NO TO INDYREF2

Conference, I think in short – we've all just had enough of the SNP saying what CAN'T be done. We want a government that says YES, YES I CAN, for once. Instead, what do we get?

Moaning about Westminster...when it's not Westminster in charge.

Complaining they don't have the cash – only to find millions down the back of the sofa.

Admitting things maybe haven't gone so well...but then saying they just need more time.

I say: you've had your time and if you can't act, or won't act, then it's time somebody else had a go.

Because we need to focus on the massive challenges of the next thirty years

How automation will increasingly change the very nature of work in this country.

How an ageing population is going to challenge our welfare state.

How public services can reform so they don't just mop up social problems, but intervene before those problems happen in the first place.

Can you even imagine this spin-drenched, short-termist SNP Government thinking about issues like that?

You want to know why I'm so determined to oppose a second referendum on independence?

Yes, it's because I don't want to see my country go through all the turmoil and the division we suffered three years ago.

Yes, it's because I will defend Scotland's place in the UK it helped build and has ownership of all my days, and don't want to see it threatened again.

But, it's also because of what we're NOT doing when our thoughts turn inwards.

...when we head down the constitutional cul-de-sac once again.

NOT sorting out our schools.

NOT dealing with a plan for our NHS.

NOT delivering economic growth, NOT empowering local government, NOT focusing on people's priorities.

How many more years, conference, can Scotland afford to spend time NOT properly addressing these things that matter?

How much longer do we have to put up with a Nationalist party that puts ITS grievance-hunting agenda, before all OUR priorities.

And for whom?

You know, the SNP claim to speak for our country, but they don't half turn a deaf ear to the actual people of Scotland.

Apparently "WE" need a referendum to assert our national identity. Forgetting that fewer than one in three of us say we actually want a referendum at all.

Here's the hard truth. The voices of the people of Scotland only matter to Nicola Sturgeon when they're saying something she already agrees with.

Don't agree with the SNP? Then your voice doesn't matter to them – you don't count.

Are you as sick and tired as I am of their arrogance?

Are you as angry as I am that the result of a democratic vote – one that the SNP promised to respect just 3 years ago – is being torn up in front of our eyes?

Yes, they're the government.

They've got the Ministerial offices and the chauffeured cars.

But they work for us, the people of Scotland.

And the people of Scotland are telling them loud and clear...

You're not on.

We don't share your constitutional obsession.

Not when Scotland's children are being failed by your mishandling of our schools.

Not when waiting times in our NHS are lengthening and tens of thousands of operations are being cancelled.

Not when violent crime in our communities is on the rise.

We don't want the next year, and the year after that, and the year after that, taken up with another independence referendum

We want you to do the job you were elected to do...

To address the issues that really matter.

...To make our schools better, our hospitals, our economy and the lives of all our people.

Scotland said no to independence.

Scotland is saying – stop trying to bounce us into another referendum.

And I can promise you this.

This party – the Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party – will never waver in our determination to stand up for the decision we made as a country. We will fight you every step of the way.

We said no.

We meant it.

Are you listening, Nicola Sturgeon?

No. Second. Referendum.

NATIONALISTS SHOULD TELL THE TRUTH ON INDEPENDENCE

And let me say this to the First Minister as well.

There's been a lot of talk since Labour's conference last weekend about the language we use in political debate.

It's a fair question and we should all seek to live up to our own standards.

But I'm sick of the SNP's double-standards on this.

So when SNP figures attack the other side, I simply say this: it's time you lived by the same rules that you apply to others.

When you accuse pro-Union figures of distorting the truth...

...please, show Scotland some respect by giving us the truth on the cost of

breaking our Union in two.

When you attack my party over the need to balance the country's books...

... give Scotland the truth about the cuts your policies would incur if we backed independence.

And when you try to portray Britain as an insular country, as something different or other, to us here in Scotland...

... take a moment to look around you.

Look at the staff in East Kilbride just down the road, delivering British Aid and Development money to some of the poorest nations on the planet.

Reflect on the troops at Lossiemouth, at Leuchars, at Faslane, defending democracy and advancing liberty 24-7, 365 days a year – in our name.

Consider what this country – at its best – gives us.

A country which punches above its weight on the world stage – economically, culturally and in the humanitarian aid of others.

A country which gives a girl from Glasgow, microphone in hand, the chance to stand up in the White House and challenge the most powerful man in the world to explain his abhorrent views on Muslims and gay people...

I know our country has its faults, conference.

But I tell the SNP, as you choose to denigrate the UK to advance your cause, don't dare claim that Britain isn't a land worth living in.

...nor that thousands of our fellow Scots want to stay open to the world as part of it.

Because you only diminish yourselves in doing so.

So, conference, I urge you to take this message to people over the coming weeks as we head to elections once again.

That this SNP Government is failing Scotland.

And that this Scottish Conservative party is ready to serve.

Ready to demand a politics that no longer obsesses over the colour of a flag

...but rather focuses on the content of our lives.

I will always stand up for the decision we made 3 years ago; but the truth is, I wish I didn't have to. I'd be the happiest woman alive if I didn't have to talk about the constitution one more time.

Not because my love for this country has diminished – far from it.

But because none of us – Unionist or Nationalist – none of us serve anyone by re-fighting old battles.

We've been down that road before.

And what have we got to show for it?

A divided country, a neglected politics, a Scottish government that has now simply lost all grip on the things that really matter.

Scotland deserves better than this.

It deserves better than "would", and "could" and "may".

It is time for "will" and "can" and "must".

And conference, the responsibility falls to us.

We CAN be that better government.

We MUST be that better government.

We WILL be that better government.

That's our ambition – nothing less.

Though we know it won't come easy.

Conference, we've had a busy few years.

An independence referendum...

A general election...

A Scottish Parliament election...

Hundreds of streets walked.

Thousands of doors knocked.

And with every step we've grown as a party. Hundreds of thousands of Scots have listened to our message, have seen our commitment and have put their trust in us.

And over the next few weeks...

...and in the months and years ahead...

...I'm asking you to do it all again.

Because we know what's on the ballot paper.

We know what's at stake.

...The prosperity of Scotland's families.

..The education of Scotland's children.

..Our place in the United Kingdom.

I'm up for that fight.

I know you are too.

So let's get out there – and get the job done.

Thank you.

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3 Mar 2017



Please see below the speech made by Prime Minister Theresa May to today's Scottish Conservative conference in Glasgow.

Check against delivery.

It is a great pleasure to be here in Glasgow at the biggest and best Scottish Conservative Conference for years.

Last May you achieved our Party's best ever results in a Scottish Parliament election, doubling the number of Conservative MSPs.

You took second place in a Scottish election for the first time in 25 years.

And you beat the Scottish Labour Party for the first time in 60 years.

Every MSP, candidate and activist can take pride in that result.

But there is one person without whom none of it would have been possible.

The leader of the opposition in the Scottish Parliament,

the MSP for Edinburgh Central,

your leader, and my friend: Ruth Davidson.

Last year Ruth had a clear and simple message.

Vote Scottish Conservative to shine a much needed light on the SNP's record and to hold SNP ministers to account.

Since last May, Ruth and her team at Holyrood have been doing just that.

And at Westminster, Scotland has a strong and respected voice at the Cabinet table in David Mundell.

I have worked alongside David for years and I have seen first hand what a champion he is for Scotland, for our Party and for our United Kingdom.

He may be one man, but his hard work and determination have achieved far more for Scotland than the noisy antics of all the SNP MPs combined.

While others fail to hold the SNP to account, Ruth and David's job in doing so is ever more vital.

SNP RECORD

Because for too long a feeble and incompetent Scottish Labour opposition did nothing to scrutinise the SNP for their failures.

An SNP Government interested only in stoking-up endless constitutional grievance and furthering their obsession with independence, at the expense of Scottish public services like the NHS and education, was given a free pass by Labour.

With Ruth now leading the charge, the SNP's holiday from democratic accountability has come to an end.

Take education.

Ruth and her formidable team of MSPs have exposed the SNP's mismanagement of Scotland's schools.

Scottish schools, which once led the world in setting the highest standards of attainment, are now outperformed in every category by schools in England, Northern Ireland, Estonia and Poland.

Education: fully devolved since 1999 and under the SNP's stewardship for ten years.

But standards have fallen, the attainment gap remains and Scottish young people are losing out.

150,000 further education places cut by the Nationalists.

A cap on the number of Scottish students who can enter higher education.

Fewer young people from the poorest backgrounds making it to university than in the rest of the UK.

And just this week we have learned that the SNP Government has delayed its planned education Bill, such is their obsession with the single issue of independence.

The SNP's neglect and mismanagement of Scottish education has been a scandal, but sadly it doesn't stop there.

The abysmal failure of their farm payments system.

Their replacement of stamp duty with a new tax which charges Scottish home buyers more, but brings in less revenue than promised.

Starving the health service by refusing to match the spending increases on the NHS in England.

The SNP Government demands further powers for the Scottish Parliament, but fails to pass powers on to local people in Scotland's villages, towns and cities.

They have scrapped the Right to Buy, denying ordinary working families a chance to own their own home.

They oppose our nuclear deterrent, which keeps us all safe, and on which tens of thousands of Scottish jobs rely.

The simple truth is their policies are not in the best interests of Scotland, but in the political interest of the SNP.

A party resolutely focused on just one thing: independence.

For them, it is not about doing the right thing.

The SNP play politics as though it were a game.

But politics is not a game and the management of devolved public services in Scotland is too important to be neglected.

People in Scotland deserve a First Minister who is focused on their priorities – raising standards in education, taking care of the health service, reforming criminal justice, helping the economy prosper, improving people's lives.

Instead, they have an SNP Government obsessed with its own priority of independence, using the mechanisms of devolved government to further its political aims and all the while neglecting and mismanaging public services in Scotland.

The SNP have been allowed to get away with it for too long.

But not any more.

Now, in Ruth Davidson, Scotland has a fighter who will stand up to the SNP establishment, in the interests of the Scottish people, and provide a real alternative to the SNP.

POSITIVE CASE FOR THE UNION

But as well as taking on the SNP for their failures in office, we have another important job.

When I stood outside Downing Street on the day I became Prime Minister, I reminded people in that the full title of our Party is the Conservative and Unionist Party.

And that word 'unionist' is very important to me.

My first visit as Prime Minister was here to Scotland.

I wanted to make clear that strengthening and sustaining the bonds that unite us is a personal priority for me.

I am confident about the future of our United Kingdom and optimistic about what we can achieve together as a country.

The fundamental strengths of our Union, and the benefits it brings to all of its constituent parts, are clear.

But we all know that the SNP will never stop twisting the truth and distorting reality in their effort to denigrate our United Kingdom and further their obsession of independence.

It is their single purpose in political life.

We need to be equally determined to ensure that the truth about our United Kingdom is heard loudly and clearly.

As Britain leaves the European Union and we forge a new role for ourselves in the world, the strength and stability of our Union will become even more important.

We must take this opportunity to bring our United Kingdom closer together.

Because the Union which we all care about is not simply a constitutional artefact.

It is a union of people, affections and loyalties.

It is characterised by sharing together as a country the challenges which we all face, and freely pooling the resources we have to tackle them.

The existence of our Union rests on some simple but powerful principles: solidarity, unity, family.

HOW WE BECAME A UNION AND WHY WE PROSPER TOGETHER

Our United Kingdom has evolved over time and has a proud history.

Together we form the world's greatest family of nations.

But the real story of our Union is not to be found in Treaties or Acts of Parliament.

It is written in our collective achievements, both at home and in the world.

Together, we led the world into the industrial age.

From the Derbyshire dales, to the south Wales Valleys and the workshops of Clydeside, British industrialists, inventors and workers charted the course to modernity and made the United Kingdom the world's engine-room.

The Union enabled the social, scientific and economic developments which powered our collective achievement.

Bringing people and communities closer together allowed new connections to be made.

The steam engine; perfected in the 1790s by a partnership between an engineer from Greenock, James Watt, and a manufacturer from Birmingham, Matthew Boulton.

The Menai Straits; spanned in the 1820s by an engineer from Dumfriesshire, Thomas Telford.

Collective achievement has been the story of our Union ever since.

Penicillin; discovered in 1928 by a Scottish doctor, Alexander Fleming, working in a London hospital, St Mary's.

The Harry Potter books, which have sold over 500 million copies, were begun in a café in Edinburgh by an author from Gloucestershire.

And that co-operation – economic, social, and cultural – has been the bedrock of our success as a Union of nations and people.

Together, we make up the world's fifth-largest economy, despite accounting for less than 1 per cent of the world's population.

Together, we fought against and defeated tyranny.

Ours is not a marriage of convenience, or a fair-weather friendship, but a true and enduring Union, tested in adversity and found to be true.

And the great institutions which we have built together, the pillars of our national life, are the result of common endeavour.

The National Health Service, the BBC, our armed forces, our Parliamentary democracy, our constitutional monarchy, our commitment to the rule of law, our respect for fundamental human rights.

All have been admired and imitated around the world, and all were created here as a consequence of our common life together.

These achievements are the fruits of our Union.

They are the signs which signify its deep and fundamental strengths.

AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR THE WHOLE UK

We should never be shy of making that positive case for the Union, because logic and facts are on our side.

Take the economic arguments.

One of the driving forces behind the Union's creation was the remorseless logic that greater economic strength and security come from being united.

Not the transient and shifting benefits of international alliance, but the fundamental strength of being one people.

Those enduring economic strengths are obvious.

Our wholly integrated domestic market for businesses means no barriers to trade within our borders.

That has always been of immense value to firms here in Scotland.

The SNP point out the importance of the European market to Scottish businesses.

I agree – it is important.

That's why I am determined to get the best possible access to it for Scottish firms, as I am for Welsh, English and Northern Irish firms.

But what the SNP don't point out is that the UK domestic market is worth four times more to Scottish firms.

In fact, the EU comes third after the rest of the UK, and the rest of the world as a market for Scottish goods.

And yet the SNP propose Scottish independence, which would wrench Scotland out of its biggest market.

They think independence is the answer to every question in every circumstance, regardless of fact and reality.

It simply does not add up and we should never stop saying so.

And the UK is not just a market place.

The financial stability of a strong shared currency and central bank underpins all sectors our economy, across all four nations of the UK.

The broad shoulders of the world's fifth-largest economy provide enviable security for businesses and workers alike.

Ten years ago, banks headquartered in Edinburgh and London, which employ tens of thousands of people and look after the savings of millions, were rescued

by the UK Treasury.

Action that was only possible because of the size and strength of the British economy.

In the oil and gas sector – a vital industry on our east coast, from Aberdeen to Lowestoft – the broad shoulders of our wider economy have allowed the UK Government to take unprecedented action to support the sector following the decline in the international oil price.

And public spending here in Scotland has been protected, even as North Sea tax receipts have dwindled to nothing.

Time and again the benefits of the Union – of doing together, collectively, what would be impossible to do apart – are clear.

Indeed the economic case for the Union has never been stronger.

There is no economic case for breaking up the United Kingdom, or of loosening the ties which bind us together.

But the economics are only part of the story.

SECURITY

The national security of the Union in a changing world has never been more important.

The United Kingdom has led the world in developing a strategy for preventing violent extremism, and we are working with our allies to take on and defeat the ideology of Islamist Extremism.

It is firmly in our national interest to defeat Daesh and the ideology of Islamic extremism that inspires them and many other terrorist groups in the world today.

In this task, we are fortunate to draw on intelligence provided by the finest security agencies in the world and the greatest armed forces anywhere.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, we promote peace and security around the world and help to uphold the rules-based order on which they rest.

As a leading member of NATO, and the foremost military power in Western Europe, we are a guarantor of the freedom and democracy of our Euro-Atlantic partners, especially our allies in Eastern Europe.

It is because we take these international obligations seriously that the United Kingdom is one of the few countries to meet our NATO target of spending 2 per cent of national income on defence, and our UN target to spend 0.7 per cent of our income on international aid.

The United Kingdom is a responsible member of the international

community and Scotland makes a huge contribution to the UK's global role.

The Department for International Development has its main operational headquarters in East Kilbride – from there work is co-ordinated which saves lives around the world.

Leading international efforts to end the outrages of Female Genital Mutilation, child marriage and violence against women and children.

The second largest donor to the Syrian crisis, helping millions of families access food, water, sanitation and shelter.

Tens of millions of children around the world immunised against preventable disease and given access to a basic education.

All work driven from right here in Scotland.

In defence, Scotland is central to the United Kingdom's capability.

HMNB Clyde, one of the largest single employment sites in Scotland, is not only the home of the nuclear deterrent which keeps us safe in a changing world.

By the end of 2020 it will be the home of all of the Royal Navy's submarines – a major investment in the future of the West of Scotland.

And this summer the steel will begin to be cut on a new generation of Royal Navy frigates, right here on the Clyde.

Our great Scottish shipyards don't just have a proud past, they have a great future too.

Firms like Ferguson Marine of Port Glasgow, which is marrying traditional shipbuilding skills with world-leading innovations in equipment and processes.

Despite the scaremongering of the SNP, and their shameful attempts to use the jobs of workers as a political football, shipbuilding jobs in Scotland will be sustained thanks to UK Government orders.

POOLING AND SHARING RISKS AND REWARDS

These practical examples of the benefits of the United Kingdom reflect a deeper truth.

The pooling and sharing of risks and resources on the basis of need across our United Kingdom is the essence of our unity as a people.

All of the practical benefits which flow from our Union, and which are hallmarks of it, depend on that deep and essential community of interest which we all share.

It has been shaped by geography and refined by history. And it has shown itself to be adaptable

Devolution is an example of that.

No-one can doubt our Party's credentials on devolution.

Conservatives in Government have taken through landmark pieces of legislation to strengthen the devolution settlements.

The Scotland Act 2016 implemented in full the legislative recommendations of the all-party Smith Commission Agreement, making the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved legislatures in the world.

The comparison between a United Kingdom which has passed more powers down to its constituent parts, and a European Union which has sought to centralise more power in Brussels, could not be clearer.

But the devolution of powers across the United Kingdom must not mean we become a looser and weaker union.

We cannot allow our United Kingdom to drift apart.

For too long the attitude in Whitehall has been to 'devolve and forget'.

But as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I am just as concerned that young people in Dundee get a good start in life and receive the education they need to reach their full potential as I am about young people in Doncaster and Dartford.

I care as much about the dignity and security of older people on both sides of the River Tweed or the Irish Sea.

The economic prosperity of the UK as a whole depends on young people in all parts of the UK having the skills they need to reach their full potential.

And people who have worked hard all their lives and made a contribution to society are everyone's concern.

It goes back to the fundamental unity of the British people which underwrites our whole existence as a United Kingdom.

We are all diminished when any part of the UK is held back, and we all share in the success when we prosper.

In Government that principle is called 'collective responsibility'.

We need to build a new 'collective responsibility' across the United Kingdom, which unites all layers of government, to work positively together to improve the lives of everyone in our country.

As the Government serving the whole United Kingdom, formed in a Parliament drawn from the whole United Kingdom, the UK Government exercises a responsibility on behalf of the whole UK that transcends party politics and encompasses all aspects of our national life.

While fully respecting, and indeed strengthening, the devolution settlements

and the devolved administrations across the UK, we must unashamedly assert this fundamental responsibility on our part.

So in those reserved policy areas where we govern directly for the whole United Kingdom, we will explicitly look to the interests of the Union – both the parts and the whole – in our policy-making.

And in policy areas where responsibilities are devolved, we will look for ways to collaborate and work together with the devolved administrations to improve the outcomes for everyone.

The modern Industrial Strategy, which the UK Government is currently consulting on, is a case in point.

This truly UK-wide strategy represents a new approach to government, stepping up to a new, active role that backs business and ensures people in all parts of the UK share in the benefits of economic success.

Scotland stands to benefit from this new approach.

Whether it is shipbuilding, oil and gas, or food and drink exports – Scotland has huge industrial potential.

In those areas where the UK Government holds the policy levers, we will use them wisely to the benefit of Scottish firms and workers.

Where the Scottish Government hold the levers, in areas like skills and infrastructure, we will seek to work with them to ensure the best outcomes for Scotland.

At all times, we will seek to strengthen and enhance the ties that bind us together.

BREXIT AND THE UNION

And I am determined to ensure that as we leave the EU, we do so as one United Kingdom, which prospers outside the EU as one United Kingdom.

That means achieving a deal with the EU which works for all parts of the UK – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – and for the United Kingdom as a whole.

When the UK Government begins negotiations with the EU on Brexit, we will do so in the interests of all parts of the UK and of the UK as a whole. That is what I mean by governing for the whole United Kingdom.

As well as ensuring that we get the best possible deal from Brexit, we also need to ensure that the United Kingdom can operate as effectively as possible in the future.

The UK devolution settlements were designed in 1998 without any thought of a potential Brexit.

In areas like agriculture, fisheries, and the environment, the devolution settlements in effect devolved to the legislatures in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast the power to implement EU directives in these areas, within a common EU framework.

The essential common standards which underpin the operation of a single market were provided at the European level.

As we bring powers and control back to the United Kingdom, we must ensure that right powers sit at the right level to ensure our United Kingdom can operate effectively and in the interests of all of its citizens, including people in Scotland.

We must also ensure that the UK which emerges from the EU is able to strike the best possible trade deals internationally.

In short, we must avoid any unintended consequences for the coherence and integrity of a devolved United Kingdom as a result of our leaving the EU.

As I have made clear repeatedly, no decisions currently taken by the Scottish Parliament will be removed from them.

While the SNP propose that decision-making should remain in Brussels, we will use the opportunity of Brexit to ensure that more decisions are devolved back into the hands of the Scottish people.

Our aim will be to achieve the most effective arrangements to maintain and strengthen the United Kingdom, while also respecting the devolution settlements, and we will work constructively with the devolved administrations on that basis.

But unlike any of the individual devolved administrations, the United Kingdom Parliament is elected by the whole UK, and the UK Government serves the whole UK.

That places on us a unique responsibility to preserve the integrity and future viability of the United Kingdom, which we will not shirk.

GLOBAL TRADING NATION

And I believe that the opportunities which Brexit presents for all parts of the United Kingdom are real.

Take Scotch whisky, a truly great Scottish and British industry, adding £5 billion to the UK economy annually and now the largest net contributor to the UK's trade balance in goods.

It directly supports tens of thousands of jobs, from farmers in the Highlands to ceramics workers in Stoke.

After Brexit, its potential for growth in exports across the world is immense.

India, our Commonwealth partner, is one of the world's largest spirits markets.

But within the EU, Scotch whisky faces a tariff of 150% for selling to India.

And Scotch whisky, the world's preeminent spirit, has just a one per cent share of the Indian market.

I am determined that we should do better than that for our key industries.

That's why I led a major trade delegation to India last year, and why I was delighted to take the Scotch Whisky Association with me.

This underlines the potential which exists for Scottish business as the UK embarks on a new, global role and free trading nation – and it is an opportunity we should seize as one strong United Kingdom.

CONCLUSION

And it is in the interest of everyone in our country that we seize those opportunities and make a success of what lies ahead.

Because politics is not a game and government is not a platform from which to pursue constitutional obsessions.

It is about taking the serious decisions to improve people's lives.

A tunnel vision nationalism, which focuses only on independence at any cost, sells Scotland short.

As Unionists, our job is clear.

We know we are united together by a proud shared history, but we are also bound together by enduring common interests.

The United Kingdom we cherish is not a thing of the past, but a Union vital to our prosperity and security, today and in the future.

The Union I am determined to strengthen and sustain is one that works for working people across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A UK which everyone can feel secure in.

A Union in which our national and local identities are recognised and respected, but where our common bonds are strengthened.

Where difference and diversity are celebrated, but where those things we share are celebrated just as much.

Because at the heart of the United Kingdom is the unity of our people: a unity of interests, outlook and principles.

This transcends politics and institutions, the constitution and the economy.

It is about the values we share in our family of nations.

Our pooling and sharing of risks and resources, our social and economic solidarity.

That social union is the glue which holds us together.

We should never forget that the people who benefit the most from solidarity across the United Kingdom are not the strong and the successful, but the poorest and the most vulnerable in our society.

We are four nations, but at heart we are one people.

That solidarity is the essence of our United Kingdom and is the surest safeguard of its future.

Let us live up to that high ideal and let us never stop making loudly and clearly, the positive optimistic and passionate case for our precious union of nations and people.

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2 Mar 2017



The SNP has been accused of placing education “on the slow train”, despite the party claiming it’s a number one priority.

At First Minister’s Questions today, Ruth Davidson asked Nicola Sturgeon why a key education strategy had been delayed amid claims of ministers wanting to “chew over” additional submissions.

This is despite Ms Sturgeon making repeated threats about holding another divisive independence referendum, the latest coming this week at the David Hume Institute.

Ruth pointed to the example of education charity Hometown, which has asked the Scottish Government for two years about the possibility of piloting community-run schools.

They said this could be done without interfering with wider reform plans, but

have received nothing back from ministers.

In a letter to education secretary John Swinney, the organisation said: "We have lost patience. This whole process has been a series of false dawns.

"This is really not a great demonstration of meaningful engagement with stakeholders or a good start in trying to empower teachers, parents and communities to achieve excellence and equity in education."

Ruth accused the SNP of paying lip service to education reforms, while privately having no intention to take them forward.

Scottish Conservative leader Ruth Davidson said:

"When it comes to education reform, the SNP government is kicking the can down the road.

"At the same time that she is ramping up the rhetoric on a second independence referendum, Nicola Sturgeon is putting education on the back burner.

"People fear that the Scottish Government has already made up its mind on much-needed education reforms, and that decision is they're not going to happen.

"A year-and-a-half ago the First Minister staked her reputation on reforming Scotland's schools.

"But since then literacy standards have slipped, numeracy has decreased, the Curriculum for Excellence continues to fail and now her education secretary is stalling.

"The continued delays over education reform show the SNP's claim that it is a priority is quite simply false."

To see the letter from Hometown to the Scottish Government, visit:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/doc00122920161122150512.pdf>

[Sturgeon quizzed on her retracted 'attack on devolution' claims](#)

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- Sturgeon quizzed on her retracted 'attack on devolution' claims

1 Mar 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have today written to First Minister Nicola Sturgeon urging her to clarify her comments on devolution at last night's David Hume Institute event.

In a pre-released excerpt from her speech, the First Minister was due to say that the UK's decision to leave the EU amounted to "an attack on the very foundations of the devolved parliament".

However, amid criticism from opposition parties over her comments, she then failed to deliver the line itself.

Scottish Conservative constitution spokesman Adam Tomkins has written to the First Minister this morning urging her to say whether she stands by the claim, or has retracted her stance.

In his letter, he said:

"Yesterday, your official Scottish Government spokesman briefed excerpts of your speech to the media prior to your speech at the David Hume Institute.

"In a passage about the impact of Brexit, it included this, rather bizarre, sentence: 'So what we have is in effect an attack on the very foundations of the devolved parliament we voted for 20 years ago.'

"Given the fact that the UK Government has made it clear that 'no decisions currently taken by the devolved administrations will be removed from them' and that it intends to 'use the opportunity of bringing decision making back to the UK to ensure that more decisions are devolved', this claim appears to be utterly without foundation.

"This is something you appeared to recognise yourself, given that you did not then actually repeat the words, despite it having been reported widely in the media.

"Given the confusion created by your briefing note, I would therefore be grateful if you could clarify your position.

"Do you believe that our departure from the European Union is 'an attack on the very foundations of devolved parliament', or do you now accept, in hindsight, that this suggestion was simply scaremongering on the part?"

A copy of the letter is here:

<http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Tomkinsletter.pdf>

In last night's speech Nicola Sturgeon was supposed to say the Brexit vote was "an attack on the very foundations of the devolved parliament".

However, she failed to deliver the line during the speech itself:

<https://twitter.com/kathsamsonitv/status/836666813895360517>

An audio clip is here. She omits the key part at 27 mins 30 secs:

<http://www.davidhumeinstitute.com/nicola-sturgeon-tory-brexite-actions-attack-foundations-devolution/>