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As we meet here in Aviemore we have good reasons to be confident. In Nick Clegg an outstanding new leader, with an inspirational first conference speech determined to double our number of MPs at Westminster And in our MPs the strongest team of powerful campaigners.

To one of whom I give special mention today.

He gave exceptional leadership at a time when our party needed it the most.

Menzies Campbell has given huge commitment to this party and we give him our heartfelt thanks.

At Holyrood, we now have five new MSPs - a young, positive, dynamic team and most spectacular of all our outstanding success in Dunfermline for Jim Tolson MSP - until this week the biggest earthquake we had seen for a generation.

Reasons to be confident

And none more so than our growing strength in local government Those Labour fiefdoms swept away after decades of one party rule.

Now 13 councils with Liberal Democrats in government And some of Scotland's most important councils led by Liberal Democrats the great cities of Edinburgh and Aberdeen; Aberdeenshire council all led by Liberal Democrats Our councillors do a fantastic job.

We should thank all 167 of them for all that they have done - and do - to build the strength of our party.

The biggest reason of all for our confidence and optimism is an enduring one.

It is about what unites us all

It is about liberalism

The rights of the individual, decentralising power, fighting for communities standing up against injustice freedom, fairness, honesty the great values of liberal democracy.

And our determination - our shared commitment - to make Scotland a more liberal and democratic place.

That is what fires us, our burning passion, the flame that guides us That is why we gather here. To build for the future.

Ours are positive values that remove boundaries between people and nations.

Internationalists, who understand that humankind has no nationality our vision of a world together, not a nation divided.

Yet to deliver on these values needs more than ideals.

It means a hunger - a hunger and a drive and a determination to deliver our policies - in government.

But for Liberal Democrats, not power at any price.

Power underpinned by principle and policy.

Power to deliver change, to shape our future.

For this we must have a strategy that is bold and a vision that is sharp and inspiring, that attracts new support and reaches out to communities right across Scotland.

A positive message at the core of our campaigning.

A vision that is radical and forward thinking. A Liberal Democrat vision for 21st century Scotland.

So today, let us talk about four areas which bring that positive message alive.

On the environment and climate change,
the other parties are weak

Alex Salmond talks about "coal is king" and his party is manifestly anti-wind power.

The Conservatives and the Labour party are in a cosy consensus dragging their feet failing to tackle the big issues on the environment that threaten our planet.

I am serious about a non nuclear future for this nation, with safe and secure energy.

But we will not achieve that unless we are decisive and act now.

That is why we must back ambitious proposals for an offshore supergrid, and why we must support major wind farm developments in places where the wind blows strongest, like Shetland and the Western Isles.

And isn't the irony rich when it is the National Grid - the very organisation that should be creating that new supergrid - that gets fined

£42m this week, not for cutting corners to do things too fast, but for deliberately blocking new technology, like smart meters, that can reduce energy costs for every household.

Liberal Democrats, that is obscene.

It is obscene too that when power prices go up six times the rate of inflation the power company's profits go up by 500%.

The companies that should be making big profits are Scotland's renewable energy companies.

And that, surely, is the biggest prize of all.

Scotland the renewable energy powerhouse of Europe.

To lead the world in wave and tidal power.

The Scottish poet Alexander Smith wrote: "A man doesn't plant a tree for himself. He plants it for posterity".

The fruits of renewable energy will benefit this generation, but they will bring even greater rewards for the generations to come.

Our duty, our liberal duty, is to use this first part of the 21st century to guarantee a quality of life and a prosperity for those who follow in the 22nd century and beyond.

That is why I have asked Dr Richard Yemm the inventor, here in Scotland, of Pelamis, the world's first commercial wave machine, and a Director and former Chairman of the industry leading Scottish Renewables Forum to advise a new Energy Commission.

It will drive forward our policy on the environment and renewable energy and transform the way we make and use power.

We must champion the cause of renewable energy and with people of the quality of Richard Yemm, we can make it happen.

We must champion too the rights of the individual.

Our second defining area of liberalism is on civil liberties and the role of the state.

These are now issues that dominate the headlines and the front pages; detention without trial, DNA, ID cards, stop-and-search, CCTV and biometrics.

Our approach is founded on a fundamental principle - That the rights of the individual are central to the freedoms and liberties that many Liberals have fought and died for over centuries of campaigning - Those freedoms have been hard won.

If they are snuffed out then it is the people who want that to happen, the terrorists and bombers, who will have won.

We must work to secure, not surrender those rights and freedoms that make us proud to be liberal democrats.

But we now discover new threats to our liberties from Labour - attempts to sweep away all protections against the retention of our DNA, whether innocent or guilty, child or adult charged or freed, and now legislation through Westminster, which now means that students there will need an ID card to get a student loan.

So today I am setting up a new 'stop and search initiative'.

A liberal democrat stop and search hit squad, led by Alistair Carmichael, with unlimited and unchecked powers to stop and search all new legislation that this Labour Government sets up or sneaks through that seeks to erode our liberties.

You know there is not just a sneaky side to all of this. There is a sinister side too.

And people are moving to our way of thinking. People thought they were going to be safer.

But they now realise that Labour cares so little about their security that their personal data turns up, abandoned in a bin-bag on a roundabout in Exeter.

This Labour Government now spends so much time and effort cataloguing and corralling the detail of everyone's personal lives that when the Dutch police give them details of thousands of dangerous, foreign criminals, they are too busy to look at it, far less take any action.

Labour have spent so much time creating big faceless government, that they are unable to pursue criminals guilty of old, fundamental, basic crimes in our communities.

Liberal Democrats want a simple commitment from Labour - that they will spend less time creating alarm and cataloguing the innocent, and more effort on basic law enforcement in our towns and cities; that is what communities the length and breadth of Scotland are demanding and that I want delivered.

Big Government is bad government.

Detached, out of touch.

Our aim has always been to break down and decentralise - to bring government closer to local people.

Our party worked for years with others to deliver a Scottish Parliament.

Now is the time to go further - to push on to the vision of Home Rule that was started by Gladstone.

It is simply not acceptable that our Parliament's sole financial responsibility is to receive a cheque for £30bn from Westminster and decide how to spend it.

People know that.

They want more powers. A stronger Scottish Parliament, until last year we were the only party that campaigned for that.

The Steel Commission built our credibility.

Now our call for a new commission, to create a stronger Scottish Parliament, with far wider tax raising powers is being supported by others.

It has the overwhelming support of the Scottish Parliament. I welcome that.

And the work of the constitutional commission will be a major priority for the Liberal Democrats in the term of this Parliament.

But in working with the Labour Party and the Conservatives, let us be clear.

It will not be easy. Labour's chaotic blundering is harmful. David Cairn's name-calling one week, Gordon Brown muttering about removing powers the next. None of this helps. Let's be clear - the Liberal Democrats will have nothing to do with stripping powers away from the Scottish Parliament.

This new, great challenge needs leadership and direction, not distraction.

That is why I have spoken to David Steel; and we have decided to recall the Steel Commission. It will create some real pressure and momentum for change and most important of all, it will make the wishes of the people of Scotland a reality.

There has been too much delay and this is too serious an issue. We will make this commission work.

And we will deliver a stronger Scottish Parliament, the more powerful Parliament that people in Scotland want.

And strong communities in every part of Scotland. Our third area of action is on poverty, opportunity and social mobility. Liberals dominated the key actions of the 20th century that improved the lives of generations.

Their names ring out: Lloyd George introduced the state pension; Beveridge created the blueprint for the national health service; and John Maynard Keynes gave his name to an economic philosophy that transformed the life chances of millions - and probably billions - of people around the globe. Liberals in the 20th century who started to break down social injustice and create a fairer society.

But let me give you another name.

Kerelaw was the name of a secure unit and an open school for vulnerable youngsters. Thankfully it closed in 2006.

There were terrible abuses there.

But here is one terrible educational statistic. Not a single child who ever went there ever went on to study at university. Should we treat that with shame or shock or a determination to act?

I say all three - but the third is the most important.

We have got to act.

It is about poverty, but poverty of ambition as well as lack of money. It is about ill health, but ill minds as well as sick bodies. Depression, despair. It is about centralising, stultifying government. Failure to deliver for generations. Schemes that stifle, not inspire. Where life expectancy in different parts of the same city - Glasgow, Dundee, Edinburgh or Aberdeen - and your whole set of life chances depend on the postcode where you were born.

In Glasgow there are constituencies a few miles apart where life-expectancy is 13 years apart.

That is simply unacceptable.

To get the 21st century right will take grit and determination and really difficult decisions.

It means a complete change in the way schools and teachers support children. Children who have never aimed high; who have never been told they could.

And what do I expect as the outcome?

We want to change their life chances.

University is not for everyone.

As a nation we do not do enough for vocational skills.

But I will not accept that there are some schools and some communities where there is no expectation or experience of anyone going to our great universities.

Our Shadow Education Secretary Jeremy Purvis has set out this weekend our plans to expand participation in both higher and further education.

That work will now enter a new phase, working with Ross Finnie who is leading our party's work on Poverty.

I can say today that those plans will include the objective to double the number of children from the poorest backgrounds who go into higher education with the number doubled again within a generation.

Change that will benefit all of Scotland. Not just our economy, but every aspect of life.

Some will ask can we afford it - I ask cannot we afford not to.

And our fourth area of Liberal Democrat action relates to young people.

Not just doing things for young people - investing in schools and sport, music and drama.

More than that. Involving young people. Listening and trusting. Young people engaged with their communities and in public life.

Our support from young people has been huge. They voted for us more than any other age group.

They like what we stand for - on the environment, on human rights, on the war in Iraq.

But our challenge goes further.

It is to make sure that young people in Scotland are fully part of public life and play a leading role in shaping Scotland's future.

I am establishing a dynamic new group to do just that. It will include Alex Cole Hamilton and Shabnum Mustapha who have worked so hard for our party.

I have also invited the former chair of the Scottish Youth Parliament to help with our work. So I am delighted to announce, that Rajiv Joshi has agreed to advise and help.

Their mission will be to get more young people involved in all aspects of their local communities. Their schools, their community centres, their sports facilities.
And also to get more young people involved in politics.

To get out there and to participate, to get out there and vote, regardless of which party they choose.

And to get more young people engaged with everything they can do to create the rich future that should be theirs.

Liberal Democrats, we are ready to inspire a new generation. These are the Liberal Democrat values I want to deliver.

And you won't find them together in any other party in Scotland. The Scottish Tories got hitched to the SNP and walked away from their promises before the election.

And the same is true with the Cameron Tories on so many of the big issues the bigger the issue the bigger the flip-flop.

Student tuition fees, flip-flop; war with Iraq - flip-flop; compulsory ID cards flip-flop and flip again.

The bigger the issue, the bigger the flip ... and the bigger the flop.

And speaking of flops, what about Mr Bean himself?

Wasn't Vince Cable fantastic?

But Gordon Brown has been wounded by far more than Vince Cable's incisive wit.

Northern Rock - the first run on bank in modern times; campaign donations rocking the leadership North and South of the border; people's personal data lost or dumped; lies and deception on rendition flights, on liberal values, failure from Labour.

On poverty - failure; on renewable energy - failure; on civil liberties - deliberate failure; on young people - indifferent Labour failure.

Everything they do and say now has the look of a Prime Minister and a party on the way out.

Staggering through a cocktail of disaster, mishap, blunder, farce and travesty.

Despite two decades of planning, the first six months of Gordon Brown have only shown how fast it is possible to climb down a greasy pole. They are on their way out.

As the main challengers in Scotland last time, we can deliver a crushing blow to Labour next time. Bring on the fight I say.

And at Holyrood, they are simply unable to comprehend the position they are in; Shell-shocked and shattered.

No ideas and no impact.

They are in no fit state to mount a challenge to the SNP.

That part has fallen to us.

In a democracy, someone always has to stand up to governments. And in Scotland, nobody else can or will but us. The Conservatives won't. And Labour can't.

Of course we will work with the Government to deliver our policies and the priorities we support.

We did that this week when we voted to support Scottish students and to scrap the graduate endowment.

But much of the next three years will be the kind of tough strong opposition that forces a Government to work hard and holds them to account.

And I don't know about you, but I wonder if some people might start to think that the SNP are a little bit full of themselves? Just a thought.

And just when Labour in Scotland have learnt they have no divine right to rule, along come the SNP who think they just might.

Did you know they have tabled, not one but two motions, in, not one, but two Parliaments entitled "God bless the SNP Government".

And what of the Sun King himself?

Our First Minister.

Well he has surrounded himself with adoration and is blessed with a dutiful array of courtiers.

They constantly commission opinion polls that have all the scientific rigour of Hans Christian Anderson.

Over and over, the same question they ask is "YouGov, YouGov on the wall, who is the fairest of them all". But there was one poll, where they didn't put out a press release. The question was: "Who should be President of an independent Scottish Republic?" Alex came third.

Sadly for him, the second most popular choice was "any other politician!" And the first choice was, "anyone except a politician!" And they don't poll on the SNP's broken promises.

They don't ask the 350,000 Scottish graduates what they think of the broken promise to write-off student debt.

Or about the cuts to university funding; Or the broken promises on class sizes. Or the promise to give a £2,000 grant to all first time buyers, broken.

The fact is that the SNP was prepared to offer anything to anyone to get elected.

And over the coming months we will see the impact, as school building programmes are axed, health investment cancelled and core public services squeezed and slashed across Scotland.

Big cuts in services that the Liberal Democrats will campaign against. Parents, pupils, patients all being let down by the SNP - and we will do something about it. But it is the centralising and controlling part that will get to people in the end.

For Liberal Democrats, the role of Government is to decentralise power to local communities; Increase the power of the individual. Diminish the dead hand of state.

For us, a cornerstone of local democracy is the power to raise and vary taxes locally.

Before our very eyes, that right is being removed by the SNP Government. One of the major powers of our local councils, centralised, stripped away. To those who regard the funding deal with our councils as historic, I say this - sup with a long, long spoon.

Do not give up hard earned powers lightly. And do not believe that tax cuts or a tax freeze can be delivered without real cuts in real services such as sport, social work or schools. The future of local taxation is important to Liberal Democrats. We are determined to scrap the unfair council tax and replace it with a local income tax.

When you find out that the poorest pensioners pay six times as much of their income in Council Tax as the richest people, you know that something has gone very wrong with fairness in Scotland.

Scrapping the Council Tax, though, has some big challenges. Labour, the Tories and London are all big friends of Council Tax. But most people in Scotland want to see it go.

So my call today is directly to Alex Salmond, the First Minister. This issue is urgent. The challenge is this - if you are serious about a local income tax, then work with us

Bring together now, in good faith, those in Scotland who want to see the council tax scrapped and replaced by a local income tax. Start now, to build a majority in the Scottish Parliament. People want to see the Council Tax go.

We can deliver in this Parliament a locally set way of paying for council services that is fair and based on ability to pay. That is a local income tax. And the Liberal Democrats are determined to make it happen.

But when I look around that Parliament, it is not always easy to see where the support will come from to build a liberal Scotland.

Of all those values and issues I want to tackle, it's hard to think of any other party that supports more than one or two.

So, to build a more liberal and democratic Scotland is a challenge. We have a choice. And when we have the choice between smaller dreams

or a bigger party, I say we should choose a bigger party and bigger dreams for Scotland.

Our path is to build and grow bigger, with a bold liberal vision.

Our choice is to take our campaigns outside Parliament. To win more support, more votes, more elections.

We will only deliver a liberal Scotland if we are stronger. And the potential is there, it is within our grasp.

We all know it - some of the people who vote for us in the Constituency Vote, shockingly don't vote for us on the Regional Vote.

Others only vote for us in local government or in Westminster or European elections.

Merge those numbers together and there are today around a quarter of people in Scotland voting for us some of the time in some elections.

So that is what we need to do. Get more of these people voting for us all of the time - in all elections.

That is our opportunity. To energise our support, to attract new support, especially from young people.

We aim to transform Scotland. As we build our campaigning my aim is simple and bold. We need clear vision; Discipline; Energy; And constant campaigning and effort. But the target is clear - to double our number of MPs and MSPs over the next two elections. We can do it.

When people are angry that Labour has eroded their freedoms we will be there, just as we were when Labour took us into illegal war in Iraq.

When people come to us, angry that the SNP have broken their promises and let them down, we will be there for them.

When people come to us angry that their local services are being cut back, when hospital and school building programmes grind to a halt, we will be there.

Our enduring values are right for them and will work for them - a determination that poverty and injustice in this country and across the world must end - for basic decent humanity and for the security of us all. A cast iron commitment that climate change and environmental damage have to stop now; in the first part of the 21st century, before it is too late; to champion the individual, to help and equip every individual with the skills and capacity to reach their full potential; in strong communities capable of coming together to create magic beyond individual endeavour;

To all those people, the opportunities, the freedoms, the success you want will be there with the Liberal Democrats:

Turn to us, walk with us, talk with us, work with us, grow and win with us.