THE ANDREW MARR SHOW

INTERVIEW:

NIGEL FARAGE, MEP
LEADER, UKIP
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TOPLINES:
"The truth about open-door immigration is not only do we not choose the number that come, we also don’t choose the quality."

Nigel Farage on NHS spending: "If we could get the same result or a better result by spending less, that is what we would do."

ANDREW MARR:
UKIP’s Leader, Nigel Farage, describes his party as “the biggest threat to the political establishment seen in modern times”, but it’s still a party without a single MP and, under our first past the post system, it may struggle to win seats at the next General Election despite opinion poll ratings in double figures. Mr Farage joins me now. Welcome. That is in a sense the problem, isn’t it – that you’re likely to do well in the wrong election? You’ll do well in the European Elections where you’ve said yourself you don’t really have any influence in the European Parliament, but to pull this country out of the EU you need to do well in the Parliamentary Election.
NIGEL FARAGE:
Well everybody said that in 2009. When we surprised people coming by coming second in the European Elections, they said ah right, that’s great Nigel, but you’ll never do it in a domestic election. Well what happened last May? The English county elections, we got a core of the vote; and even under first past the post managed to get 150 people elected as county councillors. And we’ve shown in the last half a dozen by-elections, in which we’ve come second, we’re making big progress.

ANDREW MARR:
But under the Treaty of Lisbon, it needs to be – the national government – it needs to be MPs who pull Britain out if that’s going to happen.

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well absolutely right - it needs to be MPs, who are part of the resolution in Parliament, to give us a referendum. In the end it’s the people that are going to decide this. If we left it to the political class, we’d never even be debating whether we stayed part of the European Union or not. And come on, you know the next election isn’t a General Election. I listen to all the commentators and all they talk about is what will UKIP do, what’s the impact of the UKIP vote on the Tories or Labour? We’ve got in 82 days a national election. It’s a European Election and that’s what I’m campaigning on.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) ... But for a Parliament where you say you don’t really have any influence when you get there …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Well I don’t think the British have any influence in Brussels full stop, you know whether it’s the MEPs or the parliamentarians or whether it’s Mr Cameron begging for concessions which clearly aren’t going to come.

ANDREW MARR:
At the time of your party conference, there’s a new thing that people have to sign if they want to be a UKIP candidate, and one of the things it asks is do you have any
skeletons in your cabinet, in your closet rather?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Yes.

**ANDREW MARR:**
What does that mean? *(Farage laughs)* What skeletons are you talking about?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Well what we have done with people is we have done police checks, CRB checks, we’ve put them through some pretty tough interviews. There’s no question that over the years one or two people have let UKIP down pretty badly. We’re doing our best to make sure this doesn’t ever happen again.

**ANDREW MARR:**
So in specific terms what are you trying to screen out?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
We’re trying to screen out people who would be a huge distraction and that doesn’t mean I want to turn it into New Labour and we must all think the same thing. I want it to be a party that has debate, but I don’t want it to be full of people who distract us from our main messages. And our main messages are big, important messages about who governs the country and can we control our borders?

**ANDREW MARR:**
Idiosyncratic but not eccentric?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**
Erm … Okay, alright, fine, I’ll go with that.

**ANDREW MARR:**
What about …. Now let’s turn back to the General Election. You’ve said that you will resign as Party Leader if you don’t get one seat. Given your public standing in the polls, that’s a very, very unambitious promise, isn’t it really? Twenty seats?
NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) Well, look, you know I’m fighting a European Election in 82 days’ time and I genuinely think that we have got a chance, a possibility of topping the polls in those elections. These are the most important European Elections that have ever been fought in this country and actually the leaderships of the so-called major parties will be seriously affected by that result. So I’m not going to speculate about what happens in 2015. Clearly if UKIP is to do as well as I hope it can in 2015, what it has first to do is to get momentum through these European Elections.

ANDREW MARR:
What about immigration? You’ve had a week in which immigration figures have been bouncing back up again. Is that in a way an even bigger issue for you than the EU?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well I think that the British public now understand that we cannot have our own immigration policy; that it’s utterly meaningless to set targets of tens of thousands a year, whatever you choose. We can’t have any control over who comes to Britain all the while we’re Members of the European Union and it’s as simple as that. And I think the real concern is that if you look at the Mediterranean, you look at the Eurozone, you see how badly they’re doing, there’s nothing we can do to stop many hundreds of thousands of more people coming to Britain if they need to.

ANDREW MARR:
Why is this a problem in the sense that we’re seeing you know skilled people coming from Poland and France, all around me I hear French voices, German voices? These are people with huge amounts of skill and energy helping our economy to grow. If they weren’t here, we wouldn’t be growing so well.

NIGEL FARAGE:
I mean the truth about open door immigration is that not only do we not choose the number that come. We also don’t choose the quality. Whilst you’re quite right – there are many, many people that have come from Eastern Europe who are working damn hard and if I you know was Romanian, I’d be here in Britain. Of course I would
because the minimum wage is nine times as high. But we also let in people who are not benefiting our economy and, frankly, to have a massive oversupply of people earning minimum wage, qualifying almost immediately for in work benefits, changing our communities in many cases where people are saying goodness me, is this the town that I know, is this where I grew up? And I think really the question here, it isn’t just about money. It isn’t about whether the GDP’s …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) It’s about nostalgia?

NIGEL FARAGE:
No, I think it’s about community. I think it’s about a sense of who we are as a people, you know, and what we belong to. I toured the whole of England last year in the run-up to the English County Elections and I met people everywhere who said, “Nigel, we’ve never had a problem with immigration. You know it jollifies the place and the food’s better and that’s great. But how many people can we actually take? What chance have our kids got of getting jobs? You know why am I, you know whether I’m driving a lorry, whether I’m working in a factory, why am I finding that my take home pay is less than it was five years ago?” And that is because ….

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That may be because of economic failure, which is being helped by …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) It is because we have a distorted labour market. We have a mass oversupply of unskilled, semi-skilled and in some cases skilled labour. It’s driven down wages and it’s hurt those at the bottom of society most.

ANDREW MARR:
So if … In UKIP’s world would there be a complete ban on people coming in from the rest of the EU?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Not a complete ban on people coming. Of course not. We’d operate a work permit
system and a work permit scheme.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Because you’ve talked about Australia, haven’t you?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**

Yes! And I’m not against…let me make this clear …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* And in net terms, they have got higher immigration than we’ve got and proportionally they’ve got higher immigration than we’ve got …

**NIGEL FARAGE:**

Yes.

**ANDREW MARR:**

… under the Australian system which you want for us?

**NIGEL FARAGE:**

But they’re quite a big country. There’s quite a lot of room. If you travel round London and you travel round this country on the motorways and the underground system, you know …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Without offending Australians watching, most of it is sand.

**NIGEL FARAGE:**

Well a lot of it is sand, but you can build things on sand. I mean that happened in Dubai and elsewhere. What the Australians have is quality control. What I would like to see us get to is a situation where we’ve sorted out who is here legally, who is here illegally – and that’s a big problem that isn’t even being discussed at the moment – and on an ongoing basis to have an immigration policy based on quality control. Surely that makes sense?
ANDREW MARR:
Your critics say to you that you’re in danger of becoming one of those parties which says one thing to one audience and another thing to another audience. You have said you’re the only party brave enough to cut NHS spending and yet in the Wythenshawe by-election, you say you’re going to protect the NHS. Nationally you say you’re going to look hard at the benefits bills. In Wythenshawe you said we’re going to kind of … (talking over)

NIGEL FARAGE:
I think what we have got to avoid is doing what the Lib Dems did.

ANDREW MARR:
I was doing to say not wearing sandals but you know …

NIGEL FARAGE:
(over) But the Lib Dems tended to do … the Lib Dems tended to chop and change their messages and what we were really saying in the Wythenshawe by-election is we don’t want to go on giving 55 million pounds a day to the EU, we don’t want to go on giving 25 million pounds a day in foreign aid. And yes we need to be careful about that.

ANDREW MARR:
You’d accept there’s been a certain amount of mixed message, to put it politely and gently?

NIGEL FARAGE:
I don’t think it’s quite as strong as that, but I think what happens is people run election campaigns and they tend in the short-term perhaps to change the message slightly, and we have got to make sure we’re absolutely consistent.

ANDREW MARR:
So just to take one of those issues, would you carry on funding the NHS at the current level?
NIGEL FARAGE:
We would obviously want the NHS to deliver the best possible outcome for patients. I
was in the Torbay Hospital …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s a very politician’s answer if I may say so…

NIGEL FARAGE:
I was in the Torbay hospital two mornings ago and it was brilliant. So there are some
great bits of the NHS. There are some other bits of the NHS that are failing. Labour
doubled spending on the National Health Service. It didn’t double the return. What we
would look for is better value for money.

ANDREW MARR:
Would you carry on spending the same amount of money on the NHS?

NIGEL FARAGE:
If we could get the same result or a better result by spending less, that’s what we
should try and do.

ANDREW MARR:
Right, so the answer is no you wouldn’t?

NIGEL FARAGE:
The answer is … the answer is let’s see where we can make savings given that middle
management has grown by over 40 per cent since 1997. It seems to me there are
places here where we can make genuine savings.

ANDREW MARR:
Are there any circumstances in which you would raise taxes to spend more on either
welfare or health or anything else?

NIGEL FARAGE:
Well I just think the lessons of tax are that when you raise taxes, tax income goes
down, and I would like to think of us doing things the other way round. I think the most important tax reform we need is we need to say anybody earning minimum wage is not paying tax to incentivise people to get off benefits.

ANDREW MARR:
So you’d cut taxes? Overall that’s what you’d hope to do?

NIGEL FARAGE:
If you cut taxes, you’ve also got to cut back government spending substantially …

ANDREW MARR:
Exactly.

NIGEL FARAGE:
… and the big challenge for UKIP after the European Elections is to put a manifesto together that doesn’t (as the last one did) resemble War and Peace and has some numbers that add up, and we’re working on that.

ANDREW MARR:
So we will see a properly costed …

NIGEL FARAGE:
You certainly will. That’s coming but it’s not coming until after the European Elections because for the next 82 days we want to campaign on who governs the country and why can’t we get back control of our borders.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay one big strategic question. What the Conservatives say again and again is Vote UKIP, Get Labour. It now seems as if Ed Miliband is going to change his policy at least a bit on a referendum. Doesn’t that scupper your defence against that? I mean …

NIGEL FARAGE:
No I mean Miliband will promise a referendum. Of course he will. It’s become a tradition in British politics that at every election everybody promises a referendum
and then never ever delivers it. What Liam Fox and others are saying today is baloney. Only a third of our vote comes from the Conservatives and when you poll UKIP voters and say if there was no UKIP, how would you vote, less than one in five of them would even consider voting for the Conservatives. The reason the Tories won’t win a majority at the next election is not because of UKIP. It’s because their own voters don’t seem Cameron as a Conservative.

ANDREW MARR

Nigel Farage, for now thank you very much indeed.

INTERVIEW ENDS