

ANDREW MARR SHOW

2ND DECEMBER 2018

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MICHAEL GOVE, MP

Environment Secretary

AM: Of all the current Cabinet members nobody, apart from the Prime Minister herself, is perhaps as influential right now as Michael Gove. An ardent campaigner for Brexit, he chose not to resign over the Chequers plan or the Withdrawal Agreement though he did go pretty quiet for a time. Well, he's with me now. Michael Gove you're here really to sell Theresa May's plan. If you're so keen on it why are not Brexit Secretary?

MG: Because I enjoy being Environment Secretary and I enjoy having the opportunity to make sure that as a result of this deal we will be able to be outside the Common Agricultural Policy, outside the Common Fisheries Policy, we'll be able to maintain high environmental protection, but on our terms. This deal, of course is not perfect, but it does provide those of us who've campaigned to leave with an opportunity to take back control of our borders and have control over our immigration policy. It means that we end the huge automatic sums that go to the EU every week, and it gives us the capacity in huge sectors of our economy to diverge, if we think that's right.

AM: Well come on to all of that but why is it not perfect first of all? What worries you about it particularly?

MG: Well the area which I have the greatest concern about, but I think it's important to put it in context, is the backstop. I would have preferred it if we had a unilateral right of exit. It is uncomfortable, for me, that there are some rules that might apply in Northern Ireland that might not apply in other parts of the United Kingdom. However, the critical thing about the backstop is

that however uncomfortable it is for the UK it is more uncomfortable for the European Union. Because we will have tariff free access to their markets without paying a penny. And more than that, we will have control of our borders. If you were an Italian politician and you saw –

AM: Before we come to the Italians let me just ask you a little bit about this.

MG: No, no I think this is critical. I think it's critical that people understand that the backstop, while it does contain elements that for a Unionist or for a Brexiteer aren't perfect, it also contains elements that for any European politician would allow them to see Britain having a competitive advantage over their own country and their own economy.

AM: So it put it another way, we are locked into this, we are handcuffed into this backstop with no autonomous way out? No way out just for ourselves and we have to trust that the Europeans are so uncomfortable that they choose to let us out in their good time, and that is what the legal advice what you have seen says.

MG: It's not a matter of trust. It is a matter of self interest on the part of the Europeans. Do you think that Europeans –

AM: You said their self interest was going to give us a fantastic trade deal and it didn't. We said that their self interest would make it easier for us to leave, and it didn't. And now we're saying their self interest will mean that they will let us out at the backstop and maybe it won't.

MG: Well, consider this. If you were a European politician would you be happy with another country having tariff free access to your market? Not paying a penny for it. Capable of controlling its own migration policy. Capable of diverging an agriculture and services. And capable also – let me finish Andrew – let me finish. And capable also in services of making its economy more

competitive. This fundamentally works against the interests of the single market and against the interests of European nations.

That is why European nations, and in particular the Commission and in particular President Macron, will not want the backstop to subsist for any length of time. President Macron just last Sunday made it clear that he didn't like the backstop because he would not have access to our territorial waters. What goes for France goes for all those countries.

AM: He had us over a barrel he thought – for us over that. He's got us over a fish barrel.

MG: No, he doesn't have us. We've got him over a barrel of herring and barrel of mackerel. Because he wants that access to our waters, we can sit in the backstop and say no, absolutely not. And while we're in that backstop –

AM: and we're taking EU rules.

MG: No, no that's wrong, Andrew. We do not have to accept new EU rules while we are in the backstop save in two discreet areas. So we are able to diverge as a result of being in the backstop and it's because it's so uncomfortable for the European Union that they want to ensure that we get a good trade deal at the end.

AM: Let me ask you this. At any stage over the last few weeks did you say in private that you thought this a bad deal?

MG: I said lots of things in private, but I'm not going into the private conversations that I had with the Prime Minister or anyone else.

AM: ` Cause you actually think this is quite a bad deal?

MG: No, I think, as I mentioned earlier, it's not one hundred percent of what I would want but then –

AM: Did you ever think about resigning over the last few weeks?

MG: It's not one hundred percent of what we wanted, but then we didn't get 100 percent of the vote on the 23d of June in 2016 on that referendum.

AM: Did you not have a long dark night of the soul and consider resigning from Cabinet over this deal?

MG: I reflected long and hard about this deal but I concluded, like lots of people, that while it's imperfect it is the right thing to do. And I think it's because – it's because Andrew I understand and appreciate and feel uncomfortable with parts of this deal that I also understand and appreciate how many of my colleagues feel. And one of the things that I hope that people will have the chance to do over the course of the next nine days is to recognise that we should not make the perfect the enemy of the good. We have got to recognise that if we don't vote for this deal the alternatives are no deal or no Brexit.

AM: I want to come directly to that. First of all do you think that the government has the votes to get this through at the moment?

MG: I believe that we can win the argument and win the vote. I know it's challenging, but my view is -

AM: Really? You can win this vote?

MG: Absolutely. My view is that we've got to make those arguments and we've got to – I was about to say confront. We've got to look properly at what those alternatives are. Because it's perfectly possible to say –

AM: I want to come directly to those alternatives now.

MG: Indeed, because it's perfectly possible to say I don't like this deal but the question is - yes exactly, what are the alternatives.

AM: What happens then. Let's assume, just for the sake of argument, that it is voted down by a reasonably substantial majority and it's off the table. First question, can the Prime Minister then go back to Brussels, negotiate some twists and turns and addendums and come back to the House of Commons, maybe after the markets have been falling, there's a general air of national crisis and make MPs vote again?

MG: No. I think that that hypothesis is flawed.

AM: So no?

MG: I think the key things are one, if we don't get this deal through then there is a chance of no Brexit at all or a second referendum.

AM: How does no Brexit happen?

MG: There is a chance that we could find ourselves with the votes in the House of Commons determined to impose upon us a second referendum. The people – we heard from Delia Smith –

AM: But, but.

MG: No Andrew, there is a real risk.

AM: Let me intervene.

MG: No, no not yet. There is a real risk that if we don't vote for this deal that there may be a majority in the House of Commons for a second referendum, and there is also a risk that if we don't vote for this deal we may get a less good deal, or no deal at all. And that's why I think all of those are less attractive than this deal.

AM: Let's stick with the second referendum thing. The problem with that thesis is that whatever the Commons votes a second referendum requires the government to engineer it. Make it actually happen. And we have a government that is totally opposed to that. So the government could simply refuse to have that second referendum. But if it did, what you're saying is you have to vote for this because I am frightened that if the British people were given a chance to vote again they would vote to stay inside the EU.

MG: No, I'm - I actually think if there were a second referendum that people would probably vote to leave in even larger numbers than they did before. But, the very act of calling a second referendum I believe would damage faith in democracy and rip apart the social fabric of this country. Because it would confirm in

the minds of many – not just who voted to leave but also many who voted remain that the establishment are prepared to give you a choice, but if you make the wrong choice then you have to choose again. One of the things about the referendum is that people whose voices -

AM: It's a little bit odd.

MG: - had never been heard before and certainly never been listened to had a chance to say look, we want this country follow a different course. If they were now told sorry, you were too daft or you were too prejudiced last time round, think again, then I think that would – as Barry Gardiner has argued as well, it would undermine faith in our democracy.

AM: The thesis is still that giving people a chance to vote undermines faith in democracy which in itself sounds a little bit odd. Let me move, however, to the other –

MG: No, it's just why are we asking people again on the basis that they got it wrong last time round?

AM: Well on the basis that things have changed. They didn't understand everything that was going to pertain between the Brexit vote –

MG: They were too thick to make the decision then, were they?

AM: Well you didn't understand what was going to happen after 2016 after that vote, none of us did. Nobody understood what was going to happen, now we do.

MG: Yes, but people knew that they were voting to leave the European Union and we should honour that verdict. I think the idea that people were somehow, you know, too dim to appreciate what was being offered at the time, I think that is profound – I know you're not saying that yourself.

AM: I'm not saying that. I'm saying life's moved on.

MG: Exactly. But I fear that many people would interpret the attitude of those who are arguing for a second referendum and I

know you're being objective, but I think they would interpret the attitude of those people as condescending.

AM: Let me say there are various possibilities. So we've talked about the second referendum and we'll talk a little bit about no deal at the moment. But there is another one you didn't mention which is the idea of Britain redrafting or asking to redraft the political declaration so that we stay inside EFTA or the European Economic Area, more or less in perpetuity. That's an idea that's been discussed in Cabinet, out of Cabinet by other Tory MPs, your name has been attached to this idea as well. What is your real view of that?

MG: My real view is that it is not as good as this deal. It is better to be outside the European Union and being in the EEA or EFTA is better than EU membership, but this deal offers us opportunities which the so called Norway option does not. If we had the Norway option we would have less control over our borders, we would be giving more money to the European Union –

AM: I understand that.

MG: - and we would have less control over our services. One of the things that Barry Gardiner said earlier –

AM: Sorry. If this particular deal nevertheless can't get through the House of Commons there is some evidence that the EFTA answer might be able to command support in the House of Commons. In those circumstances would you support it?

MG: I think the right thing to do is to argue for this deal because it's better. I think this deal is better and as Barry Gardiner pointed out earlier it allows us to diverge in a number of areas. One of the reasons some people on the Labour benches don't like it is because they recognise that there is flexibility for Britain in a huge swath of its economy as a result of this deal and they don't want to see that flexibility. And that's why I think it is right in the course of the next nine days to look at all the options and to spell

out why this deal, because it gives us control of migration and money, fish and agriculture and a control of 80% of our economy is the right deal.

AM: Let's logically come to the last of the options we haven't talked about which is no deal. Described as a national calamity, a disaster, chaos in many other ways. Do you also regard that as a hideous thing for the country to be facing?

MG: I think that there are problems, definite problems with no deal. I think that there have been some bloodcurdling warnings that have been issued that are not quite right –

AM; But said by people running companies. People who actually know what they're doing, running their own companies.

MG: Well I think the important thing is to get this in proportion. As I say there are some bloodcurdling warnings which are not justified, but it is the case that if we were to leave without a deal I think we would undoubtedly go through a period of turbulence. I do not want that to happen. I think that there would be trouble for the economy as a result of it. One of the reasons I voted to leave is because we have become so entangled in so many ways with the EU.

AM: 45 years.

MG: Exactly, and getting out of that will take a little bit of time and care and wrenching ourselves out of it without a deal while - it's not as bad as some have argued.

AM: it's very difficult to do.

MG: it is economically clearly going to cause hurt, yes.

AM: Is this the first government in our entire democratic history which has as a matter of public policy and intention decided to make this country poorer?

MG: No, absolutely not.

AM: Well that is going to be the effect of this deal. Your own government's figures, I'm going to show you a graphic now. There's a graphic. Produced by departments across Whitehall, not just by remainery Treasury people or whatever and the White Paper model reduces our growth by 4%. No deal is even worse. No deal is more than 9%. That is a substantial hit in ordinary families and people watching this programme.

MG: Two things I would say. Firstly, that is, even on the figures in that paper, it's not a instant hit. That's only for a period of time. But it is a projection and it is a projection and those – I've talked to them – who wrote that paper made it clear that that is a projection if everything else stays the same. It is simply one scenario and one model. And of course the government, by every scenario and in every model, can take steps in order to improve economic growth. So those projections are one way of informing the debate, but they're not definitive, they are not a prediction, they are not an oracle, they are simply a set of data –

AM: Are a slightly scary warning.

MG: Well..

AM: They mean, according to NIESR, £1,100 per family, per person, not family, per person watching this programme. That's again, it's a highly respected department...

MG: Well, during the last referendum campaign, or during the referendum campaign I should say – god forbid there should be another one – I was criticised for calling out some of these economic forecasts. People said that I pouring cold water on expertise. But actually we saw after the vote to leave that many of those predictions were proven wrong. Now, I think here the important thing to do is to look at the economic analysis, subject it to proper forensic criticism, recognise that there is some validity within it. But it is no definitive and not an oracle. But the one thing I do want to say –

AM: The Chancellor says –

MG: What I do want to say –

AM: .. remaining in the EU has a better outcome for the economy than every other option.

MG: Well, I –

AM: Every other option.

MG: This is a rare occasion where there is a scintilla of difference between myself and Philip, in that I think that we can do better outside the European Union, but it is the case that if we leave without a deal, we would adjust over time, because this is a great country. Nevertheless, for a period there would be economic turbulence, undoubtedly.

AM: If Theresa May loses this vote does she have to go as prime minister?

MG: Absolutely not.

AM: Why not? She's lost her policy, she's lost the purpose of her government, there's no way forward for her is there?

MG: No, I think –

AM: Does she call an election as the alternative. Do you think that's possible?

MG: No, I think that the most important thing is – you know yourself, Andrew, from being around the country, that there are lots of different views about this deal. Few people think it's perfect, but one of the things I've seen with my own eyes over the course of the last couple of weeks is a strong movement behind the prime minister, sympathy for her position, admiration for the deal which she has secured after a long negotiation, and a desire to see her bring this deal home and secure Brexit. So I'm supporting the prime minister, like I believe a majority of people in this country.

AM: Michael Gove, not quiet this morning. Thanks very much.

(ends)