INTERVIEW WITH:

TIM FARON MP, CHAIRMAN, LIBERAL DEMOCRATS

ANDREW MARR:
I’m joined by the Party President, Tim Farron, who is in Shropshire this morning, lucky man. Tim Farron, thanks for joining us. Is it true that there is a move inside the Party, to review policy and leadership in the wake of these election results?

TIM FARRON:
Well, I think there’s a move in the Party now to look at the results. We’ll see what happens tonight and to look ahead to May 2015, under Nick Clegg’s leadership, to ensure that we do what we’ve said we were going to have to do
all along, which is to concentrate our resources in our specialist areas and although the results on Thursday night and over Friday, they’ve been disappointing; there’s lots of people out there who did not deserve to lose and worked their socks off and did not win even so, all the same, across the country in places like Hull and Newcastle, Sheffield, Redcar, Sutton, Watford, I could keep going on – Eastleigh, my own patch in South Lakeland, we’ve seen the Liberal Democrats do well and our job is to build those fortresses as we go into the next election. We have a first past the post election system for the General Election next year. We have to make sure we operate on that basis and under Nick Clegg’s leadership, we will go forward, defend our record in being in government, having been the major reason why there isn’t an economic recovery in this country and be proud behind our Leader.

**ANDREW MARR:**
You keep saying ‘our Leader’ and Nick Clegg’s leadership, the message is pretty clear but the Independent front page this morning for instance, reads Lib Dem MPs in bid to oust Clegg and there is a petition running among your supporters and Party members for a change of leadership. What is your message to all of those people?

**TIM FARRON:**
Well, I understand if anybody, never mind if anybody, there will be lots of people who are bruised by the results over Thursday, Friday. I mean I’ve lost elections before and it is miserable and I also understand why many people will feel that the message they got back on the doorstep, that they don’t like us being in government and so on is a really difficult one and we’ll have lost
people who voted for us four years ago, who’ve not voted for us in the three sets of elections that we’ve had since in the local council elections. But I just think that this time, it will be absolutely foolish for us as a party, to turn in on ourselves. What’s separated the Liberal Democrats from the Conservatives these last four years is whilst the Conservatives have been like cats in a sack, fighting with each other, the Liberal Democrats have stood united and that is what we will continue to do and the major reason why is because the Liberal Democrats, unlike the Conservatives, actually consented to the Coalition. We had a vote of all our MPs, our ...

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You did, but it hasn’t gone very well for you, has it?

TIM FARRON:

... and a full conference. Being in government has clearly damaged our electoral standing and I think we could have predicted that at the beginning. It doesn’t mean it’s the wrong thing to do – it was the right thing to do for the country.

ANDREW MARR:

If the answer is not to ditch Nick Clegg and to stand by your leader, what is the solution to the problem that you face because it’s a really serious problem. Some people will think you rather down-played it just now in terms of the number of seats you’ve lost and so forth. A lot of Liberal Democrats feel that they are facing oblivion at the moment.
TIM FARRON:
Well, first of all I don’t down-play it in the slightest because one of the things I hate about this point in the cycle and they’ve just had a set elections and if you’ve not done well, is that you end up in a position where you’re having to talk about people losing their seats as collateral damage, as mid-terms blues, it’s not. These are real human beings who’ve worked their socks off for their Party, for their community, often for donkey’s years, and now have lost through no fault of their own. So the idea that we can just dismiss this as just a blip or something is nonsense.

ANDREW MARR:
So if it’s not their fault ...

TIM FARRON:
(over) I have absolute deep sympathy, I have deep sympathy with the fact that people feel the way they do, the point being that I don’t agree at all with any conclusion. There’s about two hundred people who’ve signed the petition, some of whom are not Party members it’s important to remember, and the overall majority of the Party believes that we took a tough decision four years ago, and just at the point where that tough decision is now paying off with the economic recovery and we’re being vindicated with decisions we took back in 2010, it would be really, really weird to say the least, for the Party then to change direction and somehow decide that all the things we’ve now got right, we didn’t ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You’ve been holed as a Party, you are sinking and your message is carry on straight towards the rocks.

TIM FARRON:
No, it isn’t at all and you know, I have to say because you know, it would be just dishonest to say otherwise, but we of course ... badly in many areas of the country over Thursday, Friday but it’s also important to remember how well we have done in our fortress areas, in the likes of Watford and St Albans, in places like Hull and Newcastle and Redcar. Some of those places Lib Dem seats now, but some of them not Liberal Democrat seats now and whilst there have been some awful results in some parts ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) This is beginning to sound a little bit like ...

TIM FARRON:
(over) ... we’ve done well in others as well and so I think if we’re looking forward to 2015, under Nick Clegg, then we go forward and we defend our record then we have to do what we’ve been best at in the past and that is applying our track record of community politics to our communities and ensuring that we buck the trend. It’s what we’ve done ...

ANDREW MARR:
(over) ... if it’s not just going to be under Nick Clegg but also under water, you have to make some big changes don’t you? What about the future of the
coalition? At what point are you going to have to start distancing yourself more clearly from the Conservatives?

**TIM FARRON:**

Well I don’t think – first of all my view is we should have perhaps been more distinctive from the very beginning on many issues. But what you don’t do is be so distinctive you are destructive because what is on trial here, much more than the Liberal Democrats is plural politics, it’s coalition government. If people come to the next election and they think coalition government is a, you know, a mess and an unstable thing, which it has not been to this day and I’m sure it won’t be, but if that was the case, then people would be pushed to the extremes again wouldn’t they? They wouldn’t want to go for Parties that could form part of the government but perhaps not at this stage lead one, and so it’s really important that having made really tough, unpopular decisions in 2010, that now in 2014, when they are paying off and there is an economic recovery, it would be really foolish for us to now somehow turn our back on all that, and I genuinely believe that had we ...

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* I’m so sorry, if I was not Andrew Marr, but if I was John Pugh, the Liberal Democrat MP, calling today for Nick Clegg to go, what would be your message to me, directly?

**TIM FARRON:**

I don’t think John has called for Nick to go. I’ve spoken to a number of my colleagues over the last few days. I mean he’s expressed concern about the
direction of the Party and all the rest of it. I think there are some fair points there and it’s really important in all this, I’m not dismissing the concerns people have about the state of the Party and about our continuing poll ratings and so on. It’s just important for us to remember that we can make things an awful lot worse by turning in on ourselves. We could also make things a lot worse for looking like we now don’t agree with the things that were difficult that we did four years ago, that are now paying off. And I honestly believe that if George Osborne had been in power on his own, there would have been much more cuts – many more cuts – and we’d have seen demand sucked out of the economy far more and the recovery would not have happened. I’m absolutely sure that it is down to the Liberal Democrats that there is a recovery. Why should we be ashamed of that?

ANDREW MARR:

Tim Farron, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

END OF INTERVIEW