ANDREW MARR:
And I’m joined now by the Liberal Democrat Leader Nick Clegg. Nick, we’re going to be talking about red lines I’m sure, later on, but one of the things that’s not in your red line so far is your attitude to that crucial question of a referendum on Europe. Now you’ve said in the past that it has to be triggered by constitutional shift, there has to be a transfer of power from the UK to the EU, but we both know the circumstances of the referendum that David Cameron wants may not be those circumstances. So the crucial question is if I’m David Cameron and I say to you “Look, Nick, I need my referendum in 2017”, do you stop me?

NICK CLEGG:
My view remains that what David Cameron and I did together in coalition government in 2011 – namely place into law the circumstances in which a referendum will take place …

ANDREW MARR:
Things have changed since then.
NICK CLEGG:  
Well, funnily enough, I’ve just heard Nigel Farage say – I never thought I’d say this, the first time in a long time I actually agree with Nigel Farage – my experience of governing with the Conservatives over the last five years is that the one consistent approach of the Conservatives towards Europe is its inconsistency. When I, when we set out in government together, I remember them saying to me with barely disguised relief that they were not going to bang on about Europe. And they bang on about little else now; in fact they’ve declared it’s their only … it’s their only sort of driving red line.

ANDREW MARR:  
Yeah.

NICK CLEGG:  
Then, as you know, we …

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) But we are coming to this …

NICK CLEGG:  
(over) Well no hang on, but …

ANDREW MARR:  
(over) … crucial question, which is your attitude to this in any former deal because you can’t do a deal with the Conservatives.

NICK CLEGG:  
No but you’re asking… you’re actually asking me about my attitude towards another party’s shifting position on a subject, and all I’m saying to you is my experience – and I might as well be guided by the past as an indicator of what might happen in the future – is that the Conservatives constantly flip and flop on this. So they first said that they didn’t want to go on about it. Then we legislated for it. Then they said they’ll renegotiate. They won’t tell us how they will renegotiate. Then they said they might leave if they don’t get what they want in that ill-defined renegotiation. Then
they’ve said that they might stay, after all. Then they said 2017.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* So let me ask …

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* Now I read maybe 2016. All I can do in those rather opaque circumstances – in other words in response to other parties shifting positions – is to say this is where we’ve always believed …

**ANDREW MARR:**

Okay.

**NICK CLEGG:**

… we should be placed when it comes to this issue of when a referendum is held.

**ANDREW MARR:**

What is not opaque is that the Conservative Leader has said he is going to hold a referendum on Europe In/Out in 2017. That is an absolutely cast iron personal guarantee by David …

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* Well it’s about as cast iron as what he said about the Lisbon Treaty.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* … by David Cameron. He can’t do any further deal, coalition or otherwise …

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* Well he said …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* … with you, unless you let that happen.
NICK CLEGG:
… he said the same on the Lisbon Treaty of course and didn’t follow through. Look …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So would you let that happen?

NICK CLEGG:
Look all I’m saying about this issue of red lines is: as you will have seen on the front page of our manifesto, we could not have been clearer in setting out collectively as a party the things that we care about most – money into the NHS; balancing the books and doing so fairly; not asking, as we balance the books, millions of public sector workers to take more cuts to their take-home pay; investing in education; protecting schools and nurseries from cuts from the Labour and the Conservative parties’ plans; protecting the environment and delivering more tax cuts to people on low and middle incomes. Then the British people – it’s called democracy – decide which of those priorities do they prefer?

ANDREW MARR:
Of course, yes.

NICK CLEGG:
Do they prefer our priorities – a very strong economy and a fair society – or do they prefer …

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NICK CLEGG:
… the Conservative and UKIP parties, which have now become almost indistinguishable on the issue of Europe?

ANDREW MARR:
It’s May 8th.
NICK CLEGG:
Right.

ANDREW MARR:
You’re tired, David Cameron’s tired.

NICK CLEGG:
*(over)* I don’t get tired.

ANDREW MARR:
He looks you in the eye and says, “Nick, are you going to let me have my referendum – yes or no?”

NICK CLEGG:
Well you see you’re asking me a question the wrong way round. I would be saying I have said to the British people that the Liberal Democrats will not enter into government unless the NHS gets the £8 billion it needs and the priority for mental health…

ANDREW MARR:
*(over)* Well I’m going to come onto the NHS and all that.

NICK CLEGG:
Well no, no, it’s very important. I …

ANDREW MARR:
I really want to nail this down.

NICK CLEGG:
No, no, because you’re genuinely, if I may say, putting these sort of … putting it back to front.

ANDREW MARR:
And you’re trying very hard, ingeniously to avoid …
NICK CLEGG:
No.

ANDREW MARR:
... answering the very straightforward question I keep asking you …

NICK CLEGG:
No, no …

ANDREW MARR:
... which is would you let David Cameron have his referendum in 2017, yes or no?

NICK CLEGG:
Before I address anyone else’s red lines, I would address mine. This is the point, with respect, which I think you get the wrong way round.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So let’s assume …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) So I would say we have to ensure … For instance, the Conservative …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay you have a good haggle on those and then you get to the referendum. Do you allow him to have it or not?

NICK CLEGG:
You say “good haggle”. The Conservatives would have to abandon hook, line and sinker one of the most regressive approaches to balancing the books that I’ve seen in modern British politics. They want to take the equivalent of £1,500 off … out of the hands of the 8 million most vulnerable families in this country. So the Conservatives were first …
ANDREW MARR:

(over) But suppose they give you that, suppose they give you that. Do you then give them a referendum on Europe, yes or no?

NICK CLEGG:

(over) Well you can forgive me for sighing when you ask me … invite me to speculate on one permutation after the next permutation or the next permuta…

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Well you’ve just …

NICK CLEGG:

My absolute priority, my ab…

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You’d be happy to speculate about cuts and austerity …

NICK CLEGG:

No – no, no.

ANDREW MARR:

… so why won’t you speculate about this?

NICK CLEGG:

No I’m happy to insist on my red lines and they are the ones the Liberal Democrats have put on the front page of our manifesto. And I personally think that for many, many people watching this programme, ensuring that we have fair tax cuts for people on low and middle incomes, that we probably support the NHS, that we don’t cut their local nursery schools and colleges is much more important than some of the other red lines that other parties have chosen.

ANDREW MARR:

But a lot of Liberal Democrats watching this interview will be saying to themselves hold on a second, so the European Referendum isn’t a red line, so that is up for grabs.
So if there is a conversation that goes well in other respects, Nick Clegg is going to allow David Cameron to have an In/Out European Referendum in 2017.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Liberal Democrat voters - no I don’t think …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s what they’ll conclude.

NICK CLEGG:
… I think it’s one of the most ill-disguised secrets in British politics that I am pro-European and I believe we should stay in the European Union and absolutely not …

ANDREW MARR
(over) But you’ll give David Cameron his referendum?

NICK CLEGG:
No, no, we have … The Liberal Democrats have for year … - well before I even became Leader – have advocated that a referendum should take place in the right circumstances. We disagree with the Conservatives, as you know. That’s why we legislated together to enshrine in law the point at which we think a referendum will take place. The Conservatives have changed their position basically because, as ever, when the right wing kick off in the Conservative Parliamentary Party, the Conservative Party leadership buckles, and that’s what’s happened over and over again. You can’t ask me to speculate about how they might buckle again or shift …

ANDREW MARR:
I’m not asking about them. I’m asking about you. I think it’s overwhelmingly likely that one of the first things on the table when you talk to David Cameron …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Will be my red line.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) … if you do talk to him will be your red lines and his red lines. And the first of his red lines is this referendum and you will give me no indication at the moment that you will support him or not.

NICK CLEGG:
I’ll tell you … I’ll tell you why not. Firstly because it seems to me it is not my responsibility or anybody else’s to try and stare into a crystal ball …

ANDREW MARR:
It’s the single biggest question he’s going to ask you.

NICK CLEGG:
Well can I just, can I just … Look the way this works – it’s old-fashioned, it’s called an election – is I set out my priorities, David Cameron sets out his, Ed Miliband sets out his. People then choose. And how we then, how those red lines are or are not compatible with each other is in part dependent on the mandate that the British people give each of those parties. And all I’m saying is if you …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I detect we’re not going to get anywhere on this. Let’s move on.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Well no what you will get is if you want properly funded public services, schools and hospitals, if you want tax cuts for millions of people on low and middle incomes and you want a fair centre ground approach to finishing the job of balancing the books and doing so fairly, you’re only going to get it by voting for the Liberal Democrats.

ANDREW MARR:
Now we’ve got two more red lines, I think, this morning. One of them’s about the environment. The second one is about public sector pay.
ANDREW MARR:
Just explain that.

NICK CLEGG:
So I think if you look back over the last five years, we’ve asked a lot of the millions of social workers, teachers, nurses, the five and a half million people who work in our public services, they have made sacrifices, real term cuts to their take home pay amounting to about £12 billion that they’ve contributed through public sector pay restraint to balancing the deficit … to balancing the budget. And I think it is now time to say we are tantalisingly close to finishing the job of balancing the budget. We will not ask workers in the public sector to weather and to shoulder any more cuts to their take home pay. That can be done. That’s a fair way to balance the books and I think we should now give them reassurance that there is light at the end of the tunnel and that their pay will not be cut any further.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay that’s very, very clear. Let’s move onto one of the other really, really big issues facing us, which is Scotland.

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
Whether you are in government with Ed Miliband or David Cameron or whatever happens, whoever is in government is going to have to start to heal the Scottish problem. And let me read you just a quote from Bella Caledonia, which is a Scottish website which we featured in the programme a little while ago and one of their writers wrote: ‘This morning Scotland is a pariah state, disenfranchised, with a proscribed party on the verge of a landslide victory. You think the union survives that?’ That’s a very common view up there.
NICK CLEGG:
Well look my own view is that what we need to do calmly and in a grown-up way after this election, and whoever’s in power, is establish a constitutional convention bringing the different parties from all the nations together and people from outside politics because clearly the tectonic plates are shifting massively. My own view is the only way we can arrive at a new stable settlement and at the end of the day for me the most important thing is that we provide stability … I think a lot of people are getting quite anxious about the instability and the way you do that of course is by devolving power to the constituent parts of our country, but …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So do you go back to Asquith? Do you go back to 1912/1914 – home rule all round and a federal Britain – which would include an English Parliament?

NICK CLEGG:
I don’t think creating a new sort of talking shop parliament is necessarily the key here.

ANDREW MARR:
A real parliament.

NICK CLEGG:
I do agree with the principle, in effect the principle of radical devolution in which you release the clammy grip of Whitehall on the governance of our country. Not only by the way to Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland, but also to our great cities and city regions and counties across the country.

ANDREW MARR:
Right, okay, that’s clear. Hopping around a little bit, you’ll have noticed – talking about great cities – your visit to Leeds means that the tuition fee thing still sits around your shoulders. Whatever you do, you can’t quite get rid of it. And there’s been a lot of commentary recently by people who were either there at the time or close to people there at the time, which says the real … the story that you have told is not the true story, which is that you actually looked at your policy that you’d had in the referen… in the election campaign and thought it was the wrong policy, you looked at the
Conservatives and you were intellectually convinced by the change. You changed policy on tuition fees because you actually thought personally this was the right thing to do. That's true, isn’t it?

**NICK CLEGG:**
No it’s complete rubbish.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Well let me read you James O’Shaughnessy who says he was there in the room at the time. And he says ‘Clegg is talking’ – I’m sorry about this – ‘crap on tuition fees. He wasn’t between a rock and a hard place. I was in the room when he decided to vote for it. He was keen.’ That’s true, isn’t it?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well I don’t even know who this chap is and he certainly wasn’t in the room, I tell you. Vince Cable and I as Liberal Democrats, we struggled with this for a great period of time. We were between a rock and a hard place. Why? Because, as you know, fees had been introduced. I know they don’t want to … they want to airbrush this out of the record. It was the Labour Party that introduced fees, it was the Labour Party that increased fees, it was the Labour Party that commissioned remember the report by Lord Browne? Never mind a £9,000 …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* … making some very clear promises to …

**NICK CLEGG:**
*(over)* … a £9,000 limit. Lord Browne - the report commissioned by the Labour Party, endorsed by the Conservatives – said there should be no upper limit whatsoever. And then …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*(over)* So you weren’t intellectually …
NICK CLEGG:
(over) … and then to add insult to injury, the Labour Party basically left no money at all, so clearly something had to give.

ANDREW MARR:
So you weren’t intellectually convinced about the change in policy?

NICK CLEGG:
No. What I had to do was deal with the reality, the very invidious choices we faced, in the wake of the biggest economic firestorm since the Second World War. Absolutely no money in the nation’s coffers, fees which had been introduced and increased by …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So Mr O’Shaughnessy and Danny Finkelstein who said the same thing - they’re just lying, are they?

NICK CLEGG:
No it’s just typical Tory game playing. Of course not. It was a very, very difficult decision for us to take. Thankfully Vince Cable and (credit to him) David Willetts then provided the fairest deal they could in the circumstances to graduates of the future. And thankfully now, as a result, far from the predictions of the whole thing being a disaster, we have more … a higher proportion of youngsters from disadvantaged families going into university than ever before.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Alright, okay. So the policy actually worked? The policy that you were against then worked?

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Well it’s working … Well I think, as I say, the sort of compromise that was struck …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah.
NICK CLEGG:
… is working better than people anticipated.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, okay.

NICK CLEGG:
Interestingly enough, of course what Labour now want to do is they want to in effect make a change which only helps the wealthiest graduates in the future.

ANDREW MARR:
Talking of Labour, you’ve used a very interesting word, which is ‘illegitimacy’. You’ve said that people will question the birthright of a Labour minority government supported from the outside by the SNP. How can that possibly be the case given that you could well be the fourth largest party and still hope to be part of government? What’s your birthright? What’s your legitimacy?

NICK CLEGG:
(laughing) I’ve been making a really (I thought) flamingly obvious, old-fashioned point, and I know there are lots of sort of …

ANDREW MARR:
It’s a big word ‘legitimacy’.

NICK CLEGG:
No well okay …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You’re saying it’s an illegitimate government. That’s not an obvious point.

NICK CLEGG:
Let me … If you let me just finish then I can perhaps explain. What I’m saying is that once the votes are done and counted and everybody’s had their say and done that wonderful thing of a cross on a ballot paper, I think then the party assuming no one’s
going to win … And no one is going to win. I know Ed Miliband and David Cameron go round robotically saying that they’re going to win. They’re not and they know it. What then happens, I think, is that the party which nonetheless has the biggest mandate from the British people, even though it hasn’t got a slam dunk outright majority, is the party which should be given the chance to try and assemble a government. Just to answer the next question I anticipate you’re going to ask, they may not succeed …

ANDREW MARR:
Exactly.

NICK CLEGG:
… they may not choose to assemble a government, and then of course alternative arrangements might need to be arrived at. But I don’t think the British people will understand, having given us instructions – namely one party has its nose ahead of other parties – that somehow immediately that mandate is entirely ignored. All I’m saying is there’s a chronology to this which seems to me to be quite important to the legitimacy of any subsequent governing arrangement.

ANDREW MARR:
You’ve lost two thirds of your members, you’ve lost – of your voters sorry – a third of your members. Your party has had a terrible, terrible time as a result of going into coalition. If you go into coalition again, you have got to go back to your party and suggest they do it all over again. Realistically what are your chances of doing that?

NICK CLEGG:
Look I’m not sort of gagging to be in power for power’s sake. You shouldn’t do that in pol… you shouldn’t do that in life. I personally think that the Liberal Democrats are now the only guarantors in these final days of this election campaign of stability because we’re the only party grown-up enough to say no one’s going to win. We’ve got to treat each other like grown-ups, there’s going to be give and take. And if we don’t provide stability, we will see disunity and disharmony in our country and I don’t want to see that happen.
ANDREW MARR:

Nick Clegg, thank you very much indeed for now.

INTERVIEW ENDS