

THERESA MAY

ANDREW MARR SHOW

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AM: Now you may remember back in December the government was definitely going to hold that meaningful vote on the Prime Minister's Brexit deal, then right at the last minute they pulled stumps and cancelled it. Now again we're promised a vote next week, but can we trust that promise? And if Theresa May loses what will she do next? Well she's with me now.

Theresa May, can I ask you first of all can we rely on this vote happening later this month, definitely?

TM: Yes. We are going to hold the vote. You said it was due to be next week, actually the debate starts next week and the debate will carry on into the following week. But we will be holding the vote.

AM: We're talking about the 15th or 14th

TM: That sort of timing, yes.

AM: Now this is vote that has been promised before. Can I ask you what in real terms, in practical terms has changed since December?

TM: Well, what we've been doing since we decided not to go ahead with the vote in December, having listened to the concerns that have been expressed by Members of Parliament, is obviously I've been talking to European leaders, there was the December European Council meeting immediately after that decision and we got some changes, some insurances from the December European Council. I've been talking to European leaders since, obviously including in the last few days, talking to colleagues and what we'll be setting out over the next –

AM: Have you got anything from them ?

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TM: - what we'll be setting out over the next few days, because actually this isn't just about the EU, it's about us as well, what we can do domestically. So what we'll be setting out over the next few days is a sort of assurances, is measures in three areas. The first is measures that will be specific for Northern Ireland. The second is a greater role for parliament as we take these negotiations into the next stage for our future relationship. And the third, and we're still working on this, is further assurances from the European Union to address the issues that have been raised.

AM: What do you mean by a greater role for parliament?

TM: Well, that's what I'll be setting out in the coming days, Andrew. But I've already said and I said at the speech I gave when we opened the debate that started on this issue that we were looking at the role that parliament can have in looking perhaps at the mandate for the negotiations for the future. There's a number of ways in which we're looking to see how we can involve parliament in a greater way in the future.

AM: And is this vote it? Is it the only chance MPs will get to support or oppose your deal or will you come back again and again and again if you lose first time?

TM: Well, look, the European Union's made clear that this is the deal that is on the table. There are further assurances we are seeking from them in relation to the specific issues and concerns that Members of Parliament have, but I think when MPs come to look at this vote, when they come to consider what they're doing, they need to think of the three things that I think they need to ask themselves. First of all does this deal deliver on the referendum? Does it bring back control of our borders, laws and money? Yes it does. Does it protect our jobs and security? Yes it does. Does it provide certainty for businesses and citizens for the future, and yes it does. So those are the three issues we looked at.

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AM: That's the case for the deal. Can I ask you again, if MPs vote this down the first time do you bring it back?

TM: I'm working on getting vote through parliament. It's for those who oppose the deal to actually say what the alternative is and so far nobody, nobody has put forward an alternative that delivers on all those issues. And crucially delivers on the referendum result.

AM: It's very important for MPs nonetheless to know whether if you don't get it through first time, despite all your best efforts, and you go back to Brussels and you get some other assurances and then you bring it back again. One of your employees in Number 10 is quoted as saying you could bring back this vote 30 times if necessary to get it through.

TM: No. Look the deal is on the table. Let's look at what we've got in the House of Commons at the moment in terms of the views that MPs are taking on this deal. And remember we've got Article 50 was triggered, we're leaving –

AM: I take it you could bring it back then.

TM: No, I want to see this deal go through, Andrew.

AM: of course you do, I know but you'll keep trying.

TM: Well if the deal is not voted on, this vote that's coming up, then actually we're going to be in uncharted territory. I don't think anybody can say exactly what will happen in terms of the reaction we'll see in parliament.

AM: I was rather hoping you could.

TM: Because – well if I can just go back to what I was going to do which is setting out what we have in the House of Commons. What we have in the House of Commons is a Labour leadership and Labour Party that is playing politics with this. That is opposing any deal in order to create the most – the greatest chaos that they can. We've got people who are promoting a second referendum in order to stop Brexit and we've got people who want to see their perfect Brexit. And I would say don't let the search for the perfect

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become the enemy of the good. Because the danger there is actually we end up with no Brexit at all.

AM: I've asked you I think three or four times whether you'll bring back this vote again and again and again and you haven't answered me which leads me to assume that you would bring it back again and again and again.

TM: Andrew, what I'm doing – You're saying what happens if, if, if, if, if.

AM: Yes, yes, reasonably.

TM: What I'm saying is let's actually remove the first if and let's get this vote through the House of Commons.

AM: Well that's what you'd like to do.

TM; That's what I'm working for and that's what I'm working for with colleagues and I'm listening to colleagues and will be continuing to talk with colleagues over the coming days.

AM: And crucial to these conversations, I assume, is whether or not Britain gets its own independent exit mechanism from the backstop or else a time limit to the backstop. Is that the essence of what you're trying to get out of Brussels?

TM: The key concern that Members of Parliament raised on the backstop was the concern that it could become permanent or it could become indefinite and they need to know that it can be replaced if it's put into place. Now we and the European Union are very clear, it's been reiterated, it was reiterated at that December council that this is not intended to be used in the first place and if it is it is only temporary. But it's that concern that maybe there is some way in which it could become indefinite. So ensuring that we actually get the future relationship in place to replace the backstop if it's used is a crucial element of this. We say, the European Union say that's what we want to do. It's making sure that we can give people the confidence that that will be delivered.

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AM: Since we're talking about the backstop, there's all this ghastly jargon around the place, but since we're talking about the backstop what we also know is that the Irish government have said they will under no circumstances put up a border. We know the DUP and Northern Irish politicians won't put up a border. There is not going to be an Irish border and therefore why does that need to be a backstop?

TM: Well, first of all we're very clear that we will do everything, whatever the circumstances, everything in our power not to have a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. But what

AM: It's not going to happen.

TM: Well you say well it won't happen. No border doesn't happen simply because people sit around saying well we won't have a border.

AM: But it only happens if people put it up and nobody who could do that will.

TM: But it's about more than that. It's about businesses knowing what they do. So if you're in a situation where you're operating different tariffs how do businesses deal with that in terms of customs and matters going across that border? So actually as ever this isn't just about aspiration, it's about practicality and that's the point. It's about making sure that we can guarantee that there will be no hard border. That's important to us. Northern Ireland's part of the United Kingdom. We owe it to the people of Northern Ireland.

AM: When you first sent the letter triggering Article 50 you said to the EU that you wanted and expected that by now we would have a comprehensive agreement on the relationship going forward, the Trade Agreement. That hasn't happened. That's been a failure, hasn't it?

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TM: No. For legal constraints the EU can't sign a legal trade agreement with us until we're outside the European Union.

AM: With respect, it's more than that. It's very, very vague and very, very waffley. It is, in Jeremy Corbyn's words, 'a blind Brexit.'

TM: No, it is not. What we have in the Political Declaration which sets out – is a set of instructions effectively to the negotiators in the next stage. And it is more comprehensive, it's more ambitious, it's an unprecedented degree of a relationship – and people focus on trade but also on security which is hugely important to us. It's about protecting jobs and security of people here in the UK.

AM: But listen to the language. Here's on trade and goods what the Political Declaration says: "The parties envisage having a trading relationship on goods that is as close as possible. When it comes to the border checks the parties envisage a spectrum of different outcomes." It could hardly be more vague and waffly than that. It's almost meaningless.

TM: Andrew, I'm sorry what you haven't read out of course is a section that says there will be no tariffs, there will be no restrictive quotas, but there's a whole range of areas which are very specific about the future.

AM: But none of it guaranteed.

TM: Well this is the set of instructions to the negotiators for the future. That needs to be turned into legal text. That can't be done until we've left the European Union.

AM: All right. Now before the first vote was going to take place you said it's not my deal there are only two alternatives. No deal or no Brexit. Forced to choose which would you go for?

TM: I'm going for my deal, Andrew.

AM: Just giving you a choice of the alternatives.

TM: I know you've given me a choice of the alternatives, but what I'm saying is what I'm working for – and I'm doing it because I

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genuinely believe this is what is in the interests of this country. I believe it's in our national interest to leave the European Union, to deliver on the referendum, but to do it in an orderly way. To do it in a way that gives certainty to citizens, EU citizens here, UK citizens living in Europe, that gives certainty to businesses. I think that's important. That's what this deal does. Delivers on the referendum, protects jobs and security, gives certainty to businesses and people.

AM: Well that was your phrase, no deal or no Brexit. Let's peer ahead a little bit into the future. We know your views on a second referendum, you're not a personal enthusiast for that, but also you're a parliamentarian and your authority comes from parliament. If the House of Commons votes for a second referendum would you implement that as Prime Minister?

TM: In my view there should not be a second referendum.

AM: But if parliament says that's what should happen?

TM: Let's just look at what you're saying in terms of parliament having a second referendum. As I said earlier, what we see in parliament is some people who are advocating a second referendum because they want to stop Brexit. Now we've also got some people, you know, on the Opposition, the Chairman of the Labour Party, Ian Lavery, has said that this would be disrespectful to those people who went out and voted leave. It would divide our country. It would, I believe – and practically actually you couldn't get a referendum in time before the 29th of March. You'd be talking about extending Article 50, we're already nearly three years from the vote to the leave the European Union. I think we should be leaving the European Union and delivering on that vote and all those things –

AM: All of those things may be true, but if parliament did it would you actually implement it, is my question. You're Prime Minister, parliament has said we want a second referendum, you're against it, what do you do?

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TM: What I do in the first place is try to ensure and persuade people that actually going for a second referendum is not the way forward for this country. It's not the way forward because it is disrespecting the vote of the people.

AM: I understand your view but if –

TM: Disrespecting the vote of the people.

AM: What about disrespecting the House of Commons and if they say this is what we want, surely as Prime Minister you have to do it?

TM: The House of Commons obviously will come to its view on these things. At the moment we've got different views across the House of Commons. We've got people who want a second referendum to stop Brexit. We've got people who are trying to use you know various means in the House of Commons to stop no deal. My message to anybody who doesn't want no deal is actually you have two alternatives. You can have no deal or you can have a deal and actually the deal that's on the table is the deal people will be voting on.

AM: Nonetheless, if the House of Commons decided either that they wanted to extend Article 50, you mentioned that, is that off the table completely as far as you're concerned or would you ask for an extension of Article 50 so we could sort this mess out?

TM: No.

AM: No, you wouldn't?

TM: Let's be clear about the situation that we're in. There's lots of people talking about all sorts of things that could happen. Extend Article 50. Actually I think it's only the government that can extend Article 50. Extend Article 50. Have a second referendum, do this. What is this about? Actually it's about not confronting the decision that we all have to take and the decision that we all have to take is a very simple one. Do we want to deliver on the referendum? Do want to bring back control of our borders, laws and money? Do want to protect jobs and security in this country?

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Do you want to give certainty to businesses and people? And if the answer to all of those questions is yes, which I believe it should be, then there is one way forward which is to ensure that we leave with a good deal and there's a good deal on the table.

AM: Let me explain why I've been going through the alternatives which is you have your deal on the table, it's almost certain, we may all be wrong but it looks very like you don't at the moment have the numbers to get through the House of Commons on that deal. If that deal falls and all the alternatives we've talked about also fall because you won't implement them, then we are heading day by day, week by week towards no deal. Something you yourself has described as chaotic and your ministers are clearly very worried about. Surely it would be utterly irresponsible to take this country to no deal. And many people who know you quite well say, d'you know what? Theresa May deep down will not take us to no deal. She will find a way to avoid that.

TM: I've always said that no deal is better than a bad deal. What we have on the table is a good deal.

AM: You're not quite answering my question, you are taking us towards no deal.

TM: But the point is, Andrew –

AM: Of course you want to win your vote but if you don't win your vote and you've ruled out all the other alternatives you are taking us towards no deal. Something that could be really, really damaging to an awful lot of people in this country.

TM: What is in the national interest, what is best for this country is to leave the European Union with a good deal. The good deal is on the table. There are concerns about it. I'm continuing to listen to colleagues and will continue to talk to colleagues about this and we're continuing to talk with the European Union about the further assurances that can give members of parliament the confidence of

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knowing that they can support this deal. Because it is a good deal that's on the table. It does all the things that I've talked about, delivering on the referendum and so forth. What is important I think is when members of parliament come to look at this that actually they recognise the responsibility. You know parliament overwhelmingly voted for a referendum. Parliament voted to trigger Article 50, parliament by a majority voted for the EU Withdrawal Act.

AM: But they don't like your agreement.

TM: There are consequences.

AM: They don't like your agreement.

TM: There's concern about a particular aspect of the agreement which is around this issue of the Northern Ireland backstop. Actually you know, there are 585 pages of Withdrawal Agreement a lot of which is about giving certainty to businesses.

AM: There's a crucial bits you know they don't like it and you're trying to renegotiate that at the moment.

TM: I'm looking for the assurances for people. What I'm saying is it's important to recognise what this is about. People focus on the backstop but actually within that document are all the issues which if you're a business with contracts in the EU that go beyond the 29th of March what happens to those contracts? Are you still able to sell those goods under EU law? All those sorts of issues.

AM: Really important, absolutely.

TM: - that are really important for people. Yes, there's an issue that we're addressing.

AM: There are quite a lot of your critics on your own side who say that they might well support your deal if you were then going to stand down and let somebody else renegotiate the rest of this afterwards. In order to save your own deal would you stand down as Prime Minister.

TM: I've been clear with my colleagues, I was clear before Christmas with my colleagues – two things: one I'm not going to call a snap election, and secondly that I'm not going to be leading

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the party into the '22 general election. But what colleagues have said they want me to do is to deliver Brexit, which is what I'm working on doing, and also deliver on the agenda that I set out when I first became Prime Minister on the steps of Number 10. And that is why, for example, tomorrow we're announcing our long term plan on the National Health Service.

AM: Which I'd like to come on to. But Theresa May, Prime Minister for a few more months or a few more years?

TM: No, I'm not going to play that game, Andrew. What I've set out –

AM: Go on.

TM: No. (laugh)

AM: Let's turn to the NHS. Now, there are three major targets in the NHS which are crucial to it. There's the four-hour A&E target, there's the two-month cancer treatment target and there's the 18-week waiting list target. And during your time as Prime Minister none of those targets have been met. Are they going to be met in future?

TM: Let me just sort of stand back and say what we're doing in relation to the NHS, and I'll come on, if I may, to the issue of the targets. Because it feeds into what we're doing tomorrow. What we did in the summer is, we announced that we are getting the biggest cash boost to the NHS in its history. That enables the NHS to come up with its 10-year long term plan. Now, this is crucial for ensuring the sustainability – ensuring the NHS is there for us in the future as it has been in the past. And there are key areas within that plan. So making sure we have the best maternity care in the world, giving babies the best start in life. Ensuring that we get better at preventing, detecting and treating conditions so that we improve the outcomes on conditions. And managing better between health and care in relation to people's old age, as people age, making sure they can live independently for longer and live healthier lives. Now, what we've seen in the NHS, and the reason

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why I wanted to make sure that we looked at this and did this, is that yes, we were actually within those targets, we're seeing more people, we're treating more people. But because the demand – no, we're slipping against the targets because despite the fact that we're actually doing more the demand is outstripping that. That's why we needed to take a look. That's why we needed to put the extra money in. That's what you need to sustain the future. But what the extra money enables us to do, what the long term plan enables us to do, is actually to step back and say how ensure that the NHS continues being one of the best health services in the world. That's what we'll be announcing tomorrow.

AM: Why are you cutting funding for public health?

TM: No. What we're looking at in relation to the NHS –

AM: You are. You announced it just before Christmas, and according to the Health Foundation a billion pounds nearly since 2015 have gone out of public health. That's stopping people smoking and drinking, eating too much and so forth. Absolutely essential. Good money which would avoid much bigger spending on cancer and so forth in the NHS down the street. Why are you cutting it.

TM: No. Let's look at what I've just said is one of the areas that we're going to be looking at in the NHS long term plan, which is about improving outcomes for conditions. That's as much about prevention and early diagnosis and then treatment and recovery. So prevention is part of what we're looking at within the NHS.

AM: But you're cutting the funding for it.

TM: No. Andrew, what you're saying to me is that there's only one way in which you can address a particular issue. As you may have known from the conversations we've had over time that is never the case. There's public health funding that is dealt with and there's a role for local authorities in some of this as well, but what we're looking across the NHS in this long term plan is how can we work in the various ways that the NHS is involved to prevent

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conditions in the first place, better diagnosis to detect them when they're occurring, at an early stage, because then you're more likely to be able to have successful treatment and help people to recover.

AM: Well, let's look at a big parallel issue and remind you of what you said in May 2017. 'Our social care system will collapse unless we make some important decisions now about how we fund it. We have to act.' Eighteen months on, there was a consultation paper which hasn't even been published, you've got almost no further forward in something you said was about to collapse nearly two years ago.

TM: There's no doubt that there has been stress and strain and pressure on our social care system. That's why we've put extra money into social care. We did that in the budget as well, most recently.

AM: It needs to be funded properly.

TM: We need to sustain – I've always said that there were short term, medium term and long term solutions on social care. The short term is putting more money in, the medium term was ensuring that we make sure the best practise that occurs across the country occurs everywhere. And the long term is about the sustainability for the future. And we will at the earliest opportunity be bringing forward proposals to do that. Getting it right is important. It's important alongside what we're doing for the National Health Service.

AM: I don't know if you say I, Daniel Craig, last night. Did you see that last night?

TM: I didn't.

AM: You haven't had the chance to see that. Why are you delaying the social care – the Universal Credit roll-out ?

TM: Throughout the introduction of Universal Credit we've been clear that we would roll it out as a sort of process, learn as we were going along. We've done that, we've made changes to Universal Credit as we've been going on. We'll be saying more

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about the future in the coming weeks. But it will be fully rolled out by 2023 as was originally intended. But what I think is important on universal credit, the reason why it's important to get this right and why we've been taking our time, why we've been ensuring that we have made changes as we've been learning through this process, is because this is a much better system than the system it replaced. This is a system that encourages people to work, make sure when they're in work it pays. The legacy system we inherited from the Labour Party had nearly 1.4 million people left on benefits for almost a decade. Now, that is not good for them, it's not good for their families, it's not good for us as a country. Actually helping people into work, giving them the dignity of being in work, the ability to support their families, that's what Universal Credit is about.

AM: We haven't had a chance to talk since you faced that leadership challenge before Christmas. Was there a time during that when you thought this might be it?

TM: Look, I approach these things, I talk to my colleagues, and I was grateful for the fact, obviously, the colleagues who supported me. But I recognise that there have been concerns around the issue we were talking about earlier, about this issue of the Brexit deal, and that's why I'm continuing to talk with colleagues, listen to colleagues about that and work with the European Union to provide the assurances, clarifications that I believe are necessary for people to feel with confidence that they can support the deal.

AM: When you set out on this process one of your ambitions was to reunite the country. If you look at the polling at the moment, if you look at what people think about Brexit on both sides, we have never been more divided. Tory members seem to be quite relaxed about the idea of no deal, Labour Party supporters by and large want to stay inside the EU, and those divisions go right down the country, they've been across every sort of table over New Year

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and Christmas. That has been a huge failure. You have failed to unite the country on Brexit.

TM: Well, you know, Andrew, yesterday I was out on doorsteps in my constituency, actually talking to members of the public. And yes, I had a couple who wanted a second referendum, I had somebody who wanted a clean break Brexit. But actually everybody else who spoke about this, the majority of people who I was speaking to yesterday, were saying one simple thing: regardless of how they voted in the referendum, they were saying they want MPs to get behind the government, to get behind the deal, let's get this sorted and let's look to our future.

AM: Are you absolutely sure at the end of March that we will leave the EU?

TM: I've been clear that we leave the European Union on the 29th March this year.

AM: Prime Minister, thanks very much indeed for talking to us.

(ends)