JAMES LANDALE:
Now government ministers will no doubt be glad to put the last few weeks behind them: a Budget not universally welcomed; problems over petrol; arguments within the coalition. How do they regain the momentum? Well I’m joined by the Local Government Minister Grant Shapps. Good morning.

GRANT SHAPPS:
Good morning.

JAMES LANDALE:
Tim Farron there from the Liberal Democrats making it very clear that unless there are substantial changes to the green paper on security, he’s going to block it. Aren’t you going to have to start trimming again, just as you did on the Health Bill?
GRANT SHAPPS:
I think the most important thing is people in this country feel that they are safe and being protected from anything which might go wrong and anything that terrorists might do. And you’ve already got these powers with things like telephones, including mobile phones - things like your mail that comes through the post. Obviously as technology changes, you need to keep track with those things. I’m a great civil libertarian, by the way, and as a Conservative I wouldn’t want to see anything which is overarching, which is why these proposals are not to do what Labour have proposed - set up a massive government database. It’s simply to make sure that information is stored just for a year in case under specific circumstances, and properly authorised, something is required just in terms of when communication went backwards and forwards, not even the contents of it. And I think that’s a very reasonable approach …

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) So …

GRANT SHAPPS:
… and that the public would expect government to protect in that kind of way.

JAMES LANDALE:
But Tim Farron says that’s not reasonable. He’s got serious concerns about this. So you know the Lib Dems are wrong and as a government will you hold firm?

GRANT SHAPPS:
Well I may have been in the green room, but I saw his interview and that wasn’t actually what I saw him say. He actually said we need to make sure that we are a government that appreciates and protects people’s civil liberties. We’re just by the way part the way through passing the Freedom Bill. It’s in the House of Lords right now. That actually strips away many of the things the last government tried to do to be overarching, overbearing on many of our freedoms. So we’re not going to support anything, we’re not going to introduce anything which is you know so overbearing. We’re not reintroducing big databases.

JAMES LANDALE:
Tim Farron said he was prepared to “kill” this proposal.

**GRANT SHAPPS:**
Tim Farron actually is very, very keen to make sure - as am I, as is everybody in this government - that people are properly protected; and to have up to date, modern laws which deal with that, I think is fair. These are not going to be sort of overbearing and it is going to make sure that, for example, it’s put on the same status as using your mobile phone at the moment. We’re not talking about going beyond anything which is already there for other forms of communication.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
We’re discussing this on a day when the Home Office website has been hacked into. How concerned are you about that?

**GRANT SHAPPS:**
Well I think it is concerning in as much as it does show you know how reliant we are on modern technology, on internet sites and so on and so forth. Actually I thought Chuka made a very good point, which is people rely on a site like that for information, particularly for things like community safety. It’s important that you know people realise there’s no advantage in going and trying to block sites. I did just check - the site is up and running right now - but you know this is the modern world we live in and people will try to do these things.

**JAMES LANDALE:**
Now let’s talk more widely about your government. Pastygate, granny tax, Tory dinners in Downing Street, incompetence allegations over the petrol non-crisis. What’s gone wrong?

**GRANT SHAPPS:**
Well, look, I think there are two ways you can govern. You can either look for tomorrow’s headline, in which case you spend all your time trying to do the kind of soft stories which don’t make much difference in the long-term but make you popular; or you govern with the horizon in view all the time and trying to ensure that you’re doing the things which are right for the country in the long-term. And if you look at
you know the times that we live in - how tough times are, the fact that we’ve actually had to bring a coalition together of two parties willing to try to make those tough decisions - halfway through the parliament, is it a surprise that things are quite difficult? No, not at all.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) But governments have …

GRANT SHAPPS:
(over) I think it’s important we carry on and make sure that we actually introduce these radical changes that are needed in this country.

JAMES LANDALE:
But governments have to make arguments. They have to persuade people, they have to take people with them, and isn’t there a risk now that people are thinking either this is an incompetent government or this is a government that is not all in it together and that is supporting the rich?

GRANT SHAPPS:
Look we can spend an interview like this talking about pasties and whether they’re hot or cold and so on and so forth, or we can talk about the big issues. And if you ask what the country, what people really understand about this government, I think the number one thing that people would say is this is a government that appreciates that we must not end up like Greece. We cannot afford to let the country go bust and, furthermore, that’s exactly where we were headed under the previous administration. So if you want to know … I think if you ask people what has this government got right, it is the deficit reduction, it is ensuring that Britain stays on the straight and level, keeps the triple A rating.

JAMES LANDALE:
The opinion polls suggest that you’re a party of chums and that this idea of elitism and a clique at the top of the government is gathering pace. How damaging is that?

GRANT SHAPPS:
Well, look, I think the most important thing is … You mentioned the Budget before. Look at what the Budget actually did. It took two million people out of paying any tax at all A further 24 million people are going to …

**JAMES LANDALE:**

*over* Taxpayers, not people who are poorer than that …

**GRANT SHAPPS:**

Well 24 million people whose tax bill each week will be reduced by £6.30. This is a government that actually understands that what you need to do is govern for everyone. And again, a bit like the pasties, if we want to have an obsessive sort of discussion about who knows who and when, for the record I don’t think I even knew David Cameron before I was elected to parliament and I’m a minister in this government.

**JAMES LANDALE:**

What’s worse, to be accused of incompetence or to be accused of being a party of the rich?

**GRANT SHAPPS:**

I think the worst thing of all is to be accused of not being prepared to take on the really big changes this country needs like the welfare reform. And it’s interesting and I think revealing that you sit down for an interview like this and talk about the tittle-tattle rather than you know the Welfare Bill that we’ve just passed into a law, which means that from now on people in this country will always be better off in work rather than on welfare and benefit - taking people out of being trapped on benefits. These are the really big issues. That, the deficit reduction, the things which are going to change this country radically like Michael Gove’s education reforms. Those are the things that matter. Of course we can talk about pasties and who knows who and for how long, but actually what matters is how you’re governing the country, not which personalities you knew.

**JAMES LANDALE:**

*over* Okay very quickly [*inaudible*] not on pasties. Tax returns. Would you be happy to publish yours? Should the rest of the government publish theirs?
GRANT SHAPPS:
I have nothing against it. These things … I mean I think transparency’s been really good. It’s one of the great things that this government has done. My department (Communities and Local Government) for example, we publish everything over £500. We’ve published the entire government credit card and it’s really driven down efficiency.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) But won’t it restore faith in politicians if they’re more open?

GRANT SHAPPS:
Look, I think it may be a good idea. And by the way, perhaps that’s a good idea and maybe we should have public institutions, maybe even the BBC, maybe even journalists release their tax returns, so we can see everything and everything is transparent including why questions are asked.

JAMES LANDALE:
(over) Very quickly. Some people say you should be Party Chairman. Do you want to be?

GRANT SHAPPS:
No, I think we’ve got a great Party Chairman. I love what I’m doing with housing and I think it’s important that we get enough homes built in this country, and that’s why I’m focused entirely on that job.

JAMES LANDALE:
Grant Shapps, thank you very much indeed for joining this morning.

INTERVIEW ENDS