AM: Ruth Davidson, the fallout from the conference is still all over the papers. Lots and lots of calls in different papers for some kind of major reshaping or reshuffling of the government. Is the Prime Minister strong enough to do that?

RD: Well, first of all Andrew, welcome to Glasgow, it’s great to see you here. The Prime Minister...absolutely, the makeup of her cabinet is entirely within her purview and people serve within cabinet at the pleasure of the Prime Minister whoever it is. Now you’ve seen some quite unfortunately shenanigans this week in terms of a couple of people trying to push, but the push back has been pretty strong, we’re behind the Prime Minister, she’s the best person to lead us forward.

AM: You said the plotters should get back in their box and so far they have got back into their boxes for the time being. I mean who knows what’s head, but for the time being. But as I say there are two things. Would you like to see some fresh blood in the cabinet? Younger faces?

RD: I’m not going to play fantasy cabinet on a television show, that’s not my job. Nor do I think that it’s particularly helpful. The Prime Minister knows exactly what talent she has in her ranks. I believe there’s a great deal of talent on the green benches on the Conservative side, and of course you want to see people get on and get up, but you’ve got to have the right person in the right portfolio doing the right job. Because one of the things that’s really angered me this week, particularly with all of the sort of
movement and tittle tattle in the papers is folks seem to have forgotten that we are really lucky to be able to serve our country as politicians. Whether that’s in opposition like myself or in government like my colleagues and it’s all about delivering for the country. It’s not and should never be about private ambition.

AM: I absolutely want to come onto that. Do you think Boris Johnson is the right person in the right job?

RD: Well look, he’s come out this week to say that he’s fully behind every dot, comma, T and words of the Florence speech.

AM: Do you believe him?

RD: Well, you know I want to see the Prime Minister hold him to that and he’s also been both publicly and privately and then because this was a Whatsapp group privately became publicly said that we need to circle the wagons and realise that you know, the opposition is not on our own benches, it’s sitting across the seat in the Commons. And I think he’s right about that. So you know he’s a big intellect, he’s a big figure in the party and if the Prime Minister believes he’s the right person to be Foreign Secretary then she has my full support.

AM: You made clear in your speech that you thought the government also needed a slight change in direction when it came to policy. You said, ‘ten years since the crash, it’s time to show working families across the UK, from a tenement in Glasgow to a one bed in Grantham that we have got their back.’

RD: Absolutely.

AM: Now a very similar message came out this morning from Sir John Major, the former Prime Minister, and he talks about the need for more ambition and more aggression when it comes to things
like housing, infrastructure projects, but he also said about Universal Credit, that he thought that ‘although it was theoretically impeccable as a reform it is operationally messy, socially unfair and unforgiving. It is time for the Conservative Party to show its heart again, which is too often concealed by financial prudence.’ do you agree with him?

RD: Well I agree with John Major on many things. I think with the issue that he’s got with Universal Credit is actually one that was addressed at the party conference and it might have been slightly missed in all of the melee, but I thought that the announcement from David Gauke in the implementation phase there was going to be a big change to that, so there had been a situation where you could have to wait up to six weeks for money if you found yourself in a situation where you first required Universal Credit. That’s been scrapped and it’s now going to be moved up to payment in advance to five days. Now I think that will make a huge difference and the one thing that I would take issue with with Sir John, if I could just finish this - that the issue he says about it being unforgiving, actually the whole point of Universal Credit is that it’s not. It replaces a system wherein if you worked beyond a certain number of hours your benefits would fall off a cliff edge. The whole point about Universal Credit is that it’s a tapering system, so that even as you go up the scales you don’t lose all the money, it tapers as well. So it always pays you to be in work. And that is the point of it and I absolutely support the principle behind that.

AM: So you don’t - unlike him – you don’t want a review of Universal Credit itself?

RD: Well, I think big programmes of government should always be kept under constant review, and like I say, I think one of the things that got lost in the conference was this announcement by the Chief Secretary – sorry, the DWP, minister David Gauke, which I think was the right thing to do. Also I would say again in
Scotland, because we’re here in sunny Scotland, is that we made like changes to it because we have the ability to change welfare here and the Scottish government –

AM: The SNP, to be fair to them, have made a change which helps that six week problem at the beginning of Universal Credit being run up.

RD: Well one of the things that they’ve done is they said that rather just paying monthly there’s also the opportunity to pay fortnightly. Now we as a party supported that in the Scottish parliament because that’s an ability to make it a more flexible system. But in terms of changing the six week issue that’s been done by the UK government and it’s now a maximum of five days.

AM: When it comes to other things that you mention in your speech as well, a big new programme of housing. You were channelling Harold Macmillan at one point. You were saying back after the war you know we built lots of houses, and certainly in the 1950s Britain was a lot poorer and yet Harold Macmillan and the Conservative governments then managed to build 300,000 new homes every year. Is that the kind of ambition that you’re looking for?

RD: Well what you saw from the UK government was talking about putting £9 billion into social housing, making it easier for private rent and also ten billion pounds into Help to Buy. So you saw all for private renters and for people using the social housing model and for people using private purchase of housing, you saw help on all three fronts. But it’s not one single thing that will help. One of the things that I said in Scotland, and this varies slightly from the government, is I did a big speech earlier this year talking about, in my opinion, in Scotland where we also have pressures on housing but we also have quite a lot of space, we have 8.3% of the population but a third of the landmass. I said we need you
know to go even more boldly than that. We need to build a new generation of new towns, like we did post war with the East Kilbrides and the Cumbernaulds and the Glenrothes of this world and I think we can do that.

AM: Isn’t this the kind of thing the government in London should be doing as well? Because if you actually look at the numbers they’re talking about an extra 5,000 new homes a year which is nothing like the ambition –

RD: No, no, I don’t think that’s fair and in the terms of the numbers itself you’re looking at – you know if you’re saying that you can only get 5,000 homes out a £9 billion investment then these are the least affordable affordable homes that you’re talking about in the history of building. But what I am saying is that in Scotland, and this is a devolved issue, I do want to see that level of ambition. I want to make sure that we take on yes the NIMBYism within local council areas and with some people who are already on the housing ladder, but let me go even more boldly than that and we start that new building for that new generation. And I also think that we’re getting to a tipping point on housing as well, because for those people who have worked hard, made sacrifices, got on the housing ladder, want to protect, you know, what they’ve built up, I see these are the same people that are now realising that their children are continuing to live with them until deep into their 20s, sometimes into their 30s because they haven’t got the same opportunities. So I think even that level of, you know, quite understandable protectionism about what you’ve build is changing in public perceptions too, and I think the government can lead public opinion on that as well as leading the building process itself.
AM: What is your vision for Britain after Brexit? I’m not talking about transitional arrangements or the detail, but I’m saying where do we stand in the world after Brexit?

RD: Well I’ve always said that I wanted an open Brexit. I want us to be a beacon in the world of liberalism in terms of trade, in terms of attracting the best talent, in terms of shouldering our burden in the world when it comes to international development, in terms of making sure that we continue to sit at the top table of the UN and of NATO and that we do our bit. And that we continue to use the soft powers we have one of one of the great cultural countries in the world in terms of our exports in music and in, you know, culture and in art and playwrights and in you know, in television and even in journalism, Andrew.

AM: Thank you. You’ve also said that Scottish businesses and Scottish farmers must have maximum possible access to the single market. That should carry on after we have left the EU.

RD: As much as I would love to claim that for myself I was quoting Theresa May in her Lancaster House speech, which is what she said too.

AM: Do you accept that to do that we have to shadow or mimic or at least adopt EU regulatory changes during that period? Or for any period?

RD: I think what’s important is to make sure that we work out a deal with the EU and as you know the negotiations are going on as we speak, to ensure that they’re happy what we’re offering and we’re happy with what they’re offering. But I’ll tell you what is – you speak to farmers themselves and it’s not in their interests, it’s not in consumers’ interests for us to have any drop in food standards and that’s not the government’s position. We want to ensure that we’ve got high quality good provenance and
particularly for Scotland where we get value add for some of the tremendous food and drink exports that we have, a lot of that is based upon the idea that we go above and beyond the rules that already exist within the EU.

AM: But if we want maximum access to the single market and I assume you now don’t want to be part of the single market, you accept that’s gone. You want maximum access to it?

RD: Well I’m a free trader. What I’ve always said is I want free trade for Scottish and British businesses. One of the reasons I was a Remainer was because that already existed and the framework for that existing was the free market and was the single market but it had the four freedoms that were attached to it so it had lots of other things that went with it. If we can get to a point where Scottish and British businesses are being able to operate within and to trade freely with the EU 27 and others around the world under a different framework, in a framework by the government is a free trade agreement then I’m absolutely fine with that. But the mechanism - but the mechanism isn’t what concerns me Andrew, it’s the result. I want Scottish businesses to be able to trade freely.

AM: But in real practical terms if we’re going to have access to that single market then we have to shadow their regulations to get that. Is that worth doing?

RD: Well I think that in many cases we already go beyond them and I think that one of the fallacies about Brexit is this idea that somehow we didn’t have agency in writing these rules, that these weren’t the rules that we wanted. In many cases we wanted even tougher rules because, you know, we are a country that chooses not, and rightly, chooses not to try and compete on the lowest possible labour cost, but chooses to trade on the highest quality product. And I think that that is the correct future for Britain.
AM: I watched your speech at the Manchester conference and I talked to representatives afterwards, a lot of them are desperate for you to come down south and in their view save the party. And you have said, no, no, no, it’s too lonely a job. I prefer to stay in Scotland. That might sound a little bit selfish, frankly.

RD: Well, that’s very kind of you. I’m not sure that prime ministers are decided on the Andrew Marr programme and we have a very good prime minister –

AM: They are. Mostly.

RD: - who I support and have always supported. I supported her in the leadership, I support her now, I support her to the future. But I know what my job is and I would say very kindly to my colleagues down south, that the job was quite important and they saw themselves in June, that getting 13 MPs from Scotland meant that we still have a Conservative in Number 10. So you know I would gently remind them that the job I’ve got here is a pretty big job. I know what it is and I know what I’m trying to achieve for the future here.

AM: And it remains a difficult job. In the opinion polling you’ve been overtaken by the Labour Party in Scotland, you’re no longer number 2. Is the air going out of the Ruth Davidson bubble just a little bit?

RD: Well it’s a Scottish Conservative bubble, it’s never been the Ruth Davidson bubble, but I have to say I do laugh on the ground that the same polls and the same commentators had us in third before the election last year where we beat the Labour Party at a canter. None of them said that we were going to get 13 MPs this time, just in June, so I know how to campaign, I don’t concern myself with polls and if anybody thinks they know what’s going to
happen in three and a half years from now in Scottish politics then they haven’t been watching the last three and a half years ‘cause it moves pretty quickly here. But I accept that we’ve got more to do. I absolutely accept the Scottish Conservatives have done a good job showing that we can be a strong opposition. We’ve now got to take that next step to be an alternative party of government, a credible alternative government for this country and that’s what all our focus is going to be in the next three years.

AM: We read in today’s papers that we are heading for no deal and the government is preparing for that. Are you relaxed about no deal?

RD: Well, I think it’s in everybody’s interest to get a deal, but I think the government should prepare for all eventualities.

AM: What would no deal mean for Scotland?

RD: Well again I mean I think that we should be putting, you know, as much effort into ensuring that the negotiations are continuing and quite away - and I think I should say to your viewers at home, Andrew, quite away from the people that walk up to the microphones and have to speak to their home audience, as I understand it the officials in the room are making actually quite a lot of good progress.

AM: So would you agree with the Chancellor when he said no deal would be very, very bad for ordinary families and businesses across the UK?

RD: Well I don’t think it’s the optimum, but I think that the country decided to leave the EU. Now I didn’t vote for that but we’ve got to respect the country’s decision. I want us to get a deal, I think it’s not just in our interests. I think it’s in the EU’s
interest. I think that the UK has gone a long way in that Florence speech to show its flexibility. I would like to see some flexibility in return from the EU 27, but, you know, I would prefer to get a deal than no deal.

AM: You used to be a great advocate for staying inside the single market, you were very vociferous when you were arguing with Boris Johnson and then for being as close to the single market as possible. Now we are heading for the opposite kind of direction and you guys seem to have given up the fight.

RD: Well I don’t see it as a fight at all. I’ve spent three and a half years in Scotland talking about the fact Nicola Sturgeon, your next guest, doesn’t get to just rerun a referendum because she lost. Now you’re right. I absolutely put my shoulder to the wheel on the Remain campaign, but I respect the result of the country. The reason that you take something to a referendum is ‘cause you decide that it’s not just for politicians. Every single person should make a decision for themselves and their family about what they believe the future should be. Now I voted for something differently but as a democrat I respect the result that this country gave and my job is to make it work to the best of my ability and that’s what I’m trying to do.

AM: Can a Scot ever again lead the British Conservative Party?

RD: Oh absolutely. Without a doubt.

AM: Can anybody who is not in the House –

RD: Michael Gove even tried.

AM: Can anybody who is not sitting in the House of Commons lead the British Conservative Party?
RD: Not under the current Constitution, no.

AM: So are there any circumstances at all ever in which you would sit for a Westminster seat? A serious question.

RD: Well actually I tried in 2010. I stood in Glasgow and came fourth, so you know maybe that’s an indication of where we lie.

AM: It is, but it’s not an answer to my question.

RD: Well look, I’ve got a job at the moment. I am not looking past 2021. I’m trying to build a party that was third, in some cases fourth when I became leader, to be it up to be a credible government of Scotland. I’ve come a long way in that. I’ve got a long way still to go. I’ve built a really good team that I’m immensely proud of, so I know what my job is and this is my job right now, but you know I’m looking to 2021 and I’m not looking past it ’cause there’s quite a few things in the in-tray right now, Andrew.

AM: Okay, but a lot of people will be listening to that and hearing those words right now. Ruth Davidson for now, thank you very much indeed.

Ends