ANDREW MARR:
So to those troubled health reforms that we were talking about a few moments ago. The Prime Minister insists there will be no retreat, but the Labour Opposition who’ve had a good week on this scent blood. The intention of course was to make the National Health Service less bureaucratic, more personal and efficient, which are all laudable aims. So if the bill fails, what would the opposition suggest? I’m joined from Salford by the Shadow Health Secretary Andy Burnham. Good morning.

ANDY BURNHAM:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Before I come to your alternatives, give me your instinct about what’s going to happen to this bill. The Prime Minister seems absolutely determined that you know there’s going to be another slew of amendments to its in the Lords, but the bill will go through.

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well reading today’s papers, it’s hard not to conclude that Mr Cameron is putting his political pride before the best interests of the National Health Service. The overwhelming consensus of opinion amongst doctors, nurses, NHS staff, but also (it would seem) the sensible members of Mr Cameron’s cabinet, is that it is better for the NHS now to abandon this reorganisation and work back through the existing structures of the National Health Service. Now I think he is backing himself into a corner. I think he’s putting both himself, his party and the National Health Service in a very dangerous position, and, quite frankly, I think he is going to pay a heavy price, I think, if he carries on in this way.

ANDREW MARR:
So let’s talk tactics. Your political job now is to draw as many of the government side over to oppose this bill as you possibly can. How are you going to do that in the House of Commons?

ANDY BURNHAM:
Well I’ve always called for the bill to be dropped, but I’ve balanced it by saying we’ll talk to the government about introducing doctor led commissioning. Now I’ve no objection to that and I repeat my offer today to Mr Cameron and the government: you know I will sit down and talk with them about how we can introduce doctor led commissioning within the existing structures of the NHS. But if they won’t listen then of course we will continue to oppose this bill tooth and nail because the reason is it breaks sixty-three years of National Health Service history, it turns the NHS into a market, and I can’t recall Mr Cameron going to the British people and seeking their permission to do that. So we will oppose it outright. There’s a crucial debate coming up next week in the commons, which is where we will ask the commons to endorse the ruling from the Information Commissioner to require the government to publish its risk assessment of these reforms. I think that’s absolutely essential. Parliament can’t take a view on such a huge reorganisation without knowing what risks the government is running with services.

ANDREW MARR:
And do you think that you’re going to get the backing from enough Liberal Democrat
MPs candidly to get that passed? I mean you heard Simon Hughes I think perhaps a few moments ago expressing still some of his concerns.

**ANDY BURNHAM:**
Well I certainly hope so. There are over ten Liberal Democrats who’ve signed a parliamentary motion calling for the risk register to be published, and I think it’s absolutely essential because we’ve argued all the way along, Andrew, that the government made a catastrophic mistake when it combined the biggest financial challenge in the history of the NHS with the biggest ever reorganisation. It’s inescapable that this is the wrong time to reorganise the NHS, and the effect of doing it is putting services at risk, so we’re seeing waiting lists beginning to rise around the country and the Deputy Chief Executive of the NHS is writing to trusts today to warn them about that. We’re seeing job losses around the system, we’re seeing random rationing. There are signs of an NHS in increasing distress and this reorganisation is only adding to that uncertainty.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And yet, and yet Labour put in huge, unprecedented amounts of new money into the NHS. You did not get the productivity improvements that you wanted and isn’t it the case that there is simply too much bureaucracy inside the NHS and that you don’t have a kind of clear plan about how to deal with that?

**ANDY BURNHAM:**
I’ve never argued that the NHS is perfect, but the coalition inherited a successful, self-confident NHS, and in just eighteen months they’ve turned it into an organisation that’s demoralised, destabilised and fearful of the future. And there’ll be some figures coming out tomorrow, Andrew, that will contradict what you just said about NHS productivity. You know when we left government patient satisfaction with the NHS was at an all time high, waiting times were at an all time low, and the question I would ask is why did the government take that situation and just throw all the pieces of the jigsaw up in the air with this huge reorganisation? Mr Cameron said there would be no top down reorganisation. You know before the election, it was crucial to his political project to pose as a friend of the NHS. I quite frankly can’t see how he’s doing what he’s doing. He doesn’t have a mandate for it.
ANDREW MARR:
Alright …

ANDY BURNHAM:
Nobody voted for the privatisation of the National Health Service and …

ANDREW MARR:
But if everything in the garden was rosy, why are you in favour of GP commissioning?

ANDY BURNHAM:
I’m not against change in the National Health Service, and one of my objections to this bill is that it’s a distraction from the real change that the NHS needs and that’s service change - taking more services out of hospital, treating more older people in their own homes or in their communities. Now that is the kind of reform that the NHS needs, and this back office reorganisation is just a huge distraction from it and that actually is one of my fundamental objections to what the government is doing.

ANDREW MARR:
Given what you’ve read in the papers this morning and the line that the Prime Minister has taken and looking at the numbers in the House of Commons, are you not reconciled to the fact that the bill is going to go through but you think it will go through?

ANDY BURNHAM:
No, not at all. To be honest, Andrew, far from it. I think this bill is not wanted by the overwhelming majority of people in the NHS, but also in the country, and I think Mr Cameron is making a grave mistake by saying he’s going to force it onto the statute book. As I say, he’s putting his political pride before the best interests of the NHS. This bill will threaten the NHS as we’ve known it for sixty-three years. Nye Bevan famously said “There’ll be an NHS for as long as there are folk left with the faith to fight for it”. Now there are folk all over the country now fighting Mr Cameron’s plans and I say to him if he doesn’t listen to what people are saying, then we are going to
give him the fight of his life to save our National Health Service.

ANDREW MARR:
Andy Burnham in Salford, thank you very much indeed for joining us this morning.

ANDY BURNHAM:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS