ANDREW MARR SHOW, BRANDON LEWIS

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BRANDON LEWIS, MP
Conservative Party Chairman

AM: Can I start however by asking you about the John Warboys case. Can you confirm the government is looking for judicial review to reverse the decision to release John Warboys?

BL: Yes. The Secretary of State is looking and now it’s getting advice on whether it can judicially review it because obviously if we can and the advice is clear that we can go forward with a judicial review in a positive way then we will look to do that. I think every victim out there, every friend and family of victims and anybody who’s read about this case will want to know that we are doing everything we can to make sure that the victims are properly protected. And actually we’re respecting the situation, the emotions and feelings that people have been through, these tragic, awful situations we have.

AM: Do you personally understand the outrage there is out there about this case?

BL: Absolutely, and I know somebody who’s been through this and has been a victim of this, so – but even just reading about it anybody out there will appreciate just how awful this must be for victims to see what is happening. To think about somebody like that being out on the streets. I think it’s absolutely right. The Secretary of State for Justice will be doing everything he can to make sure this man stays behind bars.

AM: Right, you’ve taken over the Conservative Party as Chairman, would you like to see the Conservative Party having more members?
DL: Well, I’m always looking to have more people out there working for the Conservative Party, delivering leaflets, as we were yesterday in my constituency and across the country, as well as knocking on doors. And ultimately the number that really matters to me obviously in May this year and then in a General Election voting for us in those elections.

AM: So you need those members. Have you any idea at all how many members you have at the moment?

DL: Well look, we’ve got a party that is devolved, we have a localised party, membership is d... One of the reforms that I do want to take forward, Andrew, if you’ll let me finish this point, is I do want to bring that - the numbers and the data of our membership into a central base. So in the future yes, I will be able to give you an idea of our numbers but right now and ultimately my main focus is on the people who vote for us.

AM: Isn’t it simply a matter of addition? I mean you’ve got members in Kent, you’ve got members in Scotland, all you need is a pencil and a piece of paper and just tot them up. What’s so difficult?

DL: Well look, we can all play numbers games and –

AM: But it’s not that, I’m just asking –

DL: You look at the way the Labour Party look at their numbers and things they include, we can all play – actually what matters to me is we have got a huge number of people – not just members but volunteers and activists around the country who are out there day in day out knocking on doors, delivering leaflets, getting involved in social media to spread the message about the positive things we are doing in government for people so we win those votes in local and in general elections to make sure we give people good governance in their local areas.
AM: Have you got as many members as the Labour Party?

DL: Also I’m not going to play a numbers game, though tempting as it is, Andrew. What I’m focused on – actually what I have got – AM: this is not just a numbers game if I can say, is that they are absolutely taking you to the cleaners online, as you’ve more or less admitted, and they have lots and lots of people they can mobilise up and down the country to hit constituencies with lots of actual bodies knocking on doors and handing out leaflets. The Conservative Party has nothing like that number of people.

DL: We have a huge number of great people out there, delivering leaflets, knocking on doors every day and actually as we saw at the last test, which was obviously in June last year where we didn’t win the seats we’d like to win, but we did get over a million more votes than we had before. 42.4% of the vote, biggest vote share we’ve had in decades, and I want to make sure we’re building on that and actually as you say quite rightly, building our online presence as well but doing it in a respectful way.

AM: Now, talking of the online presence, you’ve more or less accepted the Labour Party doing better on twitter and facebook and stuff at the moment and you are fighting back. Let’s have a little look at one of the things that you are using to fight back. Came on online I think this morning.

“We’ve banned credit card charges.”

Is that true?

DL: Well the government’s bringing that ban through. It’s something that’s coming through across the European Union.

AM: Where’s it come from?

DL: Well it’s coming through across the European Union and it’s coming here.
AM: It’s an EU directive, is it not?

DL: Which of course we are, at the moment, currently part of.

AM: So it says we’ve banned credit card changes, the European Union has banned credit card changes and you have been satirically mocked online already by Guy Verhofstadt for saying very, very pleased the Conservative Party has seen the benefits of European legislation.

DL: Well obviously the Conservative Party and our MEPs and our MPs and through the Council of Europe and all other areas we are fully represented and part of that process of making those decisions. But I think what is really important –

AM: Slightly embarrassing though, isn’t it?

DL: No, no it’s not and actually we’ve got to spread that message much more widely around the things we’re doing here at home. Whether it’s the work we’re doing on the environment and making sure we’re leaving a country better than we found it, but also make sure we do it with respect. What we’re seeing in the Labour Party is the way that the online media is being abused in a way and people are being abused on it. That is not acceptable.

AM: Okay, so you’re going to crack down on all online abuse, you want Tory councillors, Tory candidates of all kinds to sign up to a respect pledge and you’d like the Labour Party to do the same. That’s basically what you’re saying?

DL: Absolutely. We’ll be drafting up a pledge. All our candidates will sign up to that pledge, to behave responsibly and show respect on line during the elections and I do expect – Jeremy Corbyn’s on TV this morning I think, he should be coming out and standing up to this. Because when we’ve got people at the top of the party, the Labour Party, the Shadow Chancellor use the kind
of actions, the language and behaviour endorsing threats against other MPs, physical threats.

AM: He was quoting something.

DL: Yeah, but he’s not apologised for that, he’s not condone – he’s simply condoned that.
AM: Well he was quoting somebody.
DL: Well, so he says, but if you look at the recording that’s what he actually said.
AM: All right.
DL: What we’ve got to make sure is that all of us at the very top of the party avoid this rot that we’re seeing at the top of the Labour Party and we actually show from the very top that we will use respect – we’ll argue our case robustly but with respect.

AM: I think no politician has had more abuse online and in person than Diane Abbott, including from Conservatives. Can you apologise to her? If everyone’s going to be respectful for what’s happened to her.

DL: Well nobody should suffer, and I do mean this cross party. Any kind of personal, physical abuse online. It should be robust exchange of views if we disagree on things that people are doing.
AM: We can agree on that.
DL: But abuse is a different thing and that is not acceptable and I will go further. If people – our candidates in the elections this year breach that code and there is evidence they’ve breached that responsibility pledge we will suspend them and I call on the Labour Party to stand up and make the same statement.

AM: All right, let’s move on to another subject. It’s reported today that although Donald Trump said he wasn’t coming for the February visit because he didn’t like the siting of the Embassy and so forth, actually the real reason is he doesn’t feel enough love
from Britain for him and he fears specifically that the Conservative Party thinks about him much as Jeremy Corbyn and Sadiq Khan think about him.

DL: Well I don’t think it helps our country when we’ve got senior politicians asking world leaders and making the comments that Sadiq has made. Actually what we’ve got to remember is we’ve got a very strong, longstanding, hugely important relationship with the United States. It goes beyond any individual one of us. That relationship is not just the special relationship but it’s important that one of the biggest investors in trade are hugely important to our security interests and we’ve got to make sure we’re developing and continuing that relationship beyond any of us as individuals.

AM: But do you understand when – I can’t say the word on air when he uses the word ‘S hole’ about a whole lot of countries with black majorities, do you understand why people see that as an absolutely outlandish, racist comment that has to be condemned?

DL: Well I don’t think any of us should be using that kind of language but I should also just be clear. I think the last thing I saw was the President himself claims he didn’t actually say that, but no, that is the sort of language nobody should be using.

AM: So would you like to see him come to this country this year?

DL: Actually what I find slightly odd and Emily was on just now, is of course Emily on this show less than a year ago said that he should be coming. I think it is right that the President of the United States has a welcoming to the United Kingdom, it’s a very important relationship for us and one that we should be looking to develop in the future for the benefit of all our residents and of course our industry businesses and our security relationship.
AM: Okay, one big policy issue, Carillion, a company which is on the edge of collapse looks after, maintains half our prisons, many schools, many hospitals. Isn’t this a classic case of the dangers of privatisation? That you put a private company in deep, deep into the business of the state and then it gets into trouble and you have a real problem about whether you’re going to bail it out or what are you going to do with.

DL: Well obviously there’s a large amount of work, we’re keeping a very close eye on this. Make sure there are all plans and contingency plans in place but it is a going concern. This is a business that is a going concern that we would look to see and hopefully they’ll be able to work with their partners to get the working capital they need to continue providing important services.

AM: Is there any chance of the tax payer bailing it out?

DL: I’m sure you’ll appreciate Andrew, it is a going concern, it’s a very commercially sensitive situation, so I wouldn’t comment further than to say it is a going concern –

AM: So you can’t rule out the tax payer bailing it out?

DL: - and I would hope to see that the working capital they need will be there working with their partners but of course ministers and my colleague, the Secretary of State of Business is keeping a very close eye on it.

Ends