ANDREW MARR:
And, as we heard in our newspaper review, the number crunchers have been busy this weekend and the figures don’t look that promising for Nick Clegg and his party. The respected analyst and blogger Iain Dale writes: ‘The one prediction I’m 100 per cent confident in making is that the Liberal Democrats will lose more than half of their seats.’ And while the Prime Minister is staying in the most prestigious address in America, the White House, the Deputy PM is taking care of business back in London and he joins us now. Good morning and welcome.

NICK CLEGG:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
Good morning. Now before we …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Iain Dale will have to eat his words because I really don’t think that’s going to happen, but anyway.
ANDREW MARR:
We’ll get back to Iain Dale and his words in a moment. But first of all …

NICK CLEGG:
No he’s a good man, but some of these predictions are getting a little bit silly.

ANDREW MARR:
… another newspaper, the Sunday Telegraph …

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… has interviewed Jonathan Evans and he is really, really worried about the lack of powers that MI5 and the rest of the security services have in terms of surveillance. It’s a theme that goes all the way through the papers. Can you explain to us in words of one syllable exactly what your problem is with the Data Communications Bill?

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah, so I agree with Jonathan Evans. I agree with the security services, I agree with the police. More than that – I’ve actually acted as Deputy Prime Minister on their advice to make sure, as Jonathan Evans has said today in the Sunday Telegraph, that we retain the ability to invade the privacy and the communications and listen in or intercept the communications between people who want to do us harm. I totally … There is no dispute about that and …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But he clearly wants more powers.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) But no, hang on, actually it’s not quite clear because there is a totally different proposal, which I am not comfortable with and I think most people when they sort of reflect on it are not comfortable with either, which is completely different, which is an indiscriminate retention of the social media activity, the websites you’ve visited of
every single man, woman and child in this country for a year. It’s a sort of blanket approach to the retention of data on people who are innocent of any wrongdoing whatsoever. So I’m all I’m saying is – because, by the way, the next parliament, the next government because we’ve introduced a sort of sell by date if you like, sunset clause on existing provisions and that’s something I insisted on – there will be a major debate on this, we’ll have to legislate on this early in the next parliament. And my view is we can get the balance right by keeping ourselves safe by intruding on the privacy of those people who want to do us harm, but also keep our values safe. Because it’s not a very British thing to sort of confirm or imply …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Alright, this is …

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* … guilt on the whole of the nation by retaining records of every website everyone has visited over the course of a year.

**ANDREW MARR:**

This is the Data Communications Bill we’re talking about …

**NICK CLEGG:**

Yeah, this is what’s been dubbed by some people as the …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* The so-called Snoopers’ Charter. What I don’t understand is I can absolutely see that MI5 or whoever don’t always know who they want to be listening in on until it’s almost too late and, therefore, if you don’t go wider than the people they already know, I can see why they’re worried about not being able to get the powers that the French police have and the Belgian police have to listen in to more people. And I wonder how serious this worry that you know they’re going to be snooping on people going onto gardening websites and so forth. MI5 are already, they say, very understaffed and stretched. They’re not going to be snooping on your emails or anybody else’s emails.
NICK CLEGG:
That’s exactly my point. And that’s why actually, by the way, a number of experts
don’t think … You know forget the politics for a minute, forget whether you’re in
favour of a sort of you know security or liberty type side of the argument – by the way
a rather cardboard cutout argument; you can’t have security without liberty, you can’t
have liberty without security. But forget that for a minute. Lots of experts looked at it
and said this is a waste of resources, a waste of time. Why are we keeping records of
every man, woman and child across the country when for starters, as you said, we
tend to know where to look for the people who want to do us harm and where under
the existing provisions of RIPA …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But they don’t always know where to look, do they …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) No of cour…

ANDREW MARR:
… and a lot of people will say, look, in the end the experts, MI5 and MI6, have said
very clearly we want these new powers. Lord West was on the sofa last week saying
“We wanted these new powers. It was Nick Clegg who stopped us getting them.” And
they are the experts.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Well I thought what Lord West said was deeply uninformed because look, let’s
be clear, it wasn’t just me. A joint committee which looked at this - from politicians
of all parties, including the Labour Party, his party – said that the claims made about
this indiscriminate blanket retention of data of every social media activity and website
you’ve visited of every single man, woman and child was unproven, was clunky, was
resource intensive. And you know you’ve quite rightly implied that the task for our
security services - who do a brilliant job and I’m full of admiration for what they do,
full of admiration of the ingenuity particularly of GCHQ in Cheltenham who help us
navigate this difficult territory – is if you’re going after a needle in a haystack, how do
you identify the needle …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) They just say …

NICK CLEGG:

(over) … without conferring or implying that you’re conferring guilt on the whole of the haystack if I’m not mixing my metaphors too much?

ANDREW MARR:

Well they wouldn’t. They’d be rummaging through the haystack. But it’s clear that MI5 and MI6 want new powers and you are absolutely determined to stop them getting that and that remains the case.

NICK CLEGG:

(over) Let me be clear. No, no, you’ve completely confused things again. I’m legislating now for new powers. We did it in the summer.

ANDREW MARR:

(over) But you won’t have the Data Communications Act.

NICK CLEGG:

(over) And new powers will need to be put on the statute book in the next parliament. I will advocate them as much as any sort of you know chisel-faced securocrat. Absolutely. I want to keep … It’s ludicrous this idea that people who care about our freedom don’t care about our safety. What I will not do, what I will not do - because it’s not proven, it wasn’t proven and many people, not just me, said it was an overstretch, it was going way over the top – is saying that every single man, woman, child, every single one across the whole country should have data about what they get up to online …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) Most people will say that that is a price worth paying given the extreme anxiety that they feel at the moment about possible terror attacks coming soon.
NICK CLEGG:
Look, as I said, I think it is very important – as we not only face the physical threat to our security – that we also reject the threat to our values. Let’s remember what those people who slaughtered those journalists in Paris want to do. They actually want to extinguish the values of freedom of speech - and privacy is an absolute indispensable component of that – which is in my view fundamental to an open society.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay.

NICK CLEGG:
You have to, however uncomfortable it is – and of course it sometimes is because people shout you down right, left and centre – we must protect the values of being an open, liberal, democratic society.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay, let’s move onto something else. You have said as a party that you are committed to getting rid of the cyclical structural deficit by 2017.

NICK CLEGG:
17/18.

ANDREW MARR:
17/18, right. And everybody seems to agree that requires £30 billion of tightening.

NICK CLEGG:
Yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
I’ve asked the other party leaders how exactly are you going to do that and I can’t get clear answers. I hope you’re going to be absolutely straight with the British public about how you are going to deal with that £30 billion of actual cuts or actual tax rises.
NICK CLEGG:
Yeah, so it’ll be a mixture of the following components: clamping down on tax evasion and tax avoidance; significant additional savings in Whitehall - there will need to be some additional savings, but not nearly on the totally implausible scale that the Conservatives have said in the welfare budget; and then there will need to be some tax increases as well which fall on the wealthiest in society. And this is where one of the two big differences now lie between the two coalition parties …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay just before we come onto the political differences …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) … because when you ask … when you asked David Cameron this, he breezily said that they were going to find £12 billion from the welfare budget. There is absolutely no way …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well you’ve just, if I may say so …

NICK CLEGG:
… the Conservatives can do so without hammering the working age poor.

ANDREW MARR:
You have just breezily said, “Whitehall efficiencies”. Marr’s first rule of politics: when a politician says “Whitehall efficiencies,” they’re trying not to say what they’d really do, because everyone talks about huge efficiencies, huge savings from better tax systems and so forth.

NICK CLEGG:
Well we’ve delivered them already. Danny Alexander has already delivered billions and billions and billions of pounds worth of savings. There are more …

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah but we need 30 billion more.

**NICK CLEGG:**
Yes we need 30 billion, we need 30 billion. And you’re quite right that by the next
election, you want to know where that around 30 billion comes from.

**ANDREW MARR:**
I do.

**NICK CLEGG:**
We will do that. We will publish that in detail. I hope to do that in the next few weeks
so that you can compare and contrast with the other parties. At this stage, at this stage,
rather than crossing every ‘T’ and dotting every ‘I’, I actually think what you need to
hear from the politicians …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*over* Is the overall big picture.

**NICK CLEGG:**
*over* … is the general approach, exactly.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Absolutely. So there are …

**NICK CLEGG:**
*over* And the big distinction between …

**ANDREW MARR:**
*over* … there are three ways of doing this, aren’t there? You can take out
government departments and apply the humane killer - shoot them more or less -
because they’re the unprotected departments and their budgets would come down
dramatically under the Conservative plans, as you’ve said yourself. Or you can
borrow more or you can raise taxes substantially. Now I put it to you that your plans
do require real taxes to be raised way beyond the mansion tax stuff that you’ve talked
NICK CLEGG:
Yes … yes correct.

ANDREW MARR:
… so you’re talking about raising possibly income tax and/or VAT?

NICK CLEGG:
No, no … no.

ANDREW MARR:
But those are the two big taxes.

NICK CLEGG:
No, well we will come forward with plans. I’m absolutely confident we won’t need to do either of those. In fact of course in the five years …

ANDREW MARR
(over) What are you going to tax – purple ties? I mean what is the plan?

NICK CLEGG:
It’s slightly pink, but anyway … It’s not a UKIP purple, I hope. Look there are a number of changes in the tax system which we’ve already advocated. So, for instance, the very significant tax reliefs for people on much higher incomes. The fact …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Can I just stop you there because the things that you’ve announced already, then… the money from that goes straight to other things you want to do like fund the NHS. You’ve already as it were spent that money, so I’m talking about new taxes that you have to raise.

NICK CLEGG:
Yes and, as I say, we will come forward with a number of proposals which will show what role tax plays in meeting that target of saving around £30 billion pounds. But – and here’s the big but – what you cannot do, in my view, is either do what Labour says, which is to stick their head in the sand and it’s this Never Never Land approach to economics that you never really be clear with the British people about when you clear the structural deficit … The Conservatives, as you rightly said, say that they’re not going to ask the wealthiest in society to make any additional contributions. And then beyond that – and here’s the striking thing and it’s why I’m drawing such a clear distinction between my plans on education with the Conservatives – is that far from taking the sensible centre ground approach that we’ve taken to balancing the books during the last five years, the Conservatives want to lurch off to the right and want to impose further cuts beyond what is necessary when the deficit has already been dealt with. And that will savage …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) If you don’t mind, let’s not talk about …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) … that will savage things like education, which in my view is absolutely essential to creating the opportunity to society that I believe.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I didn’t let David Cameron talk about the Liberal Democrats at great length and I’m not going to let you talk about the Conservatives …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Well you invited me to earlier, so …

ANDREW MARR:
Well I just invited you to say what you were going to do. And it still seems to me – I want to be absolutely clear – you have got the balls as it were to say to the British public these are the taxes which to get rid of this deficit we are going to have to put up and you’re going to commit yourself to that in clear and plain terms before the General Election?
NICK CLEGG:
Yes, yes.

ANDREW MARR:
And while we’re talking about taxes, there’s the mansion tax which originated in your party and there’s also a proposal to raise the top rates for council tax, top bands for council tax. Is that an either/or or an and?

NICK CLEGG:
No, so our approach is very much a banded approach. It’s in effect extending council tax bands because it’s totally arbitrary that someone …

ANDREW MARR:
So is there a mansion tax as well as that or that falls away?

NICK CLEGG:
(over) No, no, it’s an either/or. So it’s a banded approach. It’s not a single levy on the value of all properties above a certain value, which is the approach that the Labour Party’s taking which is rather … which is being criticised. The reason why I think our approach is more sensible is that we already have a property tax – it comes in bands, in layers, in council tax – but it arbitrarily stops at around 700,000, so someone living in a family home in Lewisham pays the same council tax as an oligarch in a vast, vast £10 million palace. And what we’re saying is why don’t you treat the properties at very high value …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I understand that, right.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) … in the same banded way as we already do for properties of lower value through the council tax system?

ANDREW MARR:
Looking back, do you regret not making tuition fees a red line because tuition fees as a policy is costing this country a vast amount of money simply because of the number of people who are not paying them back? There’s a £50 billion black hole.

**NICK CLEGG:**

I don’t believe that for a minute. Look, I regret massively that of course the controversy around higher education funding has clouded what I’m probably proudest of in government, which is that because of Liberal Democrats the amount of money we’ve put in and the effort we’ve put in to boost the life chances of people … of little children, particularly from the poorest backgrounds …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Before we get to little children, I need to return to students.

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* Well no, but it’s very important that because we have taken a choice, right? We’ve taken a choice to obviously make significant savings, but in the education system – because of Liberal Democrats – to protect the money going into the schools budget, to significantly boost the amount of money to help two year olds, three year olds, four year olds, the pupil premium, a healthy meal at lunchtime for children across the country in primary school … And that is already – and this is very exciting – this is already closing the so-called attainment gap – something which has blighted our country for far, far too long - it’s something I’m very proud of, but of course as a politician I can see that’s clouded by the controversy if you like at the other end, by what happens when people leave …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* It’s not just a controversy. It’s a policy which is costing this country a lot of money.

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* No, no, you’re making assertions which are based on predictions about how much people will earn in thirty years’ time.
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well hold on a second. The Public Accounts Committee has been very, very clear about how much is not being paid back at the moment and there is a serious black hole and a serious problem with that.

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Two things … two things have emerged …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Now there is an alternative proposal, which is a graduate tax. Are you at all tempted by the idea of moving away from the system of loans, which doesn’t seem to be working very well, to a graduate tax?

NICK CLEGG:
If you really … if you really must know what we’ve actually introduced is a graduate tax and I wish we’d called it a graduate tax at the time. I suspect it would have saved us a lot of heartache. Actually what we’ve done – which is one of the reasons by the way, despite all the predictions to the contrary, more young people are now in full time courses in university than ever before, more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, more young people from black minority ethnic backgrounds … Why has that happened despite all the predictions to the contrary? Because in effect what we’ve introduced is a graduate tax. You pay nothing upfront and you only pay back what you can pay back when you earn enough money to do so. It is in effect a graduate tax. And one of the reasons why Labour can’t come up with a rival policy …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay well …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) No it’s very important, this, because they’re the ones who keep piously criticising me for it. They’re the ones who introduced fees, increased them and now won’t actually commit to scrapping them at all.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, let’s move into the post-election scenario I was talking earlier on. And we don’t know of course what’s going to happen, but it does look as if you might both lose a lot of MPs and still be in the position of deciding whether it’s Ed or Dave who goes into No. 10. That’s wrong, isn’t it?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well it’s thankfully and quite rightly not my decision or Ed Miliband’s decision or David Cameron’s decision about who …

**ANDREW MARR:**
But if it happened, wouldn’t you feel embarrassed by having lost half your MPs and still being the kingmaker?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Well I really would stop using this prediction, which I don’t think is going to come about, as some sort of absolute assertion of truth. I so happen to believe – because I spend much more time than any pollster in the Liberal Democrat seats where we are getting our message across – is that when we explain to people that, unlike Labour and the Conservatives, we would cut less than the Conservatives, borrow less than Labour … We’re committing today, for instance – it’s a very Liberal Democrat thing to do in line with what I said to you earlier – to stop illiteracy in this country by the middle of the next decade. When people hear that, they actually continue to support us. I accept it’s difficult in other parts of the country. So I think we will do so much better than the pundits are predicting. And then of course what happens beyond that, how a government is composed if no-one has a majority, it’s entirely up to the choices of the British people.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Are you clear and brave and confident enough then, if that’s not going to happen, to say that if we did lose half our seats, I would step down as leader?

**NICK CLEGG:**
Look I’m simply not going to stare into a crystal … I’m a campaigning politician. Talk to pollsters, talk to soothsayers, talk to people who can …
ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* And they will say we’re being generous when we say they’ll lose half their seats.

NICK CLEGG:

Well, as I said, they don’t spend as much time as I do in actually the seats where we have to win and where we will win and we’ll win …

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* Including Sheffield Hallam?

NICK CLEGG:

Including Sheffield Hallam where I’m confident, of course not complacent. We of course fight for every vote. We always have done. We can’t rely on the big vested interests - the trade unions on the one hand, the big money from the city on the other, or the vested interests in the press – to get our story across.

ANDREW MARR:

*(over)* Well let’s step away from crystal balls …

NICK CLEGG:

Where we get our story across, where we say look there’s an invidious choice now – you’ve got a Labour Party lurching to the left, a Conservative Party lurching to the right. We have to finish the job of securing our economic recovery, but it has to be done fairly. And the way you do that is not by cutting remorselessly for ideological reasons like the Conservatives say, not sticking your head in the sands like Labour says, and I think the more people hear that, the more actually what they’ll want when they have to take a decision about what happens with our country, they actually will see that the Liberal Democrats – despite our short-term hit to our popularity – we’ve done the right thing for the nation.

ANDREW MARR:
Okay well let’s … let’s carry on then with positions of principle because what we do know, I think, is that there’s going to be a splintered result in the next election. It’s not going to be overwhelming one way or another. So would you sit in a cabinet with Nigel Farage and UKIP?

**NICK CLEGG:**
No.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Under no circumstances?

**NICK CLEGG:**
I really can’t … I just can’t see how Nigel Farage and I could ever …

**ANDREW MARR:**
Would you sit in the cabinet with the Scottish National Party?

**NICK CLEGG:**
(laughs) I’m not going to carry on …

**ANDREW MARR:**
(over) No, no, I’m going to press you on the SNP because the SNP do want to break up the UK. You know they will have their own agenda. They want more power for Scotland and so forth.

**NICK CLEGG:**
I find it very difficult to imagine the circumstances in which I would do that.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay.

**NICK CLEGG:**
But look, my own view is what is most likely is that the Liberal Democrats … I’m not going to pretend that I’m going to be Prime Minister. I wish I might become Prime
Minister, but I think it’s most likely that Liberal Democrats back in government mean either a coalition with Labour or a coalition with the Conservatives. And we would add if you like, as we have done for the last five years, heart to a coalition led, Conservative led coalition, and …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* And do you have any instinct which way to go?

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* … and sort of spine and backbone on the economy which clearly the Labour Party lacks. No it’s not about my personal preferences or whims or wishes.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Well I wonder, I wonder because you spent five years shoulder to shoulder with David Cameron and you snipe at each other a little bit, you have jokes with each other, but you clearly get on perfectly well. Whereas your relationship with Ed Miliband, apart from your brush by in Sheffield Railway Station the other day, seems to be very difficult indeed.

**NICK CLEGG:**

As it happens, I mean you know me well enough, I’m trenchant in my political views but I try and be civil to people on a personal basis as I am to both Ed Miliband and David Cameron. That’s a grown up way of dealing with other people. But …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* And so you think despite all the hot words over the last five years …

**NICK CLEGG:**

*(over)* Can I just try and finish because I can help perhaps provide the answer to the question you ask, which is that I feel as passionately … I disagree as much with Ed Miliband’s flakey approach to the economy as I do with the Conservatives’ heartless approach to society. I think it beggars belief that the Conservatives want to proceed with an ideological approach to cuts to starve our public services…
ANDREW MARR:
(over) But you can see equally …

NICK CLEGG:
(over) … as much as it beggars belief that Labour …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … you could see it equally happening with flakey or heartless? It doesn’t matter to you?

NICK CLEGG:
Listen, I’m a Liberal Democrat. I’m a Liberal Democrat who believes in … I’m incredibly proud of what we have done in this government. We wouldn’t have the recovery now if we had not stepped up to the plate. We wouldn’t have the tax cuts that we have now benefiting millions of working people if it wasn’t for the Liberal Democrats. We wouldn’t have the expansion of apprenticeships on a scale this country’s never seen, a fairer pension system, the pupil premium, the life chances of the poorest kids in primary school improved in a way it never happened before. I’m very proud of that. And that happens because I’m a Liberal Democrat, not because I sort of …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No okay, alright.

NICK CLEGG:
… you know I try to act as a reflection for one or other party.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Now let’s move onto another issue which is the Conservatives appear to have this plan whereby for every ten seats you lose, you will lose a minister, cabinet minister. Has anyone discussed this with you or brought it up with you at all?

NICK CLEGG:
(laughs) No, no.
ANDREW MARR:
You just read it in the newspapers like the rest of us?

NICK CLEGG:
Yes, I think it’s a nonsense.

ANDREW MARR:
And so all this power and this influence that you want to have of course is much less if you don’t get all of those seats. And I come back to your own position because you know you have been unpopular in the country. The Conservatives have mocked you to pieces. Your own party are not using your face on most of the election manifesto … election posters which have gone up so far. The Labour Party are talking about a decapitation strategy. What is going to happen to Nick Clegg after the election?

NICK CLEGG:
Well, as I say, I’m a campaigning politician.

ANDREW MARR:
You still expect to be Deputy Minister.

NICK CLEGG:
Look I want … I want to promote the values I passionately believe. I accept - and I accept by the way …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) If your party is running below the Greens, why should you be Deputy Prime Minister?

NICK CLEGG:
(over) Andrew, you’re really not letting me provide …

ANDREW MARR:
Sorry.
NICK CLEGG:
… give you some answers to your questions. Look I’ve tried to deal, with as much good grace as I can muster, all the criticism I get day in/day out, left, right and centre. It is unsurprising - if it wasn’t me, whoever would be leader of the party - that you get that kind of incoming flack because what we’re doing is deeply unsettling to the vested interests on right and left in British politics who want to … And you can see all this. You can see the Labour and the Conservative Parties now wanting to try and airbrush out any other voices in politics and return to business as usual, pass the parcel between the blue team and the red team. And the Liberal Democrats have disrupted that and they don’t like it and of course I get a lot of criticism for it. But I feel that I’ve done what I need to do and what the party … the Liberal Democrats need to do to put the country first and I believe at the end of the day many fair-minded people will recognise that that was a good and decent thing to do.

ANDREW MARR:
One final question just before we finish. When you were asked on the radio about this Saudi blogger who is being lashed week by week half to death in Riyadh, you said you didn’t know about the case. You know about it now, I assume?

NICK CLEGG:
Of course I do, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
How do you feel about it?

NICK CLEGG:
I’m absolutely appalled.

ANDREW MARR:
And what do you think we should be doing? Given that Saudi Arabia’s supposed to be a great ally of ours, how strong should our protests be to that government?

NICK CLEGG:
Oh strong. And it is strong because … They are strong because it is absolutely
abhorrent that any regime – however important it is to our security or economic welfare and of course Saudi Arabia’s very important to Britain – we can maintain that relationship with that country but be absolutely unambiguous this is no …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* So you want to see pressure on Riyadh from this government?

**NICK CLEGG:**

And indeed we’ve already conveyed our absolute dismay as a government that this is happening.

**ANDREW MARR:**

Alright. For now … We haven’t talked about debates. We will shortly, but for now thank you very much indeed.

**ENDS**

**INTERVIEW ENDS**