AM: Good morning, Ruth Davidson.
RD: Good morning, Andrew.
AM: You said not so long ago, ‘I actually don’t think that Westminster saying “no, ye cannae” to a Scottish referendum would play very well in Scotland and it would damage the unionist cause.’ Have you changed your mind?
RD: Well, that’s not what Theresa May said. She said that now is not the time. And on a point of principle she said that to have a fair referendum the people of Scotland need to know what it is they’re voting for. They need to know what Brexit looks like, so it’s got to be after the Brexit process has played out. And crucially they also need to know what independence looks like. And I think it’s astonishing that after a two-day conference in Aberdeen the SNP haven’t still told us what their vision is for independence after dropping this bombshell on Monday.

AM: Unless the government are astonishingly incompetent, on Nicola Sturgeon’s timescale we will know pretty clearly what the Brexit deal will be at that point. So what’s the problem with the referendum?
SD: Well, no, I don’t accept that at all, Andrew, on the grounds that we also know that there’s going to be an awful lot of powers that come back from Brussels and many of them are going to be devolved to the Scottish parliament. The same powers, actually, that Nicola wants to hand back to Brussels, that we believe. So we won’t know. But like I say, we also don’t know what independence looks like. We have asked basic questions on things like currency, on things like a central bank, on things like whether we would even rejoin Europe as a full member. And Nicola Sturgeon seems unable to commit to that. And the other issue is I don’t think that you can have an independence referendum again,
Andrew, if you don’t have public consent for it, and the people of Scotland don’t want this. We see another poll today to add to the many dozen that we’ve seen since June of last year that shows that the majority of people in Scotland don’t want this. And I know that this is hard, I know that it’s hard from 450 miles away, Andrew, but what I have to tell you –

AM: It’s not hard, it’s honestly not.

RD: No, no. From 450 miles away I know it’s difficult because I’ve read all this week all of these people in London newsrooms that have been writing about Scotland, and I have to tell people the SNP is not Scotland and they’re acting against the majority wishes of the people of Scotland in what they put forward in their proposition on Monday. And I’ve just read far too many headlines saying Scotland reacts X or Scotland reacts Y. No it doesn’t. There are people right across Scotland, many, many thousands of them that are so thankful for the Prime Minister to actually say let’s take a pause on this.

AM: Okay, well let’s take a pause on that. Let me put it to that the SNP is nonetheless the government of Scotland and they were elected on a manifesto which said with crystal clarity that if Scotland was taken out of the EU against her wishes that would be the material change which would signal another referendum, and therefore whatever you think of Nicola Sturgeon she is, unlike some other parties we could mention, sticking by her manifesto commitment.

RD: Well, she also lost her majority at the very same election that you’re talking about, and during that entire election campaign, and I know because I was standing on a podium right next to her in the TV studios as she said it, she also the people of Scotland directly that ‘if I don’t change people’s minds on this, if more and more people don’t want it, if I don’t get people, if I don’t get people across the line to independence, I will have no right to hold one.’ She looked down a TV camera lens and spoke to the people of Scotland and she said those very words. She said that if
she hadn’t changed public opinion in Scotland she would have no right to call one. And that matters too, Andrew.

AM: So what’s your message to all of those people in Scotland who look at the prospect of leaving the EU and agree with what you used to say about it crashing the Scottish economy and being devastating for jobs and prosperity and the future of the Scottish economy and who want to stay inside the single market and want one last chance to say, ’we don’t agree with this and we want to go in a different direction,’ and you and your leader in London are taking that possibility away from them?

RD: Well, I would point to Theresa May’s Lancaster House speech, where she said that she wants to be able to pursue a free trade deal that allows companies in Scotland as well as companies in the rest of the UK to trade freely with, and operate within, that single market, as well as look for trade deals abroad. I would also point to some of the other twelve points that were in Theresa May’s plan, ones that the SNP asked for. Now, you wouldn’t think it from the way Nicola Sturgeon’s talking, but things like close cooperation on crime and intelligence gathering. Things like workers rights. Things like rights for EU migrants living in the UK. These were all things specifically asked for by the SNP government, but they will not acknowledge was detailed in that Lancaster House speech by Theresa May.

AM: Which haven’t been included in the legislation that’s just gone through parliament of course, those things. Can you point me to a single actual change in policy or direction that Theresa May has conceded to the Scottish government. She said at the beginning she’d be listening to Scotland, nothing would happen without Scotland’s say-say and consent, and it seems since then there has been a deafening silence.

RD: Well, you’ve all of the JMC – that’s the Joint Ministerial Council meetings that have been going on between the UK government and the devolved administrations. I’ve just literally
detailed four points out of the 12-point plan that was specifically asked for by the SNP government. Now, I know that if Theresa May wrapped up a pony in a big bow and gave it to Nicola Sturgeon for her birthday, for some reason that wouldn’t be enough and there would still be grievance.

AM: A slightly strange thing to do, yes, I take your point.
RD: There would still be grievance. But these are things that were specifically asked for by the Scottish government that have been delivered and laid out by the UK government. Now, Nicola Sturgeon might not wish to acknowledge that, but there’s a reason for that, because she is hell-bent on the separation of this country. We’ve seen it this week. She wants to do it against the majority wishes of the Scottish people and we’re seeing, because this is important, Andrew, just one more point before we move on. And we know that Brexit is only this week’s excuse and there have been plenty of excuses in the past, because when asked Nicola Sturgeon was asked, ‘will you take an independent Scotland directly back in as a full member of the EU immediately if you won independence?’ And she refused to confirm it. So this isn’t about Brexit, this is about utilising whatever is to hand to try and break up the UK because that’s been Nicola Sturgeon’s political mission for her entire life.

AM: She is leader of the SNP, so it’s not surprising. But another – RD: She’s doing it against the wishes of Scotland, and she also the First Minister of Scotland and has a responsibility -
AM: She’s nonetheless... She’s the leader of the biggest party in Scotland, she is the First Minister of Scotland.
RD: She is, and she has a responsibility to all of Scotland, and this week she reneged on that –
AM: And to abide to her own manifesto.
RD: And she reneged on that responsibility and she followed the view and narrow party objective not the view of the people of Scotland, who have said time and time and time again they do not want to be dragged back to the divisions of three years ago, and
they haven’t changed their view on the question that they were asked and gave a clear answer just three years ago.

AM: No, it seems very binary. It’s independence, full independence or the status quo inside the union. Gordon Brown has suggested, as it were, a third – a sort of third way whereby a lot of those powers which are coming back to Westminster aren’t grabbed by London but are passed straight to Edinburgh. Do you think this is a reasonable idea, a federal Britain might be the way forward?
RD: I think that Gordon Brown is full of thousands of good ideas, it’s just a wee shame that he was never Prime Minister and he could have implemented some of them. But in terms of the powers argument, Theresa May has already made it absolutely clear there is no power that’s currently residing at Holyrood that’s going to go anyplace else, and that as powers are returned from Brussels to the UK parliament they will then be further devolved. Now, it will be asymmetric devolution, I would expect, because Scotland already has competency over a wider range of issues than the Welsh Assembly and the Stormont Assembly, but there will be more coming here. But that’s something that we have to discuss and make sure that we do in a way that doesn’t practically impede our own internal market in the UK. And that’s why I’m talking about a Brexit process not just the date on which we actually leave the EU.

AM: Got that. Now, it’s been very, very difficult week for your party. Some high and low moments and some surreal moments as well. What did you think when you saw that George Osborne was going to be editing the London Evening Standard?
RD: Yeah, well I have say I thought, well, he’s a better man than me, because I spent ten years as a journalist and I’ve spent six years as a politician and I’m not sure you can combine them both, because, you know, I work a pretty busy week as it is and this
week in particular. So I’m not sure you could do both at the same time, if I’m honest.

AM: John Major has warned Theresa May not to become captured by the so-called ‘hard’ Brexiteers, and clearly the Chancellor Philip Hammond is having a pretty torrid time in the papers at the moment. Are you concerned that there is a kind of growing war inside your party to push out anybody, including people like you, I suppose, who are not hard as hard can be on the Brexit issue?
RD: No. I don’t think there’s anybody either pushing me – and it’d get shoved back pretty had if they tried – and also I think the idea that anybody could capture Theresa May is probably somebody that doesn’t know Theresa May very, very well. That’s a woman who knows her own mind.
(ends)