EMILY THORNBERRY, MP
SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY

AM: Emily Thornberry, you must be delighted. £20 billion more money for the NHS.

ET: Yeah. I mean I’d certainly welcome it if we could believe it. Let’s see if we -

AM: You don’t believe it?

ET: Well let’s see what they deliver. How they gonna pay for it? So they say that they’re going to increase taxes but we’ve yet to hear who’s going to get their taxes increased and how. They say they’re going to increase borrowing, but they haven’t told us by how much, and they haven’t told us what the effect will be. They’ve told us that they’re going to pay for it from a Brexit dividend. We don’t really know what that means, because we don’t know what the deal is going to be and what the overall effect on the economy is going to be, and actually whether Brexit is going to end up costing us a great deal of money or whether we can strike the sort of deal that would actually do us some good.

AM: So lots of pertinent questions, but –

ET: And we’ve got another 15 on top that we have also overnight.

AM: As we sit here, in mid June, 2018, which party is promising more for the NHS? The Tories or Labour?

ET: I think that people are not fooled. I think that they saw in the Tory Manifesto last year a whole load of promises but none of them were costed, and that’s what brings me back to costings.
AM: But which one? Tory or Labour?

ET: Well because our Manifesto actually had these things costed, so we said that we would spend an extra 7 billion pounds and we would do that by stopping the cuts to corporation tax. So we meant it. And when you can say how you’re going to pay for it you mean it.

AM: I’m going to come onto that in a second. But just on the raw figures, the NHS has asked for 4%, some people say 5%. The Conservatives are offering 3.4%. Is that enough money in your view?

ET: I think that it is not - certainly – I mean one of the problems is that we have no idea how much they’re going to spend on social care and social care –

AM: Sure, but just on the NHS is that enough?

ET: No, no, no, but you can’t talk about just the NHS.

AM: You’re trying to avoid every answer.

ET: I’m not, I’m not, I’m telling you that you can’t have the NHS without social care.

AM: Agreed.

ET: Anyone who has an elderly relative know that, or is elderly themselves and if you’re not looked after in your home or you don’t have somewhere you can go to when you leave hospital, it continues to bleed money and resources out of the NHS and leaves people abandoned in hospital beds.
AM: Emily Thornberry, the reason that you don't want to get into percentages, can I suggest, is that if you look at the percentages they've been asking for 4 to 5%, the Conservatives are offering 3.4%. Labour is offering 2%.

ET: Labour is offering costed percentages and what we’re talking about is –

AM: So for the first time in modern political history the Conservatives are offering more for the NHS than the Labour Party?

ET: Well, as I say, it goes hand in hand with social care. We have not heard anything about social care. For example, we were talking about spending an extra £2 billion a year on social care. So if you add that on actually you may find that these raw figures don't quite – don't quite paint the picture that you’re saying. On top of that, as I said at the outset, let’s see what they actually deliver. Because as those Tories who went in to see Theresa May in her office behind the Speaker’s chair last week heard, she may promise one thing, the question is what is it that she’s going to deliver.

AM: Come the next election will the Labour Party be offering more than £20 billion for the NHS?

ET: When’s the next election going to be?

AM: 2022 I think.

ET: Er, or it might be this autumn or it might be next year. We have such a fragile government, who knows when the next General Election is going to be.
AM: So you don’t know what you’re going to be offering for the NHS, you don’t know what the percentage is going to be and you don’t know whether you’re going to be offering more money than you are at the moment. But if you’re not offering more money than you are at the moment, the Conservatives are at least promising a great deal more than the Labour Party are.

ET: In the end you know people know that they can trust the Labour Party with the National Health Service. We created it, we have always spent more on it, we have always looked after it. We have saved the NHS in previous times when the Tories have not been spending enough money on it. This time, we’ve had eight years of underfunding on the NHS and it is at a state of collapse. People know that the Labour Party will spend what is necessary in order to ensure that our NHS delivers properly to those that need it.

AM: And I ask you again. When you look at the numbers do you think –

ET: - but you’re asking me about numbers from a year ago, well I can tell that we have our numbers that are costed. You throw in front of me some things which the Tories have come up with, which we’ve yet to see the details of and yet to make any sense and without any numbers on social care and then you say, - they can say something very gimmicky, but your costed numbers - I mean it’s –

AM: You’re on 2%, they’re on 3.4%. Now Gordon Brown, former Labour Prime Minister was very, very clear about this. He had all the numbers at his fingertips and he said you have to pay more for the NHS, Labour has to do more and you can do it by raising National Insurance again by 1% and people will accept that. So there was an honest proposed tax rise to pay the money the NHS needs.
ET: Yeah. And obviously that was a very popular tax and Gordon was quite right to introduce it at that time and it was something that the NHS needed.

AM: But you would like to do it again?

ET: I’m not going to be developing Labour Party health policy on your programme. Not least because it isn’t my brief. But I mean as part of the leadership team I can tell you that our figures make sense, we’ve yet to hear the Tory’s figures, obviously our policy continues to be developed and we are prioritising social care as much as the health service because we know that social care and health go hand in hand.

AM: Because I mean it was described as a gamble on the front page of the Mail on Sunday today, partly because alongside the Brexit dividend which we can talk about they are promising higher taxes to pay for the NHS. Would Labour ask people to pay more taxes to pay for the NHS?

ET: Well, yes. I mean that was what was in our Manifesto. So in our Manifesto we said that we were not going to agree to the Tory’s cuts in corporation tax. We were going to put the – and that was what was going to give us a large amount of the money and we weren’t going to agree to the cuts to taxes for the very richest. And we said that as well. I mean you know, if you look at our Manifesto we’re being very boring but we do cost what it is that we promise and the Tories may come up on a wet Sunday afternoon – Sunday morning and come out with this but we want to see where the money is, where it’s coming from and what does it mean.
AM: It’s extraordinary. Here you are being very, very soberly fiscally responsible. You’re supposed to be this radical Labour Party –

ET: Sorry Andrew, I’m not going to tell you.

AM: - and you’ve been overtaken, and not only that you’ve been overtaken on the Left by Theresa May.

ET: Well I mean I don’t think so, because I think that, as I say, they’re in government, they have to deliver on this and we need to see how it adds up. And we have a history at the moment, particularly over the last few weeks and months where they will make all kinds of wild promises and then they don’t deliver on it.

AM: Do you think they could honestly promise this money to the NHS and Simon Stevens and then simply not pay it over?

ET: Well, they promised in the past for example that they would give them a large amount of money if the NHS went through so-called efficiency savings. And they kept holding back the money and they kept holding back the money and the NHS said, if you give us the money that will help us with our efficiency. And they never got the money. And so you know, you get these kind of promises.

AM: In short you don’t believe them really on this?

ET: In short, well let’s wait and see. And if they deliver on it then fantastic because quite frankly you and I know that the NHS is on its knees and has been for a long time and for the last eight years it has been bled of funding and if the Tories have had a road to Damascus conversion, good.

AM: What is a blah, blah Brexit?

ET: Okay. So the rule is never make a joke when you’re in politics. You must never make a joke. Never be sarcastic, or anything else.
My concern is, is that we need to make sure that the exit deal that we have makes some sense and is able to look after our economy. There are some major decisions that need to be made and yet they have yet to make them. They have yet to be able to commit themselves to what they’re going to do about a soft border. They have yet to fully make up the deal in relation to what will happen to EU citizens. You know, we’ve yet to have that. And who knows where we are with the money? You know they’re saying that they’re going to have a dividend, you know, today. I mean in the past they say that they’ve committed themselves to a certain amount of money.

AM: So ‘Blah, Blah’ is caused by divisions and confusion basically?

ET: Well, just not meaning what you say and saying what you mean and not having a proper deal that could help us to move to the next stage of Brexit.

AM: Isn’t the Labour Party more divided even than the Conservatives? You’ve lost six frontbench colleagues this week alone. 90 of your colleagues voted against the Whip on one of the crucial votes. That’s about a third of the Parliamentary Labour Party defying the leadership. The party is split from top to bottom on this.

ET: If you ask the Labour Party, if you ask anyone who’s a Member of Parliament in the Labour Party, I’ve yet to find someone who disagrees with these basic principles, which is we have to leave the European Union. We have to remain as close as possible for the sake of our economy and for jobs –

AM: Well I can think of a few on the first one.

ET: - and we need to be in a customs union and we need to have some changes to immigration. Now that is a hell of a lot more
than you’ll ever get – you will not be able to get the Cabinet together to be able to come up with four basic points that they agree on. We agree on where it is that we want to go. And the difference is in the Labour Party is we’ve had some arguments about what the right mechanism is for being able to deliver that. So some people believe that being in the European Economic Area is the way to deliver that. There are others of us, which includes me, who believe that the EEA doesn’t really fit the British model so we need to have a negotiated settlement. Even those who agree with the EEA model think that it should be negotiated. This is technical, but the broad thrust of it is we’re leaving, we support – we accept that we have to leave, we need to remain close, there need to be changes to immigration, this is –

AM: Have you heard of Back Together?

ET: No.

AM: Back Together is the organisation of Labour MPs who are so upset about where the leadership is, this sort of wibbly-wobbly message they think they’re getting on Brexit, they want to set up a new organisation. I just wonder what your message is for them?

ET: So who’s in that?

AM: I can give you a long list but not on air.

ET: Oh there is? ’Cause quite often you hear –

AM: No there is a list.

ET: ’Cause I often hear these things and then you never know who it is that is actually committed to it.

AM: Let me turn to something else then. Donald Trump is coming on a visit to this country next month. Normally in those visits he would meet the opposition team. Have you had your invitations to meet him yet?
ET: No.
AM: Nothing at all. Do you expect to get them?
ET: It’s up to them. I mean the protocol normally is that a visiting
you know, leader will ask to see the opposition if they want to. If
we get an invitation to see him of course we’ll go and see him.

AM: If you haven’t had an invitation and if it doesn’t arrive on your
doormat in north London perhaps it’s because you have called him
a racist and described him as an indescribably awful violent blob
of horribleness.

ET: No, I called him ‘an asteroid of awfulness.’
AM: An asteroid of awfulness. It’s not very polite.
ET: Well, it is, but that’s because that’s what he is.
AM: But aren’t you doing exactly what you have so much fun
accusing Boris Johnson of doing, in other words talking loosely
and in this case quite endangering this country. One day you may
very well be the Foreign Secretary of this country.
ET: I certainly hope so.
AM: At that point we will probably have left the European Union
and we’ll be looking around the world for big alliances and none
will matter more to us than the United States and no one will
matter more in that relationship for the time being than Donald
Trump and yet the Labour Party has gone out of its way to offend
him.

ET: No. I went to the United States a couple of months ago and I
made a lot of good friends in the United States with people with
whom we share values and I begin all relationships on that basis.
And I met people in the Senate and in Congress who finished my
sentences for me. I mean there are — we share values with the
United States. We do not share values with Donald Trump when
he wants to walk away from the Paris Climate Change, when he
wants to tear up the Iran Nuclear deal and I am quite happy —
AM: Will you be protesting against him?
ET: - to say that openly and I will say it to his face. I have no problem with that and we must be clear about it and in my view when you have a bully like that you stand up to them and you’re clear about what it is that you disagree. You don’t need to be pusilanimous. What happens – you know look what’s happened to Theresa May. She’s been as nice as she possibly can and he can’t even work out how many points out of ten he wants to give her.

Ends