ANDREW MARR:
Well with over just … only just a year until the General Election today’s poll results don’t make good reading for Labour. The Tories are now comfortably ahead of the Labour Party on economic competence. Confidence in the economy is now returning and two polls in this morning’s papers indicate that the Budget has given the Tories a significant boost. So how will Labour fight back? With me is the Shadow Business Secretary Chuka (pron. Chucka) Umunna.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Good morning, Andrew.

ANDREW MARR:
Good morning. Chuka, I should say, not Chucka. Chuka Umunna.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
That’s right. (laughs)

ANDREW MARR:
Now these are pretty terrible polls for you and they reflect what seem to be absolute
hesitance in the Labour response to the Budget. Frankly, it didn’t look as if you knew what you wanted to say about the Budget.

**CHUKA UMUNNA:**

Well look, Andrew, I couldn’t disagree more. Look polls go up and down. We’ve seen them fluctuate and frankly if we obsessed with polls, we wouldn’t be doing our job properly. And let’s actually look at the hard facts because what matters is how people vote. And we have seen under Ed Miliband’s leadership, the Labour Party put on over a thousand extra councillors importantly in the marginal seats we need to get a majority next year at the next General Election. We have put on tens of thousands of new members since May 2010. And of course let’s not forget what people were saying in May 2010. They were writing the party off. They were saying you know one term opposition, you’re going to have many more terms than that. People are seriously talking about us actually winning next year and that is not what they were doing back in May 2010. So have we got lots …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Are you really telling me you’re relaxed about this morning’s polls?

**CHUKA UMUNNA:**

Look we’re focused on the …

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* On your national standing?

**CHUKA UMUNNA:**

What we’re focused on is actually talking to the issues that matter to people. And you talked about the Budget. There was a huge amount of speculation that there was going to be a rabbit pulled out of the hat. There was no rabbit pulled out of the hat in respect of the big issue facing your viewers, which is the fact that they are now earning £1,600 on average less than they were in May 2010.

**ANDREW MARR:**

*(over)* Some are, some aren’t.
CHUKA UMUNNA:
There was nothing here about how you’re going to help them … how the Government is going to help them on childcare …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Right well let’s turn …

CHUKA UMUNNA:
(over) … nothing on what they were going to do, for example, to relieve the squeeze on energy prices, you know what they have been seeing happening to their energy prices. Nothing in this Budget. In fact …

ANDREW MARR:
The big news in the Budget of course was on pensions and the freedom to use pensions as you want …

CHUKA UMUNNA
Yes, yeah.

ANDREW MARR:
… in a lump sum. Now initially the Labour Party didn’t have anything to say on that, but you’re now in favour of that. Is that correct?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Well, look, we’re being clear that the principle of giving more people more control over their pension pot and their pension saving is something that we support. In terms of the actual detail - which by the way we’re still looking at, of course we only had the Budget on Wednesday – we’ve got three tests that we apply to that. First of all, it’s got to pass the fairness test, so we’ve got to … (Marr over) Well you know does it provide a range of products for high … lower and middle income earners, which give them certainty in retirement. There is the advice test, which is are they going to have access to proper high quality financial advice when they’re making these decisions? We don’t want a repeat of some of the mis-selling scandals we’ve seen.
ANDREW MARR:
Sure, sure.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
And there’s a cost test as well. Can we be sure that this isn’t going to lead to more cost for the taxpayer in the long-term? Now those are the three tests we require.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So if I ask Danny Alexander these three questions and he says yes, yes, yes, then you are signed up to what George Osborne has said and will vote for it?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Well we need to see the bill, and I’m not going to sign a blank piece of paper here on your show as good as that may be. But let’s see what, let’s see what …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That would have been fun. I would have liked that.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Well let’s see what Danny says. But I think one of the other curious things about this Budget is of course we know the Conservatives have been trying to frame themselves as the Workers’ Party so to speak; that there was very little at all here about work. Look of course I mean we’ve got to deal with the fact that we’ve got more than 900,000 young people out of work. Where was the equivalent of our job guarantee where we guarantee young people being out of work a job after they’ve been out of work for a year? There was nothing on that. We actually have a bigger issue here by the way …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) How many … Can I ask you how many firms have signed up to that yet?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Well in terms of the number of firms that would sign up to that, you wait till you
actually implement that in government. We’re not in government yet. But there’s a bigger issue here as well because (Marr over ‘None, I think’) any job is better than no job, but at the end of the day we’re very clear on what our ambition is. We want people to have good, secure, meaningful work that pays a wage that you can live off. We saw nothing in the Budget as to how they may incentivise firms to actually pay a living wage to people. You know Andrew …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So why do you …

CHUKA UMUNNA:
(over) … one in five people in this country is in a low wage, low skilled job. That for us is not good enough. We want people to have good, secure work, which is more high skilled, pays a wage that people can live off. That’s our ambition for your viewers.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) So why is it, do you think, that you’re not trusted on the economy or trusted less than the Conservatives? What’s happened?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
(over) Well, look, as I said … As I said you can obsess about the polls …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) No well it’s clearly what people think. They don’t trust you at the moment …

CHUKA UMUNNA:
(over) Well no, okay, I …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) … and I’m just asking you as a politician what is wrong?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
… look I’ve seen the headline on the front of a Conservative supporting newspaper.
That’s all well and good, but what will actually matter is the judgement people pass at the time of the next General Election. We’ve of course got important local elections in this May. That is what matters. People will pass judgement then. And all I know is that when I talk to people in my own constituency in Streatham about the fact that we have young people, long-term unemployed at a higher rate than at the last General Election, they want to know what we’re going to do about it. And they also talk to me about the actual quality of work that they’re doing. And I think look this is a great country and we’ve got huge potential, but we’ve got to unleash the talents of everybody. And that means that we have to do things, for example, like ensure that there’s more vocational and technical training, which we’ve outlined in our long-term plan for growth agenda 2013.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You are Business Secretary, Shadow Business Secretary, so …

CHUKA UMUNNA:
(over) I was going to say I’d like to be the Business Secretary.

ANDREW MARR:
Yeah. Your chances of becoming Business Secretary depend partly on business coming round to Labour at least a bit. Business love the Budget and they’re very critical of the Labour Party. They see all these tax raises, these new kinds of regulation. Is there anything that you can offer the business community, anything new at all to win them round to the idea of supporting Labour again because you have lost almost all the business community at the moment?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Well, look, I don’t accept that at all. We’ve actually been drawing up lots of our policies with business people like Sir John Armitt, for example, who has proposed having a National Infrastructure Commission which we support. We have a phalanx of business support. To give you one example, Charles Allen, for example - you’ll excuse me for mentioning someone connected to ITV – but Charles is the Chair of the biggest commercial radio …
ANDREW MARR:
(over) Well there you go, there you go.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
... radio proposition. But look, in terms of business support, we want to get the support of businesses of all different shapes and sizes in all parts of the country. And you know I’ll let the Conservatives obsess about …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) You’re going to tax them more individually and as businesses, you’re going to regulate them more.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Look, Andrew …

ANDREW MARR:
It’s very, very hard for them to come and …

CHUKA UMUNNA:
… the biggest, the biggest uncertainty on the horizon for British businesses is the prospect of a UK exit from the EU, and all I can tell you is that when Ed Miliband set out our very clear priority, which is to ensure that we prioritise getting Europe to work better for growth in our country and also he was very clear that we see our future at the heart of the European Union, which is the best way that we can get access to our biggest nearest export market but also the key that unlocks the door to emerging markets – us staying in the European Union is …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Is the single biggest thing?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
… is the number one priority for many businesses and they’re very clear on our position and have supported our position.

ANDREW MARR:
And would you like the Labour Party, rather than the Liberal Democrats as now, to be seen as the pro-European Party?

CHUKA UMUNNA:
I think we are the pro-European Party because only the Labour Party can actually secure the sensible course forward on that that we want to see and that I believe business wants to see. Ed Miliband’s announcement in respect of opposition on Europe was welcomed by the CBI, the EEF, many other business organisations, and I’m not surprised because it’s creating what the Conservatives have done – a huge amount of uncertainty for the economy.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright, Chuka Umunna, thank you very much indeed for joining us just now.

CHUKA UMUNNA:
Pleasure.

INTERVIEW ENDS