INTERVIEW WITH:
ALEX SALMOND, FIRST MINISTER OF SCOTLAND

EDDIE MAIR: Alex Salmond and by the way, nice weather behind you, you’ve got no snow there, which is good.

ALEX SALMOND: Well strangely enough Eddie, Inverness is one of the few areas of Scotland without snow but of course we’ve got 10,000 people without electricity, particularly in the South West of Scotland, so that’s a serious problem for those many, many hundreds of engineers who are working to rectify that situation.

EDDIE MAIR: Well the weather will be better in an independent Scotland, right?

ALEX SALMOND: I haven’t made that commitment Eddie. But obviously, one thing would be relevant perhaps is that Scotland is at the very forefront of countries with ambitious targets, in terms of climate change and maybe this erratic weather is a reminder of just how important that issue is.

EDDIE MAIR: Now if the referendum were to be held tomorrow, let’s get one thing straight, two things would happen. First of all people would be really surprised and also you’d lose. That’s true isn’t it?

ALEX SALMOND: Well the referendum isn’t going to be held tomorrow and I don’t know if news has reached London yet, but there’s a Sunday Times poll out this morning, showing support for independence rising and support against independence falling, so that’s the narrowest gap we’ve had in the campaign period so far and we’ve still got eighteen months to go. So the ‘yes’ campaign believe if we can win the arguments, we can win this referendum.

EDDIE MAIR: What are you going to do to win the arguments? The polls haven’t really, despite that glorious Sunday Times poll you referenced. The polls haven’t really moved much, even in all the time of devolution one way or the other. Which levers are you going to pull to persuade Scots that they should make the leap?

ALEX SALMOND: Well I think there’s three arguments Eddie. It’s about the why of independence, and that is the preoccupation and ambition of the ‘yes’ campaign. One is to point out the things that won’t happen to Scotland if we become independent. You know we won’t get dragged into illegal wars. We won’t have weapons of mass destruction in the Clyde estuary. We won’t have
things like the bedroom tax, currently being imposed, on an iniquitous levy. So that’s the reason that things won’t happen to Scotland. But perhaps the best and most important arguments are things we can do and that’s about growing a more prosperous economy but also having a fairer society and that’s the things we were spelling out at this conference. What can we do to grow the Scottish economy? What can we do to have a fairer society in Scotland and the issues I particularly concentrated on yesterday in my speech of course, was childcare and what that could do in terms of women’s participation in the workforce and also giving more children in Scotland a better chance in life.

EDDIE MAIR: I want to ask you about some of this because you’re relentlessly optimistic about an independent Scotland in public but early this month you know, there was a leaked draft document supposedly detailing the private thinking of the Party. Worried about oil revenues, worried whether pensions could be afforded. Now I know the response to the leak was well, it’s out of date but if you’re going to convince all of these doubting Thomas’, you’ve got to convince them that you’re not saying one thing in public and another thing in private.

ALEX SALMOND: Well our response to the document wasn’t just that it was out of date. I mean it was in terms of the estimates of oil revenues. But more importantly, our response to the document is this is what you’d expect a government to be doing, analysing issues. There isn’t a government in the Western world who are not looking at the affordability of pension provisions and I’d hope they’d give people a lot of satisfaction to know that the Scottish government takes these issues seriously …. (interjection)

EDDIE MAIR: Well, only if they know there’s not going to be a pension black hole.

ALEX SALMOND: Well that’s not what the document said. The document said we’ll examine to make sure that the affordability of pensions can secure an independent Scotland. Incidentally, in terms of Scotland’s percentage of GDP, of wealth and social provision. It’s actually lower than the United Kingdom’s which means it’s actually more affordable in a Scottish context than a UK context but it’s still right and proper that governments address this issue Eddie, and that’s what would be expected by the population.

EDDIE MAIR: Looking at your document and I’ve got it here. It shows your income from oil might be dropping quite dramatically.

ALEX SALMOND: Well, as I pointed out, since then we’ve had and I think this is known by everybody apart from the unionist parties perhaps, we’ve had a most extraordinary oil and gas boom in terms of investment. About 11 billion pounds invested last year, another 13 billion this year and of course that investment boom in the North Sea is going to lead to higher production and higher revenues, not just the Scottish government saying that but the industry body, Oil and Gas UK, that’s the people who are making the investment in sterling.
EDDIE MAIR: Forgive me for interrupting, but doesn’t it inevitably lead to higher revenues till the end of time does it and that’s the pig in the poke you’re asking the Scottish people to look in to.

ALEX SALMOND: Well I don’t think it’s a pig in a poke Eddie. I mean what we can say is that the estimate of up 23 billion barrels recoverable, a reasonable estimate the value of that over the next 40 years is 1.5 trillion pounds, that’s a thousand billion Eddie and the important thing there is to compare that with the last forty years which is just over a trillion, which in other words, there’s going to be more worth, retail wholesale value of oil and gas extracted from the waters round Scotland over the next forty years, than there’s been over the last forty years. So that is, you know, that is a comfortable position. I mean only in the fevered imaginations of the Labour and Tory parties, is somehow that is a great curse for Scotland ...

BOTH TOGETHER

ALEX SALMOND: ... Most countries in the world would regard it as a great advantage.

EDDIE MAIR: Well, you could thrash all of this out face to face with Alistair Darling from the No campaign in a TV debate, couldn’t you? You could look him in the eye and tell him he’s wrong. Are you going to have a TV debate with him?

ALEX SALMOND: Well I think my first mark is David Cameron, the Prime Minister. I think you know, as First Minister of Scotland, I should debate with the Prime Minister. We signed the Edinburgh Agreement. He’s against independence, I’m for it. So I think the first debate should be between First Minister of Scotland who wants independence and the Prime Minister of the UK who is trying to stop Scotland getting independence and then other debates no doubt will take place.

EDDIE MAIR: All right. AleTransitx Salmond. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW WITH ALEX SALMOND