

## **Addressing the delegation at the close of the Scottish Conservative Conference 2008, Annabel Goldie MSP, Scottish Conservative Leader, said:**

*It is a great pleasure to see you all. It is a great pleasure to speak to you all and these are not just the dry words of polite social protocol. I don't do polite social protocol. I'm not saying these words because I have to I'm saying them because I want to. This has been a marvellous conference. You can taste the excitement, the vibrancy, the sense of political purpose, a wonderful location, engaging company and a tangible sense of Conservative spirit and camaraderie.*

*Last year I said welcome to Tories Friends Reunited and we are and what a power we represent when we stand together. Now of course an enjoyable and successful event like this doesn't just fall out the sky – it represents the culmination of a lot of hard work and planning. So to Andrew Fulton, Bill Walker, Mark McInnes, Victoria Roberts, Vicky Rines and our wonderful team at central office and Jackson Carlaw our incomparable compere. Well done. You have pulled together a fantastic Conference. And can we all say to you a very big thank you.*

*Last year when I spoke to you we were on the cusp of something very exciting – the elections for the Scottish Parliament and for local government. Indeed exciting is not adequate to describe some of the antics which I was required to engage on your behalf. Debates with party leaders pale into insignificance when you are charging round the place on a quad bike. I can tell you it takes a lot to make the blood drain from the collective face of the Scottish media but that did! Or plunging into fresh air hoping the abseiling equipment is all it's cracked up to be. At least the blood draining from my face afforded a vengeful satisfaction to the Scottish media!*

*Indeed Murdo Fraser and Liz Smith were so impressed with my abseiling they're now recommending it to all Scottish schools! Of course yesterday I made some new friends the Harley Davidson bikers or HOGs to those of us in the know! Bel's Angels I read in the press today. Well you are all Bel's Angels to me.*

*Last year, we fought these elections on a simple premise. Here are our policies - they're easy to understand, they're relevant to ordinary people right across Scotland. And we won't break them or compromise on them by going into coalition with another party. What it says on the tin is what you get.*

*As you know I felt it was time for a change, a time to break with coalition government. A time to consider a period of minority government.*

*Now many of you will remember that when I first raised the possibility of minority government nearly two years ago I was laughed out of court. The media were not persuaded. People thought it was madness. I should go and lie down in a darkened room with some iced towels. Then I might regain*

*lucidity and make a bit more sense. But there were two reasons why I favoured minority government being given a chance.*

*The Lib Lab coalition pact for eight years had become stale. It threw up the worst features of political compromise. Deals done behind closed doors, fudged outcomes. In short a democratic distortion rather than an exciting political vision.*

*The second reason was minority government would not just let our Scottish Conservative voice be heard in the parliament but it would make it count as well. We would matter more, our votes would be as important as those of any other party.*

*And so it has proved to be. Whether it's abolishing bridge tolls, monitoring sex offenders, protecting rural schools or promoting tartan we have not just influenced the debate – we have led it. And the most graphic illustration of just how influential we are came with the Scottish Government's budget. Our support for that budget was conditional on three major areas of Conservative policy being delivered. 1000 extra police, big cuts in business rates for our smallest businesses and a new national drugs strategy for Scotland. We secured these three pledges. And that is the reality of Scottish politics in 2008 - for the first time in eleven years Conservative policies were delivered here in Scotland.*

*And it is remarkable that 16 of us have achieved that whereas Labour with nearly three times our number has been invisible, ineffectual and in turmoil. So can I say to my hard working colleagues in the Scottish Parliament well done you have come up trumps, together we have made a difference. You have done us proud. So stand up and let us thank you. (And can I invite all of you to thank all of them.) But before you get too carried away, the hard work is not over, it's only just begun. This is not our destination this is the first leg of our new journey together.*

*And something else of vital importance happened last May. We took our total number of Councillors in Scotland from 122 to over 140 – which is a 17% increase. Our Councillors represent an equally hard working group of our political foot soldiers. In many of our Councils they like us in the Scottish parliament are delivering Conservative policies for the good of their local areas. Most prominently right here in South Ayrshire. So to all our Tory Councillors in Scotland, thank you - we applaud you.*

*And that's not all. In fact how much more good news can you take? Yes I know you are somewhat unfamiliar with the experience - but get used to it – begin to relish it.*

*Opinion polls some months ago began to suggest it. The local government elections in England and Wales and the triumph of Boris in London undoubtedly pointed to it, the Crewe and Nantwich by-election is the latest evidence of it and yesterday inspirationally David Cameron personified it – the*

*Conservative Party is marching forward to a general election with victory as our goal. A victory we must earn not by default but as of right.*

*And so in Scotland we have a tremendously exciting journey in front of us. A journey in the Scottish Parliament which builds on our achievements of the last year with the real prospect of gains at the next election in 2011. A journey with David Cameron with the thrilling prospect of a Conservative Government at Westminster including from Scotland according to these recent polls a raft of potential gains. Here in Scotland Labour and the Lib Dems are on the slide, we are on the up.*

*So let me firstly give you a flavour of where we are headed in the Scottish Parliament. Our broad aims continue to be smaller government, robust policies on law and order, a strong enterprise based economy and delivery of quality public services in health and education.*

*This may be old fashioned but I happen to believe in the enforcement of law and order. More police officers will help us to do that. But there are challenges such as lack of prison capacity, overcrowded jails. Well again it may be old fashioned but I happen to believe in prisoners in prison not convicts in the community. And it's the Scottish Conservatives who are hounding and harrying the SNP Government on their law and order policies. I shall not sit by while they create a 'soft touch' Scotland. Where to them emptying the jails is more important than protecting the public.*

*If we need to build more prisons we must build them. And if in the meantime we need to find some temporary secure accommodation, let's find it. What we cannot have are the courts forced to decide sentencing on the basis of what prison space is available. The sentence should fit the crime not the prison capacity. Isn't it shocking that just this week because things have got so bad that a Sheriff had to speak out about the scandal of early release. The SNP might be the criminal's new best friend. The Scottish Conservatives will always stand up for the victim.*

*And if the SNP is failing us on justice, the story on education isn't much better. I believe that what takes place in a school should overwhelmingly be the responsibility of head teachers, their colleagues and parents. These hardworking, dedicated and experienced professionals should not find themselves buffeted from pillar to post by ministerial edict and bureaucratic directive. And the Scottish Conservatives will support our teachers in their desire to have their classrooms returned to them. We shall support our head teachers in giving them the right to deal with unruly disruptive pupils and to make whatever decisions they think are in the best interests of their pupils. We believe that every pupil should have the opportunity to develop their talents whether they be educational or vocational or extracurricular. That is why I am delighted that Murdo Fraser and Liz Smith have been taking forward our agenda with their announcement this week of our acclaimed Outdoor Education Policy. What could be more important to the future health of our nation than the health and wellbeing of our children. So we say that every child in every state school should benefit from one week's outward bound*

*course. For them that provides new opportunities and new horizons. So I challenge the S.N.P government, support our fresh thinking and back our policy. Once again we lead others will follow.*

*But you know in every generation a problem emerges which for too long has remained hidden and about which too few people have been prepared to speak. It takes political courage to recognise that problem, to be prepared to speak about it and especially for a politician to admit you don't have all the answers. Now, for example, over ten years ago I became aware that drugs abuse in Scotland was emerging as a creeping and sinister malaise, cutting right across social backgrounds and spreading like a contagion. I also became aware that many were reluctant to speak about it, many felt helpless in the face of it and the great majority thought it was someone else's problem. Well it wasn't it was sweeping its pernicious way through every community in Scotland, affecting families who thought they were immune to it and corroding society.*

*There was a cost to the justice system, a cost to the health service, a cost to social services but the worst cost of all were the lost lives and shattered existences of countless individuals and their families. Apart from swapping heroin with methadone there didn't seem to be any other strategy. Now when I first raised this in the Scottish parliament I was criticised, indeed lambasted from all sides. I was more or less told to shut up and go away – I didn't know what I was talking about. Well I'm not a shut up and go away kind of girl. If you are a Scottish Conservative you don't go away when the going gets tough. What you do is you hang on in there and you fight your corner. We have led the debate on drugs abuse in Scotland, the Scottish Government to its credit is prepared to do something about it. We imminently await the publication of a draft drugs strategy which for the first time in years will focus on recovery and abstinence. You know there are two types of politicians. Those who say nothing and wait for things to happen and those who speak out and make things happen. I know which type the Scottish Conservatives are.*

*And so there is a new threat emerging from the shadows. A threat every bit as insidious and potentially corrosive as drugs abuse. Now fortunately in Scotland traditionally the concept of family has a strong resonance and there are many parents who whether together or on their own make a splendid job of bringing up their children. And that task can be frustrating, it can be down right worrying but it is also immensely satisfying and richly rewarding. But the threat to which I refer is not like drugs abuse. It doesn't arise out of something that people do but rather out of something which they don't do. I am talking about parenting skills or sadly in far too many cases the complete lack of them. Too many parents don't or can't extend to their children the parenting skills so essential if young people are to have any hope of growing up with guidance, support and boundaries.*

*Why don't they extend these skills? Because they themselves were the children of parents who did not possess these skills. And disturbingly in 2008 we may now be moving into the third generation of this parental void. And how do we know this? In 2003 the number of children referred to the Children's Reporter on grounds of lack of parental care was over 16,000, and by 2006 that figure had soared to nearly 19,500. And if I tell you that when I spoke to an audience of Children's Panel members within the last few months in one part of Scotland and they said that not even a multi-storey tower block could accommodate all the children who in their area are suffering from parental neglect, you realise how serious this is.*

*This is not some abstract bit of statistical data. These are young lives being ruined. Nearly 19,500 of them in that desperate situation. And these are just the ones we know about. This is not just our nation's future, these children are the parents of the future.*

*Now politicians and governments have to respond to actual situations. For this neglected element of our children we will expect police officers, children's hearings and hard pressed social workers to deal with that actual situation. But you know like drugs abuse unless we are prepared to think ahead 10, 15, 20 years all we are doing is engaging in 'sticking plaster' politics trying to fix broken things now with such bits of solution or part solution as we can cobble together. And I say to you quite simply, we cannot stand by without a longer term strategy to deal with this new problem. We cannot hope it will solve itself because it won't.*

*And we cannot in 10 years time weep and wail and gnash our teeth wring our hands and say we should have done something about it. And so on this as on so many other issues I am determined that the Scottish Conservatives will not stand by silent. It may not be popular but we are prepared to talk about this problem. We are prepared to ask the tough questions. We may not be able to bring forward immediate answers and I'm frank about that but we can start planning how to make a difference in the next 5 to 10 years. And the bottom line is unless we are prepared to lead a debate on this deepening crisis, the problem will remain invisible like drugs abuse, not talked about in polite circles and the very foundations of our society will be crumbling beneath us.*

*There is no simple solution because the causes are complex, complicated and deep rooted. There may be generations of drug or alcohol dependency, poor education and no employment. People trapped on a treadmill of hopelessness with nowhere to go and no way to get off. The human cost to them enormous, the cost to society escalating.*

*So the first thing that we need to do is recognise the problem. But we also need to work out how we start informing youngsters of what being a parent means. Not just in terms of material support but how you help a child become a responsible adult and a valued and contributing member of society. We can't expect hard pressed teachers to take on that task.*

*But in Scotland we do have a host of voluntary and charitable organisations more than able to help young people develop into being effective parents. Interestingly with drugs abuse much of the most effective work now being done with youngsters has not been provided through school curriculum but through external contact with young people such as Strathclyde Police Choices for Life. And I'm calling on everybody who does think it is worthwhile investing in our young people and our nation's future to contribute to this debate and to bring forward their ideas. We don't have the answers, but we must start asking the questions.*

*And so within Scottish politics there is a lot which we have achieved but there is so much more which we as Scottish Conservatives can do. And I pledge to you that we shall keep driving forward our positive political agenda setting a lead which others can follow.*

*But if our star is in the ascendance in the Scottish Parliament, there is a very positive astronomical conjunction with our star at Westminster David Cameron. In fact there is probably some apposite astrological terminology to describe the situation such as Mercury in alignment with Venus. If he's happy, I'm happy. Because David Cameron has quite simply made the difference to our prospects at Westminster. Everybody listening to his speech yesterday can be left in no doubt about his dynamism, his determination, his commitment and his vision. We need a new political direction in government at Westminster. Tony Blair did not operate on the basis of any sustainable political philosophy, he was an event driven politician. For all I know Gordon Brown may have had an underpinning political philosophy but his inheritance has turned to dust. It now falls to David Cameron to take forward a new political agenda for Britain and a new direction for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

*For some time in Scotland the plates of Scottish politics have been moving. Labour's historic vice like grip on Scotland shattered last May not just in the Scottish Parliament but in various Councils throughout Scotland. Labour is a party battered and fragmented. The SNP remains popular. But it's what opinion polls over the last few months say about us which is interesting. Indeed it was just this week that the nationalists of all people disclosed that averaging out the Scottish sample of the most recent UK polls for Westminster puts us on 21% (up 5% since the General Election) with Labour collapsing and the Lib Dems trailing in 4<sup>th</sup> place. I am not given to wild unbridled optimism (I'm a Scottish Conservative after all) but I can now see in Scotland a raft of Westminster seats within our grasp. We have 100 weeks left to prove we are worthy of winning them. We are on the up. Labour and the Lib Dems are on the way down. Or as Status Quo would say – Down down deeper and down! Yes stay on and you may hear that for yourselves at the concert tonight.*

*And I congratulate David Cameron on his passionate and wholehearted commitment to Scotland. And his desire as a Prime Minister in waiting to be sensitive to and respond to a new United Kingdom post devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.*

*He understands the need for Scottish devolution to work effectively. He knows that 75% of people in Scotland support devolution and most of these people want devolution to be more effective. He and I welcome the Calman Commission a cross border, cross party initiative charged with reviewing the devolution settlement. And when that Commission reports we shall reflect carefully on its views.*

*Because what he and I both know is that the current devolution settlement has rough edges. We also know that fundamental to stable devolved government is a constructive and positive relationship between our two parliaments and our two governments at Westminster and Holyrood. This is not rocket science. Throughout the world many effective devolved legislatures engage positively with their national governments. Not so in Scotland. Why? Because relationships in the Labour Party, north and south of the border have been appalling. Devolution has not had that fair wind of mutual positive engagement. As David Cameron said so eloquently yesterday we need a new relationship built on respect. A respect whereby each government acknowledges the democratic mandate of the other.*

*Now of course Alex Salmond cannot be expected to go out of his way and engage with a Labour Government at Westminster in a mood of sweetness and light. Why should he? It doesn't serve his purpose. He delights in the friction between the factions which is an apology for the Labour party. He relishes Labour's current woes and he revels in poking his SNP stick into the Labour flank to make it squeal. Mind you – not that I can blame him.*

*Many people might have thought that a new Labour leadership in Scotland would have been more in tune with the Labour Government at Westminster. But anyone who has watched the Scottish Labour party self destruct by its extraordinary decision to promote Alex Salmond's independence agenda can be in no doubt about one thing – relations between Labour north and south of the border have got even worse. Wendy Alexander wants a referendum, Gordon Brown doesn't.*

*Labour MSPs and Scottish Labour MPs are at one another's throats and this tormented and divided rabble would have us believe that it can be a credible champion for the union, well it can't. It's not even a credible opposition. And if it's not even a united party, how on earth can it stand up for a United Kingdom? And of course rejoicing over this mayhem, his smile getting smugger by the moment. His self-satisfaction oozing out of every pore and there are many pores for it to ooze out of is Alex Salmond. You only had to look at him in the Scottish Parliament after Wendy Alexander's u-turns to realise what the surrender of the Labour Party on the union meant to him. He is like a wee Scottie dog with 10 tails. Uncontainable in his gleeful triumphalism.*

*Well I have a message for Alex Salmond:-*

*The Labour party may have imploded and let you trample over them but you are not going to trample over the Conservatives. You may seek to proclaim a*

*monopoly on patriotism but you don't have it. There are millions of us who are proud to be Scottish and proud to be British. Our saltire and our lion rampant are the flags of our Scottish nation, they are not the flags of your Scottish Nationalism. You may strain and push at the boundaries of devolution to take Scotland out of Britain, David Cameron and I will work together tirelessly to keep Scotland safe within Britain. That is our duty, that is our obligation and that is our pledge to Scotland.*

*And Alex Salmond can aspire to be a self proclaimed Scottish power broker at Westminster in what he hopes will be a hung parliament with a Conservative minority government. Well I've got news for him. Our ambition extends to being a majority government with more Conservative MPs for Scotland. And all of us Conservatives north and south of the border will be the insurance policy to safeguard a strong and confident Scotland within a strong and confident United Kingdom. And it is we Conservatives who will stand shoulder to shoulder against the Salmond agenda of separatism. Labour can't, be we can and we will.*

*So when the General Election comes, Scotland will have a choice. Our precious place in the Union jeopardised and sacrificed to the enfeebled incompetence of Gordon Brown and Wendy Alexander – or - David Cameron and me with all of you defending and fighting for that union with grit and passion and unflinching determination. A choice between a Labour Party riven with indecision and dithering. Or a Conservative Party which is united in our determination to create that strong and confident Scotland within a strong and confident United Kingdom.*

*A Conservative vision of a country where people have more opportunity and control. Where families are stronger and society is more responsible. Where Britain is safer and greener. A neighbourhood you feel safe in. More time for your family.*

***These are the changes that people want, and from us these are changes that people will get. Changes in policy. Changes in politics. Yes, Scotland and Britain can change. Yes, we can build a better future for ourselves and our children. Yes, we can get the change we really want. But we can also keep and hold dear and hold secure the one thing millions of people don't want to change at all – the status quo – which they cherish and which we pledge to keep our Scotland within our United Kingdom.***