AM: Dominic Raab is a leading Brexiteer and indeed a former Brexit Secretary who walked out of Theresa May’s Cabinet last year, and he’s announcing this morning that he wants to be our next prime minister. He’s with me now. I said that, is it true?

DR: Yes. I’ll put putting myself forward because I believe I’m the candidate that can bring the optimism and the change that this country needs to get us moving forward. I’ll fight for a fairer deal in Brussels, with negotiation to change the backstop arrangements, and if not I will be clear we’d leave on WTO terms in October. But mainly because I want to get on and talk about all those other things. I’ll be fighting for a fairer deal for workers, many of whom haven’t had a pay rise in many years. And above all a fairer society where the kid from a humble home, the rough background or the disadvantaged community, gets their shot to make the best of their potential in life. So that’s the vision I’m putting forward, and I think it’s a vision that can take Britain forward and beat Jeremy Corbyn.

AM: But nothing happens until you have sorted out Brexit and the backstop. Now, you say that you can get a better deal on the backstop. Can I put it to you that you can’t, that there is no evidence that you or anybody else can? Theresa May fought and fought and fought for it. What was she doing that was wrong?

DR: Well, look, first of all I think there is clearly a reasonable ask that we can make, one that had the approval of the House of Commons around the so-called Brady amendment. In particular making sure we got an exit from the backstop. And I think we need to go out and be absolutely resolute in a way we weren’t last time. And I’ve got the experience, not only as a conviction
Brexit, as a lawyer, having worked six years in the Foreign Office. I'm used to these negotiations. I've seen enough first-hand. And I think that it is achievable. But of course you're right. It will need some goodwill on the other side too.

AM: And they don't like you very much do they?
DR: Well, that probably tells you that I was doing my job in terms of pressing them hard and making sure that Britain's interests were resolutely defended.

AM: Now, you said you can get a better deal, that they can move on the backstop. The Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, who is a real friend of Britain in relative terms in that, says, this week, said on Friday: 'the withdrawal agreement which includes the backstop is not up for renegotiation.' The Irish Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, says, 'whatever happens, we are going to hold our nerve.' Again and again and again they say we are not moving, and people like you on this side of the Channel say, 'oh, they will in the end.' And they don't. What's going to be different?
DR: Well, one of the reasons that they – I mean, you'd expect them to say this, right, in the middle of a leader – as the leadership kicks off. But one of the reasons is that we weren't resolute enough and we took no deal off the table. So I don't want a WTO Brexit. But I think unless you're willing to keep our promises as politicians – and we I think are going to see what happens if you don't in the European election results later – if we're not willing to say that I think we put ourselves in a much weaker position in terms of getting a deal. Because if you're not willing to walk away from the negotiation it doesn't focus the mind of the other side.

AM: But you have been in these negotiations yourself and you've asked for these things yourself in the past and you haven't got them. What's going to be really different because you're prime minister?
DR: Well, first of all, as I said, we’d be willing to walk away from the negotiations if we don’t get the very finite targeted reasonable change. Secondly, I think my experience was of being undermined by some others in government, so we’d need to have a very well organised Number 10 operation and a united Cabinet. And I think if you do that and you can be really credible in Brussels that actually we mean business, we want a good deal, we want these limited changes, but we’re willing to walk away otherwise, I think that will focus minds in a way that wasn’t done before.

AM: And do you think that Theresa May was simply not tough enough, therefore?

DR: I don’t want to get into the personal side.

AM: That’s the implication of what you’re saying.

DR: I don’t think – I actually don’t think that at the leadership level, which includes the prime minister but also includes the Cabinet – we weren’t resolute enough around the line that we’d agreed and we’d promised. This comes back to the binary promise we made: we would leave on the 29th March with a deal – and I’m very keen to get a deal – but if not, if the EU wouldn’t move, wouldn’t extend and reciprocate with the goodwill and the flexibility we’d shown, then yes, on WTO terms.

AM: Well, let’s come back to what may or may not happen. You say that, you know, you were worried about aspects of the deal. You voted for the withdrawal agreement, and for a lot people who are proper Brexiteers, that was betrayal. You said you wouldn’t vote for it and then you did.

DR: It’s not quite true is it, Andrew? If you look and read my speech, what I said was I voted, in the specific third vote we had, was to avoid the European elections and any further extension, and it was very clear that if we were going to have a vote on the deal under so-called section 13 – I can bore you with all the detail – it would have to come back to the House of Commons. So I
voted only to avoid an extension, which I think was a bad idea. And I think I’ve been proved right about that.

AM: Do you still think that Theresa May’s withdrawal agreement was worse than staying in?
DR: I didn’t say that. What I said was that the backstop, in some respects, because we’re bound by a suite of laws from customs – hold on - from customs rules to tax policy and social policy without a say over it. And it was weaker in terms of taking control.

AM: Let me read you what you said on the Today programme in November. ‘If you just presented me with this deal or EU membership. yes, I would think this is even worse than that,’ staying in the EU. ‘We’d effectively be bound by the same rules without a voice or control over them.’ That’s what you said. Worse than staying in. But then you voted for it.
DR: So let’s be clear and honest with your viewers about this in relation to the backstop, which is the suite of laws we’d be bound by. We wouldn’t have any say over those and we wouldn’t be able to exit them. No democratic country in history has agreed to be bound by that. And I voted against an extension, but I made very clear, as my speech in the House of Commons shows, that because we would have another section 13 vote that I would reserve my position.

AM: Okay, this is at least complicated stuff. The Brexit Party might have a fantastic night tonight, they might win, they might push the Conservative Party way down the running order. And that is partly because they feel that people like you folded.
DR: I don’t think anyone that looks at what I did can say that. I resigned on principle, because I tried very hard to fight for the deal that I’m still fighting for now, and when my advice wasn’t taken, either by the prime minister, or indeed by the Cabinet, I did the honourable thing and said, ‘okay, I can’t carry this deal
over the line.’ But it also showed me – and I’m a details guy, I’m a lawyer and spent six years in the Foreign Office – it’s also showed me actually the path that we can navigate to get a deal. But we’ll only be able to do that if we’re serious about walking away in the worst eventuality.

AM: Well, let’s talk about that. Because as prime minister you would have one power absolutely in your hands. At the end of October you would be able to ask for an extension or decide you were definitely not going to ask for an extension. Can I ask you, as prime minister would you certainly not ask for a further extension in October?
DR: There’s no case for a further extension. I think we’ve got to bring some finality to this.

AM: And can you promise people watching now, ‘I will not ask for an extension,’ then?
DR: I will not ask for an extension. Of course, if parliament legislates that then we would be in a difficult position. But as the Institute for Government set out today, it is very difficult for parliament now to legislate against no deal or in favour of a further extension unless the executive on this, unless a resolute prime minister is willing to acquiesce in that. And I would not.

AM: So you are really one of the candidates which would take Britain towards no deal?
DR: No, I would be the candidate that would put us in the best position – because you need to be able to walk away – to get the deal which could pass through parliament.

AM: So a lot of people in the Conservative Party think that to take Britain towards no deal is hijacking the result of the referendum campaign in 2016. Philip Hammond, the Chancellor, who’ll be on later on, said: ‘the 2016 leave campaign was clear that we would leave with a deal. So to advocate no deal is to hijack the result of
the referendum. There is no mandate for a no deal exit.’ That is true, isn’t it?
DR: No, it’s not. And of course the one thing we said we’d do during the referendum – hold on, let me answer the question – is leave the EU. And then as Conservatives, whether you’re on the remain or the leave side, all of our manifestos said we’d come out of the EU, come out of the customs union and that no deal was better than a bad deal. I think we should keep our promises.

AM: Well, let’s remind ourselves what you said during the referendum campaign.

ARCHIVE CLIP: Look at the options being put out there. Swiss, Norwegian, Turkish, I think, because Britain’s economy’s bigger than all of those economies combined, and because the French farmers, German car manufacturers sell us £68 billion more each year than we sell them, we’re very well placed, and mutual self-interest suggests we’d cut a very good deal.

AM: ‘We’d cut a very good deal.’ But that’s not where we are now is it?
DR: No. And that’s because, I’m afraid, that the original vision of Brexit that the prime minister set out in the Lancaster House speech and then in our manifesto wasn’t followed. But I want a deal.

AM: Why do you think it wasn’t followed?
DR: There’s all sorts of – I don’t want to get personal about this, but I basically don’t think we were resolute enough in sticking to the strategy and the vision of a Brexit which maintains our cooperation and our trade links with the EU but doesn’t then grasp the opportunities of Brexit. And actually it’s become rather a miserly, dour, risk management exercise rather than grasping opportunities to take back control of our laws, our borders and
our money, and also to have this – the global advantage and opportunities that free trade brings.

AM: You know that a lot of your colleagues very strongly disagree with that. They’ve read Mark Sedwill, the Cabinet Secretary, they’ve looked at the Treasury, they’ve listened to the big bosses of some of the car companies and other companies in this country, and they think no deal will destroy a lot of British jobs very, very quickly. And they are frankly terrified at the prospect. And there are lots of Conservatives who would vote to stop that happening in parliament. Would you simply ignore a parliamentary vote on that? As leader?

DR: Well, you can’t ignore law, and as is set out in law at the moment we leave at the end of October unless the law changes. And that’s what we should follow. But bear in mind also, every Conservative, whether the ones on your side or otherwise –

AM: What about parliament not asserting its view? Parliamentary sovereignty, that’s what we’re supposed to be fighting for.

DR: Parliamentary sovereignty is expressly the law, and the law says we leave at the end of October. But just to come back to your point. Look, on WTO Brexit, it has to be credible if we’re going to be able to get the EU to move towards the deal we want. We have an extra six months to prepare for this. We’ve got two side deals –

AM: You’ve done nothing.

DR: No, no. Let me – we’ve got two side deals, or accepted arrangements with the EU to facilitate the free flow of lorries either way between France and the UK. Aviation as well. And we’ve got £39 billion worth to put the rocket boosters up the economy to support business through what I agree would be a transition. Any change is.

AM: Can I just ask you, very, very strictly – you mentioned the £39 billion. Is your view that if we leave without a deal in October
then we keep all of that money and we can spend it, as it were, to mitigate any financial shock of the no deal exit?
DR: I think long term we want a deal with the EU, and I think we will end up over the long term putting our relationship on a positive footing. But if we leave the EU on WTO terms, I think probably under our strict legal obligations, a fraction of that would be due. I’d be very happy to arbitrate that at some point over a period of years. But you would get at least, I would say, 25 of that billion, which you would have to support businesses through what would inevitably be a transition. And that’s why I think we’re in a better position now to do this six months on from March.

AM: Some people might be watching this and thinking, hold on a second, Dominic Raab, you’ve blamed all sorts of other people for what’s happened. Brussels, your colleagues, the Cabinet, officials and so forth. You were Brexit Secretary during this process. If you were so good you’d have got us a deal.
DR: And you know, to be honest with you, I think if you look at my judgement call on this issue from the backstop, in exit from the backstop, if my advice had been followed I think we’d have been in a very good position to do so.

AM: Okay, swirling around this studio, out there, there is the prospect of a romping performance by the Brexit Party under Nigel Farage. You’ve seen how well he’s done up and down the country in terms of big meetings.
DR: Yes.
AM: Do you think you’ve got something to learn from Nigel Farage. A very crisp, simple, straightforward message which is having resonance with a lot of Tories out there?
DR: Yeah, we Conservatives should keep our promises. And all politicians across the spectrum should keep their promises. And we haven’t, because the one thing people knew was that we said we’d leave on 29th March and we didn’t.
AM: So given that, could you do business with him? Could you come to some kind of agreement? He wants to be part of the negotiating team. Could you imagine walking into Brussels shoulder to shoulder with Nigel Farage?
DR: Look, I always listen to all sides of this debate, from the – Nigel Farage and others –
AM: So you would.
DR: No, hold. But no. I would lead a Conservative team uniting all the different aspects of the Conservative Party around the Cabinet table, and take a disciplined approach.

AM: Any electoral pact with Nigel Farage and the Brexit Party going forward?
DR: I have no plans for that. And that’s not what I’d be aiming for.

AM: No plans, not what you’re aiming for, is not saying no.
DR: Look, I’m not going to answer hypothetical questions, it’s irresponsible to do so. My aim is not to cosy up to other parties, my aim is to keep Conservative policies, present an optimistic aspirational vision for the future and then go and beat Jeremy Corbyn.

AM: If you become Conservative leader, when’s the next general election?
DR: Well, I think we’re scheduled for 2022, and I think it’s very important that we get Brexit delivered before we go back to the polls. And I think –
AM: Any new Tory leader coming in is going to have the same problems that Theresa May’s had, of virtually no majority. And as a strong Brexiteer, you’re going to have, as it were, remainers inside the Conservative Party, people who are against no deal as well, against you. How do you stop the Conservative Party falling apart in parliament and an early general election being provoked by Jeremy Corbyn?
DR: Well, you mentioned the European elections, and at least the success that the Brexit Party has. I think it’s going to be a stark reminder to all concerned – as we’re one family – we bicker and squabble but we need to come together – that we need to keep our promises. And for those of us, and I think the leavers, remainers all went to get on to talk about the other stuff that I talked about – a fairer deal for workers, the opportunity society – we’re not going to do any of that unless we get Brexit delivered. It will haunt us. Let’s get this done responsibly, in the right way I want a deal if we can get one. But then let’s move on and take Britain forward.

AM: Let’s come on to that. Tax cuts. You’ve talked about considerable tax cuts. How do you pay for them?
DR: So I’ve talked about raising the National Insurance threshold and I’ve talked about taking a penny off the basic rate of income tax.

AM: Every year for five years, that’s what Nigel Lawson did, or just once?
DR: So I would like to raise the National Insurance threshold straight away. The basic rate, take a penny off it straight away. And then over time, subject to the public finances, my ambition would be to get the basic rate down from 20 to 15. And the reason I want to do that is we’ve – hang on, can I just explain why?
AM: I kind of know, you’re a tax-cutting Tory –
AM: No, no, it’s not because of that.
AM: Sorry, the reason I ask –
DR: Can I answer that and then come on to you?
AM: Very quickly, yes.
DR: So we’ve done a terrific record of getting people into work. We’ve got the lowest level of unemployment since I was in nappies – probably not a mental image for your viewers over
croissants and cornflakes – but we know so many of those are struggling with the cost of living. I want to do something that – AM: So that’s why people want them, but can I just put the other side –
DR: I want to give a pay rise to aspirational working Britain.

AM: Let me – Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, reckons that your tax proposals would cost £30 billion a year. And he says – that’s the Institute for Fiscal Studies – ‘after a decade of austerity and with rising costs of population ageing, it seems implausible this could be paid for by further spending cuts. This must mean either extra borrowing or tax rises elsewhere.’ My question is which.

DR: No, I think those are selective snippets. Let me answer it very clearly. The basic rate, taking a penny off, and the National Insurance, would come to around 15 billion. I listened very carefully to the Office of Budgetary Responsibility in March. We’ve got £26 billion worth of headroom within our deficit target. And I listened very – hold on – I listened very carefully to the Chancellor on Tuesday in the House of Commons. Because of the great work that Philip Hammond and previous Chancellors have done, we’ve got actually what he called the luxury of choice about what we do with that headroom, including cutting taxes for working families. That would be my priority.

AM: The numbers are very clear. 5p over 5 years, plus the National Insurance changes adds up to 30 billion.

DR: But I’ve said I would do this as the – after the NI and the first payment on the basic rate, we would have a CSR – Comprehensive Spending Review – we would do that year by year, and I’d only do that when it was responsible with the public finances. I accept that challenge.

AM: You wouldn’t deny that this is a big tax cut offer. My question is what does that do to public spending on services, education, health and so forth? Do they get extra money as well?
DR: So we’re already putting extra money into, for example, health. And there’s an extra billion pounds going into police funding. So the approach that I would take – and you can’t budget on the Andrew Marr Show, as much as I would like to – but the approach that I would do is to cut down the number of Whitehall departments, cut out the bureaucracy. I’d have a special commission looking at public sector procurement, particularly in the NHS and the MOD. And then I want to cycle roughly half of that into frontline services, teachers, schools, nurses, and half of that into tax cuts for the future.

AM: Let me ask you a few quickfire questions on spending issues. HS2, yes or no?  
DR: I would want to review it to make sure we got full value for money, and that its benefits were really seen in the north.

AM: Foreign aid, sticking with 0.7 per cent of GDP, yes or no?  
DR: Yes.

AM: Yes, you’d stick with that. Okay, let me ask you about a really big strategic choice for the country, which is Huawei. We’ve got the Chinese on the one hand wanting to be involved in the 5G services around the country, and the Americans on the other hand warning us strongly not to do it. Which way would you go?  
DR: I would – look, first of all I think that the contracts can be segmented and protected so that nothing – any business, whether it’s Chinese or any other business, can threaten our national security. And I think if you’ve got that protection in place, I think actually we’d want to be open to business. We’ve got Chinese investments, we’ve got Huawei investments already in infrastructure projects. We’ve got international investment going into nuclear reactors and all sorts of other things. I don’t think we want to turn away that international investment. But we do need to make sure absolutely that the contracts are there to protect our security.
AM: Another issue. Here’s something you said in 2009. ‘My name is Dominic Raab, I don’t support the Human Rights Act and I don’t believe in economic and social rights.’ Is that still true?
DR: So that’s in the context of saying that we should have a Bill of Rights which doesn’t just protect –
AM: But is that statement still true?
DR: I’ve explained to you what – you haven’t quoted it all. I believe strongly in civil liberties, but we were talking about a Bill of Rights. Should you upgrade economic and social policy and make them legally enforceable rights? If you do that you give –
AM: Do you believe in the Human Rights Act?
DR: Hold on – you give the power to the judges rather than to elected politicians like me.

AM: Do you believe in the Human Rights Act?
DR: I think it should be reformed. I want to protect our civil liberties. I’d actually have stronger protections –
AM: So you’d scrap it and bring something else in?
DR: I’d actually have stronger protections for things like free speech and jury trail. But I do think there is areas where actually the courts have taken over with judicial expansion of rights where we should have more democratic accountability. But look, we’ve got a – let me also be clear about this – we’ve got a minority government, this isn’t something that we could do without an election, a proper mandate, without thinking it through in a manifesto.

AM: More recently, 2011, you told the Politics Show: ‘from the cradle to the grave men are getting a raw deal. Feminists are now amongst the most obnoxious bigots.’ Do you still think that?
DR: I think it’s really important that in the debate on equality we have a consistency and not double standards and hypocrisy. I think that’s really important, something as important as equality. And just on the practical side of it, I’ve been supporting Maria
Miller – hold up, the Equality Select Committee chair this week saying we should have more protections for new mums, and also saying paternity leave for dad should be a day one right.

AM: At the moment the Conservative Party’s looking around, it’s looking at Nigel Farage and it’s really worried about all of that and so on, and they’re looking for somebody who’s going to be a big charismatic national figure. You and Boris Johnson have more or less the same policy on Brexit, you agree on lots of other things. Why would they go for Dominic Raab and not for Boris Johnson?

DR: Well, I think if you look at some of the polling, I think I’m a less known figure, and actually I think I can appeal to those aspirational low and middle income families in this country. I think I’ve got the conviction, the vision. I think I’ve probably set out more about what the fair society and the fair economy looks like for workers and for young people in this country. But also, I’m a details man. I’m a lawyer, I’ve done these negotiations before.

AM: And are you implying that he is not?

DR: No, I’m just talking to my strengths. I’m not going badmouth any other candidate. I’m going to adhere to Reagan’s 11th Commandment: never speak ill of a fellow Conservative.

AM: Dominic Raab, there’ll be lots of fellow Conservatives out there making their judgement right now. But for now, thanks very much indeed.

(ends)