ANDREW MARR:
Now Douglas Alexander is one of the key power brokers in the Labour Party and the man officially in charge of the party’s election campaign. He’s had a boost this morning from Ed Miliband’s performance in last week’s TV special when the Labour Leader surprised some people by biting back at a snarling Jeremy Paxman. But with Nicola Sturgeon surging in Scotland, there’s a lot still for Labour to do. Douglas Alexander joins me now.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Good morning.

ANDREW MARR:
So you will have seen this morning Nicola Sturgeon, front page of Scotland on Sunday saying that they will be the “guts and the backbone” of the Labour Party in power. How do you respond to that?
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well if you want a Labour government, you have to vote for a Labour government. Nicola’s strategy seems to be to say if you’re in England, you should vote Green. Alex Salmond said at the last election in England, you should vote for the Liberal Democrats. I’ve got a very different message: if you want a Labour government, vote for a Labour government.

ANDREW MARR:
And yet the polls are not really shifting much in Scotland, are they? You may very well see a lot of your colleagues, your valued colleagues in Scotland kind of taken out and slaughtered in this election campaign and replaced by SNP MPs. Now we know you’re not going to have a coalition with them. Some kind of supply and support arrangement might be put in place or not. But either way, you’re going to have to negotiate with the SNP quite possibly if you’re going to form the next government.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Listen, a lot of what you’ve heard from Alex Salmond – who seems to be setting the policy on this, not Nicola Sturgeon – has a lot more to do with campaigning than with governing. Their real agenda is certainly to drive down the Labour vote in Scotland, but I would suggest it’s also to drive up the Tory vote here in England. Why? Because, perfectly reasonably, as nationalists they remain committed to a second referendum. They want Scotland to have a second chance, as Alex Salmond said this week, and therefore they would much, much rather have an unsuccessful Tory government than a successful Labour government.

ANDREW MARR:
So you think when Nicola Sturgeon gives her generous offer to left wing …

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
(over) She’s trying to win Labour votes.

ANDREW MARR:
… she’s actually lying? She really …
DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well no, she’s trying to win Labour votes. But the fact is she said that you should vote Green here in England; Alex Salmond said that you should vote for the Liberal Democrats. The truth is their strategy seems to be anybody but Labour in order to get a Labour government. They’re perfectly entitled to pursue what strategy they choose, but I think the rest of us should take it with a large barrel of salt.

ANDREW MARR:
Coming back to the possible post-electoral situation, can you possibly envisage, could you physically stand sitting beside Alex Salmond or Nicola Sturgeon arguing on a vote by vote basis for what you as a Labour government were allowed to do?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well we’ve ruled out a coalition with the Scottish National Party. They effectively did the same with Labour. But as the polls this morning indicate, this is a winnable election for Labour. It is difficult …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Even in Scotland?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… but it is certainly doable that we can get a majority. And we are confident that as we set out the core argument of this campaign, that Britain succeeds, working families succeed, we can actually grow our numbers in the coming weeks.

ANDREW MARR:
Well let’s talk about other kinds of numbers because in your article this morning in Scotland on Sunday, you very much say that Labour is going to be the anti-austerity party, you’re going to end Tory austerity; and yet your party signed up for the fiscal tightening agreement in the House of Commons, which implies a £30 billion either tax rises or cuts.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well actually Paul Johnson on that sofa just disputed that analysis of the charge of
fiscal responsibility. The fact is if you recognise you need to get the current budget in balance, that does not imply what the Tories are doing, which is deeper cuts over the next 3 years than even over the last 5 years. But let’s look at the specifics. How do we end austerity? Take the example of Scotland: £200 million more for the health service in Scotland - my local hospital’s facing a crisis at the moment - funded …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) That’s about spending …

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Yeah. … funded specifically by a mansion tax across the UK as well as other specific tax measures we’ve proposed. So if you’re going to deliver social justice in Scotland, you have to be clear where those taxes are coming from and how you’re going to fund your proposals. Look at, for example …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) But to be absolutely … Sorry.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
... 59,000 young people out of work in Scotland.

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Okay. But to be absolutely clear, however …

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
(over) That can be funded with the bankers’ bonus tax.

ANDREW MARR:
… there is this huge deficit hanging over the British economy. You regard that as a problem which has to be dealt with, yes?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Yes.
ANDREW MARR:
And you don’t want to deal with it mainly by spending cuts?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well we’ve said that we’ll do so in three different ways. First of all, there will be fair taxation – for example reversing the millionaires’ tax cut. Secondly, there will be spending …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) Just … sorry.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
(over) Just let me finish the answer. There will be spending reductions in non-protected departments. But, thirdly and critically, we will also run a different kind of economy because one of the reasons that the Conservatives have so abjectly failed to deliver their deficit reduction plans is because we’re running a low wage, low skill economy. So whether that is ending exploitative zero hours contracts, whether it’s raising the minimum wage to £8, we will put in place measures that means that actually wages can rise and thereby people contribute to dealing with the deficit.

ANDREW MARR:
So let’s take these in order. I mean you’ve talked about tax rises, but they are – in terms of the overall impact on government budget – still pretty small tax rises you’re talking about, and yet you have ruled out as a party VAT, you’ve ruled out changing income tax rates, you’ve ruled out all the big tax rises. Which when people look at you, they say hold on a second, you say the deficit’s important, you don’t want to make the deep cuts the Tories do, but you won’t raise taxes either. The numbers simply don’t add up.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well, unlike the Conservatives, every single one of Labour’s manifesto commitments has been specifically funded and agreed. Indeed the IFS have said …
ANDREW MARR:

(over) But beyond that, you have to deal with the deficit.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

… we are the most cautious in our assumptions. That’s right and we’ve said that we’ll deal with the deficit in three ways. There will be fair taxation, but there will also be reductions and non-protected department budgets year on year until we …

ANDREW MARR:

So tell us where, tell me where those reductions will happen.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well, for example – I know you’ve got Iain Duncan Smith on – we’ve said that the winter fuel allowance shouldn’t be paid to those pensioners who have incomes of £42,000 or more. We’ve said …

ANDREW MARR:

(over) You may well be right, but that’s a very, very small amount of money.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well let me give you another example. Child benefit, we’ve said, would be limited to a 1 per cent rise for 2 years. We’ve also got a zero based review that’s looking across every department. We could save hundreds of millions of pounds from the department of local government here in England by making sure that we’ve got more effective back office systems. That’s even before we’ve had the chance to look at the government books. So there are ways that we can save money.

ANDREW MARR:

What about the great big capital spending projects like HS2, like the modernisation of Trident? Do they carry on definitely under a Labour government?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:

Well we, as Paul Johnson recognised, have differentiated between capital expenditure and day to day expenditure because we do think it is necessary to remove waste in government but, on the other hand, continue to invest in the drivers of growth. And if
we don’t have capital expenditure, then we’ll have the kind of low growth that we’ve seen in the course of this parliament.

ANDREW MARR:
But we’re not going to see any more substantial promises or clear promises on cuts from Labour in the course of this election campaign? You’ve said what you’ve said and that’s it, is it?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well we’ve set out our agenda and that’s the programme on which we’ll fight the election.

ANDREW MARR:
So no more cuts to come? Now Ed Miliband clearly had a better night than perhaps many people expected with Jeremy Paxman and there’s been a poll boost here. Whether or not it’s going to be sustained, we’ll see. Now how do you, as campaign coordinator, how do you deal with Ed Miliband from now on? Do you try and find ways to get him up against David Cameron? What’s your plan for Ed?

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Well I reaffirm this morning in this studio our offer to David Cameron for a head to head television debate …

ANDREW MARR:
Of course you do!

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
… before polling day. And I think we saw on Thursday evening why David Cameron is doing everything in his power to avoid a head to head debate between the two men who could be the prime minister of the country on May 8th. So I welcome the opportunity to a further debate. But listen, this is an opportunity to communicate a clear argument, which is a fundamental difference between the parties. The Tories genuinely believe if you look out for people at the top, the whole country does well. We believe that Britain succeeds when working people succeed and that’s going to be at the heart of what Ed and all of us say in the coming 6 weeks.
**ANDREW MARR:**
On Thursday you have a rather strange debate now with seven party leaders all standing together or sitting together on the same platform. Who is your main target? Who do you go for – Cameron or Sturgeon?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
The people we’ll be talking to are the people of Britain because we relish the opportunity, frankly unmediated by the written press, to make our case to the British public.

**ANDREW MARR:**
And you think the more people see Ed Miliband, the better you will do. But my question remains who is your main target of assault during that rather complicated, many sided debate?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
Well the main challenge, the main challenge in this election and in this debate is to get rid of this disliked, discredited Conservative government. And the alternative is a Labour government because the truth under all of the psephology, all of the numbers is we’re either going to have a Labour government or a Tory government. The fact is we do believe this is a winnable election. We're working and planning to secure a majority Labour government and the next debate this week provides us with a further opportunity to make that case to the people of Britain.

**ANDREW MARR:**
Okay. And if the people of Scotland against what you hope and believe do elect many SNP MPs after that election and you have to deal with them, would you personally sit down and negotiate case by case with the SNP?

**DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:**
I’m not going to play Alex Salmond’s game. This is the Marr Show, not Match of the Day Two. I’m not going to engage in post-match analysis before the game has
actually begun. We’re working for a majority in every part of the United Kingdom.

ANDREW MARR:
Douglas Alexander, thank you very much indeed for joining us.

DOUGLAS ALEXANDER:
Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS