SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Now listening to that was the President of the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron, who’s spent a considerable amount of time in Eastleigh out and about helping to ensure victory for his party, and he joins me now from his home in Cumbria. You must be exhausted after the week you have had and somewhat relieved. You held on.

TIM FARRON:
Yeah, I think more than relief, Sophie. I thought this was a by-election where there was no score draw, there was no away point on the table - we either you know lost by a bit and it was dreadful or we won by however much and it be almost unspeakable triumph. So I think it is a game changing result for us from Eastleigh for the Liberal Democrats because although it’s only a by-election and it’s important to emphasise it doesn’t mean absolutely everything, but you can read quite a lot from Eastleigh with regard to seats that are like Eastleigh - in other words the other 56 seats the Lib-Dems hold and perhaps those other 20 or 30 (maybe a few more) Conservative held seats where the Lib-Dems are second. So this vindicates I guess the position we’ve taken, which is that it was a tough thing to go into government, the alternatives were worse,
and it was far better for us to campaign for the right things in power than to sit on the sidelines.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
It was …

TIM FARRON:
And it shows you know you can take power and you can win elections.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Well but it was far from a triumph though, wasn’t it? I mean you lost … Your vote plummeted. You lost … I think half of the people who voted for you in the General Election didn’t vote for you this time.

TIM FARRON:
Sophie, I’m guessing you’ve read the papers this last week. We managed to win an election against the backdrop of all that. If the Tories can’t beat us after the week we’ve had, crumbs. It is massive, massive for us, and actually quite massive for the Conservatives as well to have come you know third in a two-horse race.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
But you were very dug in there, weren’t you? I mean Eastleigh, you hold all the council seats. It is very much your seat. Nationally you’re still polling very badly.

TIM FARRON:
Well Eastleigh is a good microcosm of what Liberal Democrat seats are like. I mean here in Westmorland where I’m talking to you from now, we have a situation where Liberal Democrats work hard on the ground. We communicate with people regularly, not just when there’s an election, and that’s what Liberal Democrat seats are like. That’s why you can’t read into the Eastleigh results all that much for the majority of the seats in this country. You can read an awful lot into what it’s like in seats the Liberal Democrats hold and the Liberal Democrats target. So it’s obviously a great result for us and …

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
But my point …

**TIM FARRON:**
… but it’s also something that we just need to not be complacent about.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Yeah, absolutely, because my point is nationally you still do poll very badly. In that sense, it doesn’t look great ahead of a General Election, does it?

**TIM FARRON:**
Well I mean you know Nigel Farage and I were on the same side of the AV referendum and that was a refreshing, nice thing to do. We didn’t win though. And that reminds us that we have an electoral system that doesn’t reward you on the number of votes you get, the number of seats you have, and our job is to make sure that whilst the system is unfair, we’ve got to make use of it to the best of our advantage. And that means making sure that our fortresses are firm and Eastleigh shows that Lib-Dem fortresses are firm.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
So …

**TIM FARRON:**
It was interesting really. More than any other by-election I’ve ever taken part in, there were national issues on the agenda there - in our leaflets, not just the local stuff - and the national issue predominantly was about taxation - the Liberal Democrats’ plans for fairer tax, lower taxes for middle income and lower income people versus the Tories’ plans for tax cuts for the wealthy …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Okay, so with …

**TIM FARRON:**
… and it was interesting that we managed to cut through on that.
SOPHIE RAWORTH:
Sorry to interrupt, but with those firm fortresses you referred to, does that mean that that now gives you more muscle in negotiations with your coalition partners?

TIM FARRON:
Well I would hope so. I mean the message from Eastleigh surely in the run up to the Budget is that it is not popular to offer tax cuts to the wealthy, which I think George Osborne is minded to do. It is popular to give tax cuts - and it’s not only popular, it’s sensible - to give tax cuts to people on middle incomes and on the lowest incomes. It’s fair, but it also would help the economy because people on lower incomes spend the money they have. The rich people go and blow it on villas in Tuscany.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
So are we going to see then in the run-up to the Budget, I mean are we going to see the Lib-Dem hand firmly on you know what is announced at the Budget? Are we going to see you resisting moves to cut welfare further to shore up the defence budget, for example?

TIM FARRON:
Well that’d be a ludicrous thing to do. I heard Philip Hammond making those comments. And you think at a time like this to think that it’s more important to be you know investing, I don’t know, money into Trident or something like that rather than protecting those people who are the least well off in our society, that would be morally wrong as well as just economically stupid. So yes we do need to resist things like that. We also though need to behave in a collegiate way and be magnanimous. It is just an election. David Cameron must be tempted by us to remain on the centre ground or to move towards the centre ground and not listen to siren voices from the right. That would be a very foolish thing for the country. Actually if he’ll listen to advice from me, it would be a very foolish thing for the Conservative Party to lurch to the right.

SOPHIE RAWORTH:
And if ahead of a General Election … I mean one of the key things you obviously will have to do is to make it very clear that you may be in a coalition but you are very
different in your approach, and one of those ways that you could do that is the mansion tax. Now will you be voting with Labour on the mansion tax? They’re very keen to push this through.

**TIM FARRON:**
Well Labour have interestingly tried to copy a lot of our ideas and they’ve put I think a plan through to parliament in an opposition debate to support a mansion tax. And that’s a very interesting thing. Normally speaking, we take opposition day motions as the mischief that they are and we don’t necessarily vote for them, but you know we’re all ears and I don’t think …

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
(over) So you could have a real impact here. Will you vote with them?

**TIM FARRON:**
We’re all ears, shall we say. I mean my view is not that we should be lured into any kind of parliamentary trap by Labour, but then again sometimes you just have to look at things at face value. So we’ll see, Sophie.

**SOPHIE RAWORTH:**
Tim Farron, thank you very much.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**