

Alun Cairns: Delivering a better connected Wales

Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

"It's a pleasure to be here and I'm delighted to see so many of our Welsh membership here in Birmingham.

I want to take this opportunity to thank all those who are involved in the Party in Wales, our Chairman Byron Davies and my Ministerial team, Mims Davies and Lord Bourne and my PPS Glyn Davies.

I want to pay tribute to Andrew RT Davies – recognising his service to the Party and his commitment to holding a tired Welsh Labour Government to account.

And it was a privilege to hear Paul Davies yesterday address Conference as the new leader of the Welsh Conservative Group in the Assembly.

This year will bring new political leaders in every party in Wales – UKIP have gone through three!

And whilst we will have a new First Minister we can expect the same old Welsh Labour with the same old tired policies, chasing yesterday's economy. And if anything, a further lurch to the left as the front runner is a fully signed up Corbynista.

The only way to deliver better public services, more jobs and investment and a stronger Union, is to elect Welsh Conservatives and Paul Davies as the next First Minister of Wales.

Amongst all these leadership changes and personalities let me be clear, as we leave the EU the Union of the UK is more important than ever before.

This principle is at the heart of the Prime Minister's agenda.

From her first day on the steps of Downing Street to the negotiating table in Brussels, the Prime Minister has been clear that it's the Conservative and Unionist Party who believes in the precious bond between our four nations.

Being part of the Union of the UK has delivered:

- A new funding settlement for Wales – putting right the unfair funding Labour oversaw for many years;
- We will have City or Growth Deals in every corner of Wales; and
- Looking to the industries of tomorrow we have a thriving compound semi-conductor cluster in South Wales and a nuclear arc in the North

including the new multi-billion-pound plant on Anglesey which will power the UK.

But as we seek frictionless trade in Europe we find within our own union an economic and psychological barrier. To cross into South Wales hauliers were paying £20 and commuters thousands of pounds a year.

Last year we committed to deliver a toll-free crossing into Wales and today I'm delighted to announce that the Severn tolls will be scrapped on 17 December 2018.

This decision will not only bring our nations together but it will immediately boost the economy of South Wales by £100 million a year.

And it sends a powerful message to businesses, commuters and tourists alike that South Wales and the West of England – this Great Western Gateway, this Severnside Super Region, this global hub – are truly open for business.

With this focus on the Union it is little wonder that:

- Wales is the fastest growing part of the UK outside London;
- Employment is at a record high; and
- Unemployment is below the UK average

Conference, this shows what Conservatives in Government can deliver.

We are working to build a stronger, fairer country where if you work hard and do the right thing you have the opportunity of living in a united, fair and outward-looking country – where we come together so all four nations thrive after Brexit and we stand tall and strong in the world.

Conference, thank you, diolch yn fawr iawn."

ENDS

For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.