

Taking on Trump & Farage – and fixing church roofs



I've just come off stage after my speech to close our spring conference in Harrogate.

It's been a fantastic weekend, and it's wonderful to see our party in such good health and high spirits. We made a big decision for our future success, with members overwhelmingly endorsing proposals to improve the way we select parliamentary candidates – 80% of votes were in favour.

But there is no doubt that three dark spectres hang over our politics at the moment – and these were the focus of my speech:

Donald Trump – bullying, narcissistic and unpredictable. Vladimir Putin – a murderous tyrant waging war on Ukraine. And Nigel Farage, who worships them both.

Farage and Reform's destructive, divisive politics poses an enormous threat to the future of our country. We know where it all will lead, if we don't stop it.

That's why our liberal, internationalist values are so important right now. They are the antidote to Trump and Farage's destructive nationalism.



And it's why our trademark community politics are so important too. **Liberal Democrats working hard for our communities and putting our values into action.** That's how you defeat cynicism and give people real hope.

Kemi Badenoch mocked us as people who fix the local church roof – and that's exactly who we are. People who care about our communities, and get things done.

Kemi Badenoch thinks that's beneath her, and so does the whole Conservative Party. That's why we won 60 seats off them last July, and why we must kick them out at May's local elections too.

We're in a battle for the future of our country – and with your help, it's a battle I know we can win.

Read Ed's Full Speech

We meet at a time of great peril. For our continent, and for our country.

Because Donald Trump is not only betraying Ukraine. It's not only their sovereignty he's selling out. It's our security. The security of Europe and the security of our United Kingdom.

And that is unforgivable.

Putin might be able to fool Donald Trump into thinking that his ambitions do not extend beyond parts of Ukraine, but we know better. Just look at what he's already doing in Georgia, in Moldova, in Romania – undermining their democracies and seeking to extend his grip further into Europe.

Our brave Ukrainian allies are on the frontline. Fighting not just for their homes. Not just for their freedom. But for the freedom and security of people across Europe, including ours here in the UK. Their fight is our fight.

So to our Ukrainian friends, on behalf of all Liberal Democrats, let me say once again – We thank you. We salute you. We stand with you. Today. Tomorrow. Always.

And of course, that solidarity must go beyond mere words. That's why I am proud that the United Kingdom has been Ukraine's staunchest ally right from the start. Why I am so proud of the tens of thousands of British families who welcomed Ukrainians into their homes. Showing the incredible warmth and generosity of the British people. Why I am proud of all the military assistance we have given to the Ukrainian armed forces – the tanks and training, missiles and drones to repel Putin's war machine. And it's why I was proud that the Prime Minister brought Europe and Canada together here in Britain to chart a way forward, the day after those appalling scenes of Trump and Vance ambushing President Zelenskyy in the Oval Office.

And Trump's so-called "special envoy" might dismiss British leadership as pointless posturing, but we know what it really is... Britain, leading in Europe again, as we have done at the greatest moments in our nation's history. And friends, it was good to see that again after such a long time, wasn't it?

But now we must step up our efforts and do more. Much more. For the defence of Ukraine, for the defence of Europe, and for our own national defence too.

So we Liberal Democrats have led calls for far more support for Ukraine – funded by the tens of billions of pounds of Russian assets frozen in the UK, and the hundreds of billions of pounds frozen across the G7. We backed proposals for a new European Rearmament Bank, to finance a massive expansion of defence manufacturing here at home and across the continent. We pressed the Government to raise defence spending to 2.5% of GDP – and now we are continuing to push for cross-party talks to get it to 3%.

Because the threat we face is existential.

To our east, a murderous dictator hellbent on building a new Russian empire – and committing atrocities on European soil in pursuit of it. And to our west, for the first time in my life, a President of the United States willing not merely to turn a blind eye to Putin's aggression – but actually to praise it. A President who has repeatedly demonstrated that he is not a reliable ally to Ukraine, to Britain, to Europe, or to anyone else.

So the fundamental questions we now face are these:

How do we deal with Putin?

And how do we deal with Trump?

Well, let me tell you how not to deal with them. Just like any bully, you don't deal with them by curling up in a ball and hoping they'll leave you alone. You don't turn a blind eye as they attack your friends, praying that maybe they'll stop there. You have to stand up. Stand tough. Stand together with our friends. Make clear that an attack on one is an attack on all.

And that – for the vast majority of people in our country – is our instinctive response. Brits can't stand a bully.

What Trump and Putin are doing offends our fundamental British values of decency, fair play, respect for national sovereignty and the rule of law. Almost everyone I speak to – in every part of our country – feels that way. But there is one man who thinks differently.

One lone holdout. Someone who simply doesn't seem to get it. A man who splits his time between GB News, Mar-a-Lago... and weirdly selling nappies on social media, apparently. A man who can even, legend has it, occasionally be spotted in the House of Commons and – if you wait long enough – in the town of Clacton-on-Sea. Nigel Farage.

Unlike you and me, Nigel Farage thinks Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are great. Not in a “look, we have to be pragmatic and work with them” kind of way. More in a teenager with a celebrity crush kind of way.

Don't forget, when Farage was asked which world leader he most admired, his answer was Vladimir Putin. Yes, really. Now, to be fair, that was before Donald Trump became President – so I guess Putin might have slipped to number two by now.

A tyrant responsible for the brutal suppression of Russia's own people, and countless atrocities in Ukraine. Who has murdered thousands of innocent civilians. And abducted 20,000 children from their homes. Snatched them away from their families.

That, apparently, is the sort of man who wins Nigel Farage's admiration.

How despicable. How completely out-of-touch with British values. With human values. How unpatriotic. How deeply un-British. And this from a man who thinks he can be our Prime Minister. Not on our watch.

With war on our continent, an unpredictable President in the White House, and an increasingly volatile world... This is no time for a nationalist.

We need real British patriotism instead. At home and abroad, our country has big problems to solve. And let's be absolutely clear: Nigel Farage is not the least bit interested in solving them.

If Farage had his way, he would turn our great country into little more than a Donald Trump tribute act. He has said it himself: he sees Trump as his

inspiration. He wants to do to Britain what Trump is doing to America: All the division. The nasty culture-war nonsense. The economic self-harm of tariffs. Cruelty for the sake of being cruel. Siding with criminals and undermining the rule of law. And of course, limiting your access to healthcare. And making you pay more for it.

Farage doesn't like to talk about it much these days, but he has been very clear throughout his long political career that he doesn't believe in the fundamental NHS principle of universal healthcare free at the point of use. He's called for an American-style insurance-based model. He says he's "open to anything" when it comes to the future of the NHS – including privatisation. Just like his idol Donald would want.

And apart from that, isn't it striking that Farage has nothing to say about the challenges facing our NHS? Nothing to say about how to make sure people can actually see a doctor or a dentist when they need one. Nothing to say about ambulance delays or crumbling hospitals. Nothing to say about fixing social care, so that our loved ones get the care they need and carers get the support they deserve. And I mean literally – nothing to say.

Farage has never uttered the word "care" once in Parliament. Because the truth is: Nigel Farage doesn't care.

He hasn't mentioned the "NHS" once either – or GPs, hospitals, ambulances, dentists. Imagine that. A political party whose leader has nothing at all to say on one of the biggest issues on people's lips, and the biggest challenges we face. Our country has big problems to solve. And Nigel Farage is not the least bit interested in solving them.

But friends, that's not the worst of it, is it? What worries us most about Farage and Reform is the deeply destructive, divisive brand of politics they deploy.

The weaponisation of difference. The demonisation of diversity. The scapegoating of "the other". The superficial, simplistic, snake-oil solutions they peddle. We know where it all will lead, if we don't stop it.

We know what happens when cynical, opportunistic politicians seize on the struggles and the anxieties of ordinary people – Anxieties about the cost of living. About cultural and technological change. About sovereignty and security. When they exploit those struggles and anxieties for their own selfish ends – When they point the finger of blame at those who differ from you because of their religion or their nationality or the colour of their skin – When they teach that those people threaten your job or your family or your way of life – When they manipulate new forms of media to spread lies, sow fear and stir hatred – When they use those tools to convince you that their cause alone is righteous and all who stand against them are evil... We know where that ends.

We have seen it before across history – too many times. It is the populist playbook, and its pages are very well-worn. It is ugly. It is powerful. And it is incredibly destructive. Not only to the groups they target – the

vulnerable, the minorities – but ultimately to us all. To our whole society. To the very idea of liberal democracy that our United Kingdom embodies.

And if this sounds alarmist or over-the-top, remember this: It always starts that way.

With a reasonable, even beguiling face. With an appeal to “common sense” and “plain speaking”. But if allowed to take root, it grows and mutates with such speed and ferocity, till it fills every crack in the foundations of our country... Until those cracks become chasms.

And what is broken can never be mended. So we know where it leads. We know what is at stake. Not just an election. Not just a set of policies. But the very future of liberal democracy itself.

That is what’s under threat. And friends – Liberal Democrats – it falls to us to save it.

Because with the Conservatives desperately chasing Reform’s tail – And Labour sounding more and more like them every day – We Liberal Democrats are the only ones with the courage and the conviction to stand up and offer something different. Offer a positive alternative. Something better... Hope.

And here’s the good news – Because I know it can feel like the tides of history are against us right now. I know that when you look at Trump in America, Le Pen in France, the AfD in Germany, Reform here in the UK – When the headlines are so often so bleak – It can be tempting to give in to despair.

Well the good news is this: What we can offer people is even more powerful than all their lies. All their false promises. The easy answers of the populist right. Even more powerful, and even more popular. Real hope.

Hope based not on empty rhetoric or magical thinking – But on hard work and concrete action that people can see making a difference to their lives and to their communities.

That’s what good old-fashioned Liberal Democrat community politics has always been all about. Winning people’s trust by getting things done. Showing them what liberal democracy can do for them – not by talking about it, but by rolling up our sleeves and actually doing it. Putting our policies into practice and our ideals into action.

I don’t know if you heard what Kemi Badenoch said about us recently. Did you hear this?

She said – and I quote: “A typical Liberal Democrat will be somebody who is good at fixing their church roof. And people in the community like them.”

Good at fixing the church roof. People in the community like them.

I think she meant it as an insult! But I’ll happily wear it as a badge of honour.

Because she's right. Liberal Democrats fix things.

And isn't it telling, that attitude from the Leader of the Conservative Party?

Not that she doesn't like us – I'm not surprised about that. She's got good reason not to like the Liberal Democrats... After all, we did take 60 seats off them last July! I'll say that again, Conference... We took 60 seats off the Conservatives! So you can hardly blame them for being a bit upset!

But what I'm talking about is the sneering attitude of the Leader of the Conservatives. The sneering attitude that says fixing church roofs is somehow beneath her. Even beneath politics altogether. That what happens in our communities is trivial and insignificant compared to debating the true meaning of conservatism on Twitter.

And it goes far beyond Kemi Badenoch and church roofs. It's the whole Conservative Party – whether in Westminster or in town halls and county halls across the country. They have abandoned our communities.

The Conservatives left schools and hospitals to crumble. Left whole areas without enough GPs or dentists. Left water companies to pump filthy sewage into our rivers and seas. And they have left decent, traditional Conservatives without a political home.

Their out-of-touch, disdainful thinking is why the Conservative Party is in the mess it is today. Treating the day-to-day things that matter in people's lives not just with indifference, but outright contempt.

It's why so many lifelong Conservative voters have turned to the Liberal Democrats. It's why people rightly kicked them out of government last July – And why we must kick them out of our councils in May too.

But that Conservative disdain and neglect is also what has opened the door to Reform. And that's why it's so important that we Liberal Democrats are rooted in our communities, getting things done.

Fixing the church roof – and much more besides. Showing people that politics can work for them. That who they vote for can make a difference. That their voice matters.

That is how you defeat the populists. How you drain away the cynicism that feeds them. How you win back people's trust and restore their hope.

It's not easy, our way of doing politics.

Liberal Democrat MPs certainly have to spend a lot more time in our constituencies than Nigel Farage spends in Clacton – although I admit that's a low bar.

That's why no one ever joins the Liberal Democrats as a shortcut to high office. And if that's why any of you are here today, I'm sorry to have to let you down like this.

We join because we want to make a difference to our communities and our country. Even though we know it's hard work.

And we join – we all joined – because of a genuine belief in the core Liberal values that have made our country great: Freedom and equality. Community and internationalism. A commitment to human rights, to the environment, and to democracy. And those values are exactly what this moment in history demands.

At a time when people are facing so many daily challenges on so many different fronts – The cost of living crisis. An economy that is still barely growing. Public services that just aren't working the way they should. Opportunity that feels further and further out of reach for too many young people.

These are challenges that can really test our values. When people feel so economically insecure. When times are so tough. Historically these are the times that liberalism has struggled, that progress has stumbled. But these are the times when our liberal values are needed more than ever.

To build the fair, free and open society we all believe in. So that people can get on in life – with real power to make their own choices and pursue their own dreams.

Because we understand that if you free people – If you empower them to make their voices heard and hold the powerful properly to account – Then you unleash the best in people and create a better society and a stronger economy as a result.

So that everyone gets a fair deal. Every child gets the best possible start in life, and everyone sees their hard work and aspiration properly rewarded. Everyone gets the care they need when they need it, and a helping hand if they fall on tough times.

And friends, how critical are our Liberal, internationalist values right now?

Not just on Ukraine and defending Europe from Putin – critical though that is. But on so many big, global challenges – from the rise of China to the threat of climate change to the risks of artificial intelligence.

These are challenges that no nation can afford to ignore. And challenges that no nation can tackle alone. Pulling up the drawbridge simply isn't an option. Like I said, this is no time for a nationalist.

What we need is a movement of proud internationalists – People who believe that our country and our people thrive when we are open and outward-looking. Who know that the UK can be an incredible force for good when it stands tall on the world stage. And stands up for what is right. Who recognise that the concerns of one nation inevitably become the concerns of all nations. A movement of proud internationalists. And Liberal Democrats, that is who we are.

The only party that has consistently opposed the Conservatives' damaging Brexit deal from the start. The only party arguing for a new deal with the

EU, with a Customs Union at its heart – putting us on a path back to the Single Market. The only party still championing international aid, after first the Conservatives and now Labour shamefully cut it.

And friends, we're the only party in British politics speaking up in defiance of Donald Trump. The only ones willing to state the obvious truth: that he is no leader of the free world. I mean, this is a man who stands on the White House drive, flogging Teslas for Elon Musk like a particularly bad used car salesman. It's hardly "Ask not what your country can do for you", is it?

And more despicably, this is a man who halted shipments of food, medicine and other essential aid supplies to people around the world who desperately need them. Locking whole shipping containers in port for their contents to rot. So much for Ronald Reagan's "shining city on a hill".

And remember – this is the man Nigel Farage calls his "inspiration". We're the only ones willing to say that Trump cannot be relied upon to play by the rules, or stick to agreements. That his presidency is a threat to peace and prosperity in the UK, across Europe, and around the world. And that we must deal with him as he is. Bullying. Narcissistic. Unpredictable. We must deal with Trump from a position of strength, not weakness.

Like on trade. If there's one thing we know, it's that Donald Trump loves tariffs. He says it's "the most beautiful word in the dictionary"...

Which, when you think about it, really is a very Donald Trump way of deciding your economic policy, isn't it?

Now, as Liberals, we profoundly disagree. After all, it was the Victorian Liberals who overturned centuries of protectionism and ushered in a new era of free trade and prosperity. We can already see the damage Trump's tariffs are doing to the US economy, with forecasters saying he may plunge it into recession. And we fear the damage his trade war could do to the world economy, impacting jobs and living standards here in the UK too.

So the question, again, is how do we deal with him?

And the answer, we say again, is from a position of strength. Regrettably, that's not Labour's strategy. They say: "Let's be nice to him and hope he won't hurt us".

Now Labour's even talking about scrapping Britain's tax on social media giants. Changing the UK's tax policy to appease Donald Trump – and Elon Musk. Well appeasement never works with bullies, and it doesn't work with Trump – as his tariffs on British steel already show.

And let me say this to Elon Musk, who I know is my biggest fan... We will make out-of-control social media giants like you pay more – so we can defend our children and young people from the harm you're causing them.

But it's not just Labour bending the knee to this White House. It's the Conservatives too. They'd have us go to Mar-a-Lago, begging bowl outstretched, pleading for a trade deal on whatever terms Trump will give us.

The Conservatives would sell out British farmers to President Trump, just as they sold them out in their damaging trade deals with Australia and New Zealand. And then they'd let Trump's billionaire mates carve up the NHS between them.

Another Elon Musk rebrand, this time to NH-X.

More and more appeasement – in the futile hope it would protect us from more Trump tariffs in future. But we know it wouldn't. Of course it wouldn't.

Just look at how he's treated Canada – a steadfast ally who fought fascism alongside the US and the UK. He has hit them with outrageous tariffs, breaking the trade deal between their two countries. Because he doesn't like the deal, so he doesn't think he has to stick to it.

Last month he asked "who would ever sign a thing like this". The answer, of course, is you did Donald. Only five years ago. His signature means nothing.

So no, a bad Trump deal won't protect us from tariffs. And playing nice, being weak, is no way to deal with him either. So let's stand up to Trump. Let's stand side by side with the EU and with our Commonwealth ally Canada. I urge the Prime Minister to bring those leaders together here in the UK to agree a coordinated response to Trump's trade war – just like he's rightly done on Putin's murderous war. As others have done, we should hit back with tariffs of our own – starting with those Teslas Trump is so desperate to sell.

And Conference, let's put ourselves in the strongest possible position by rebuilding our trade with Europe – Strengthening British businesses and showing Trump we have other options.

So you see, when it comes to dealing with Trump – as with the other looming threats in the world right now – it is our liberal belief in internationalism that offers the solution. Conference, with Trump in the White House and Farage leading a Trump tribute act here in the UK – Our role in British politics has never been more essential. Our precious liberal values are the only antidote to their destructive nationalism. Our trademark community politics is the only way to defeat their cynical populism.

The threat they pose is grave. The challenge before us is great. This is a battle of competing values. A battle of competing visions. A battle for the future.

We didn't choose this fight. But friends, I know you are up for it. I know together we can win it.

For the future of our democracy. For the good of our communities. For the love of our country. Let's go to battle.

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Taking on Trump

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Free To Be Who You Are

The freedom to live your life as the person that you are, secure in the knowledge that their fundamental rights will be protected is not a lot to ask.

But in our country there are still too many people for whom that is an aspiration.

Our LGBTQ+ community face prejudice, discrimination and hostility simply because of who they are.

Their health care, their housing, even their education can all be affected.

But today I believe we have taken an important step forward in protecting vital rights and setting out how our government should deliver a positive future for everyone in the LGBTQ+ community.

Our policy paper: 'Free To Be Who You Are' sets out how we will continue to pursue that Liberal Democrat goal of a society where nobody's life chances are limited or constrained because of who they are.

Liberal Democrats have been at the forefront of each of the great strides the UK has made towards LGBTQ+ equality. It was Ed Davey in 2003 who proposed the clause which finally repealed "Section 28", the Conservatives' law which prohibited the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities.

Lynne Featherstone – the first ever Liberal Democrat Equalities Minister – was the driving force behind the legislation that made Same Sex marriage happen.

And it was the former Liberal Democrat MP John Leech who spearheaded the campaign to pardon Alan Turing and Lib Dem peer Lord Sharkey, tabled the amendment to the Policing and Crime Act 2017 which posthumously pardoned thousands of gay men who had been criminalised for their sexuality.

Our party had been pushing to lift the ban on men who have sex with men's ability to donate blood for over 15 years by the time it finally happened in

2021.

That is the proud tradition of which we are the keepers.

We know there is still a lot to do but each step is important to progress in achieving that free and fair society.

The measures we voted through today will mean:

- **Ensuring LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic abuse and hate crime** get the support they deserve, including by delivering training for police and support services
- **Ending anti-LGBTQ+ abuse in social care**, by commissioning an urgent investigation into anti-LGBTQ+ abuse in social care with recommendations on how to prevent it.
- **Banning medically unnecessary, non-consensual treatments** or surgeries for intersex infants and children.
- Pushing for all integrated care boards in England to **immediately remove the requirement for lesbian couples to pay for artificial insemination** before accessing NHS-funded IVF services.
- **Banning all forms of conversion “therapies” and practices.**
- **Implementing a new LGBTQ+ Action Plan** to coordinate cross-government work on delivering LGBTQ+ equality.

Read our new policy in full

As liberals, we believe that true equality is achieved when individuals are not only free from prejudice and discrimination, but also free to fulfil their potential. So fighting for LGBTQ+ rights is not a choice Liberals make. It is who we are.

This comprehensive new policy readies our party to continue that fight. There is much to do, let's get to it.

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[Making Britain a science superpower](#)

British scientists and researchers already punch above their weight. This technological innovation is essential to tackling the major challenges of our time; climate breakdown, conflict, economic stagnation, crumbling public

services, and social unrest.

The last Conservative government utterly failed UK science and innovation with a total lack of strategy and interest. From their hostile attitude towards international collaboration and ideological hostility to sensible regulation, to the shambolic adoption of technology in the public sector and chaotic management of the economy putting off investment.

Now the new Labour Government risks making the same mistakes. Already they have cancelled the exascale supercomputer in Edinburgh, a short-sighted cost-saving measure, symbolic of their lack of vision and understanding of how science and technology works.

Liberal Democrats take a different approach, one grounded in our values of internationalism, respect for individual rights, and challenging concentrations of power.

Today we're setting out the rescue plan that science and innovation in the UK needs:

- **A national and international science and technology strategy** that raises R&D spending to 3.5% of GDP.
- **Measures to invest in education**, including through a teacher workforce strategy to ensure every secondary school child is taught STEM subjects by a specialist.
- **A National People Strategy** alongside an industrial strategy to ensure the UK workforce has the necessary skills and people are protected from disruption.
- **Measures to strengthen UK universities as world leaders in research** including by fully participating in Horizon Europe, and enacting a decade-long program of increasing and improving research funding with a package of measures to improve spin-outs.
- **Sensible regulation of AI**, including a **National AI Strategy**.
- **A comprehensive public sector technology policy** and investment plan.
- **Tackling regional inequality** through a digital inclusion strategy, national investment in digital infrastructure and investing in local government.
- **Investing in green technologies** to help mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis.

Read our new policy in full

Technological advances must be for the benefit of all in society, not just for wealthy and powerful individuals and institutions.

For technology to benefit the whole of society and deliver the maximum benefit, government must play a comprehensive and active role, showing

leadership with a national and international strategy.

The Liberal Democrats' bold plan to restore UK leadership in science and innovation will drive investment, boost global collaboration, and ensure technology benefits everyone, not just the privileged few.

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[A message from Christine Jardine on International Women's Day](#)

Reflecting on the year's International Women's Day theme of "accelerate action", I am sadly reminded of how much more we still need to achieve.

The World Economic Forum has estimated that at the current rate of progress, it will take until 2158 to reach full gender parity. That's another 133 years from now – and it's just not good enough.

Liberal Democrats have long fought for gender equality, and we've secured some great successes. From introducing shared parental leave to improving workplace protections from sexual harassment, I'm incredibly proud of what we have achieved so far.

But it's clear there is more to do – and I'm determined our party continues to lead that charge.

That means pushing our revolutionary parental leave and childcare policies – helping more mothers return to the workplace should they want to, and fighting against the gender pay gap. Or our plans to end period poverty and ensure that survivors of violence against women and girls are properly supported in the criminal justice system.

Women deserve an ambitious vision from political parties of how their lives can be improved. So it's disappointing that the government seems to have missed opportunities to make this a reality. They removed the target for women's health hubs in the latest NHS mandate, while their Crime & Policing Bill fails to mention domestic abuse once.

The fight for equality continues. Liberal Democrats will keep pushing on these issues and others, to deliver the positive future that all women deserve.

Of course, accelerating action also means supporting the tireless campaigners who are already doing fantastic work. I am especially grateful to the groups within our own party who are pushing for change. Lib Dem Women and the Campaign for Gender for Balance are just some examples, who lead the fight to get more women involved in politics.

We as a party – and a country – have come so far. If we keep working together, we can go even further.

Happy International Women's Day.

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