

A speech by the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Theresa May MP | Policy Exchange Summer Party, 20 June 2018

So can I give a sincere thanks to Policy Exchange for everything that you've been doing because its 16 years now that you've been making the case for a modern compassionate reforming conservatism. And if we just look at some of the ideas you've brought forward – free schools, Police and Crime Commissioners – you've actually championed some of the defining policies of the last decade.

But, I know you aren't resting on your laurels. I've no doubt that under your leadership Dean, under your chairmanship Alexander, you'll continue to make an outstanding contribution, and I'm really interested in the report you've brought out today. I've long said that design quality is, I think, actually one of the keys to new housing, and can I just say that it's important you carry on because there's a real battle of ideas today because, let's face it, the world is changing fast.

Not only do we see the technologies that a decade ago sounded like the stuff of science fiction are now a reality, they're transforming the way we access information, the way we travel, the way we communicate but, alongside rapid technological change, some old political certainties are in question. Free trade has lifted millions out of poverty, but today it faces opposition. The international rules-based order is being undermined by hostile states. Some go as far as to doubt the future of the liberal democratic system. It's threatened by extremism, populism, by a growing bitterness and intolerance that makes civilised debate harder and it's up to those of us that believe in progressive conservative values to step up and do something about it.

Sometimes it might seem like a daunting task but actually making the case for our values and beliefs and by delivering policies that improve people's lives I believe we can restore confidence in the institutions and values we hold dear. And now, that has to start by delivering Brexit and making a success of the UK's future outside the EU. And today we're taking another important step on that road with the EU Withdrawal Bill clearing the House of Commons with a decisive majority.

Time and again we have overcome the obstacles and made progress towards our goal: in December the agreement to move negotiation onto the next phase, agreement on the implementation period, on citizens' rights, on financial settlement for taxpayers, on the no hard border in Northern Ireland. Now with the Withdrawal Bill on its way to the statute book – the final stage in the Lords this evening – it's time to, I think, unite as a country and as a party and focus on getting the very best Brexit deal for Britain, because more people voted to leave the European Union than have ever voted for anything else in our history. And I think nothing would hurt our democracy more than to give people a choice and then not to trust their judgement when they give it, and I think that by honouring that decision that we are showing in the United Kingdom – the mother of parliaments – that when people speak their voices are heard.

But of course that vote was about more than our EU membership, it was also about how our economy and society works for people and, as a Conservative government, we have a big agenda of economic and social reform alongside delivering Brexit. Because we believe in free markets, we know their power, we know their potential to increase opportunity and prosperity and drive down poverty. But we also know something else, and that is that

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markets don't work unless government steps up to its responsibilities, so that is why we're inventing a modern industrial strategy, fixing the foundations of productivity – the skills of our workforce, our infrastructure, our business environment – but it doesn't stop there. Identifying those long term trends that are shaping change in the world in the world today that represent areas of enormous potential for our UK economy, and channelling our efforts into making the most of them.

By doing that we can develop new exports, grow new industries, create good jobs across the UK and, of course, delivering a strong economy allows us to invest in our public services. And we believe in public service, we believe in public services -we use them, we rely on them, and we are determined to improve them. And no public service is more precious than our NHS. And, as I quoted in PMQs today, for most of its 70 years the NHS has been under the stewardship of Conservative governments. Of course this week we announced a major investment to safeguard it for the future which translates to £394 million a week more in real terms, and they'll produce a 10 year plan led by doctors and nurses to improve patient care and to make sure that money is spent wisely. That's a Conservative approach: using the roots of a strong economy to invest in our public services, matching that investment with a credible plan to ensure the money is well spent and drives better outcomes for the people who rely on them.

So, I think on the big issues at stake today – on Brexit, on the economy, on our public services – it's clear that the real intellectual energy is on the centre-right. That's good news for our country and our party. Because what's on offer from the left is nothing but a politics of economic nostalgia – pessimistic about the future, suspicious of new technology, ignoring the changing world – taking refuge in the failed policies of the past. But we must accept that, to a generation that has not experienced them, those ideas can seem new. In contrast, we must remain the optimists: optimistic about what Britain can achieve, optimistic about the potential of new technology, confident that our values can speak to a new generation. So let's go out there and let's make the case. And, if we do so with all our hearts, we cannot but succeed.

So, thank you very much, thank you to Policy Exchange for the role that you will play in helping us to do just that, and enjoy the rest of the evening.