

Conservative Party Conference – Douglas Ross speech #CPC22

The leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Douglas Ross MP and MSP, reacted fast to the Chancellor's U-turn over cutting the top rate of tax when he spoke to conference this morning at 10.30. He said that he supported the decision by Kwasi Karteng to scrap the tax cuts for those paying 45% of tax on their income which he only announced on 23 September.

Mr Ross delivered his speech in Birmingham at the [conference](#) this morning where Kwasi Karteng address Conservatives from the podium at 4pm.



Mr Ross's speech:

“Thank you, Russell and Pam, for those great introductions.

As both Russell and Pam have said they do not have a typical Conservative background.

They didn't come from what people would say were traditional Tory communities.

But they are here today as Scottish Conservative MSPs.

That's because to them and hundreds of thousands of Scots across our country, the Scottish Conservatives are the party of aspiration, the party of opportunity.

The party for people who try hard, who don't just accept that their lot is what they were born to, and they shouldn't have the ambition to dream of more.

People who work hard and want to deliver a better life for themselves, their family and their community.

I know how they feel.

Because the stories of Pam, Russell and hundreds of thousands of Scottish Conservatives across our country are also my story.

I grew up in Moray, the constituency I am proud now to represent as MP and MSP.

My dad was a relief milker and tractor man on a local dairy farm, my mum was a catering assistant who became a school cook.

I went to college to study agriculture and then worked on a dairy farm, just like my dad.

A background about as far away from Eton and the City of London as possible.

Yet in 2006 I joined the Conservative Party and just over a year later I was elected as a councillor.

So why did a 23-year-old from working-class, rural Scotland want to stand for a party led by, David Cameron?

At that time in Scottish politics, it certainly wasn't a sell out to fame and fortune.

Our party was more likely to lose its deposit than it was to win in many seats across our country.

Instead, it was because I cared about my home area, about the community I'd lived in my whole life and still do.

That community mattered to me back then and still does now.

It was my area, many of my friends and family still live and work there.

And I wanted to raise a family and have my children grow up in the same community, which they could shape with their own stories.

I had always known that this was where I wanted to live my life.

I couldn't have imagined anywhere else.

I'm not sure there will be many other MPs who have their constituency office on the same high street as the church their parents were married in, they were christened in, and they themselves were married in – but that is why Forres and Moray are so special to me.

Let's be clear, if you need to know only one thing about me, it's that I'm a Moray man through and through!

And so, I wanted what was best for Moray and for the people who lived there.

Far too often though I'd seen – as I was growing up and into adulthood – that we had been let down by successive UK and Scottish governments.

Promised investment in our roads never seemed to appear.

Services that were the backbone of our community closed due to centralisation and local cuts.

And many of my peers were forced to leave to get a good education or job but never returned to the area.

Things weren't moving in the right direction; in fact, they were getting worse.

We weren't being given a fair deal.

And so I joined the Conservative Party to fight for that fair deal.

I was proud of my home, but I knew that it could be so much more.

That the people who lived there deserved so much more.

But our area was never the top priority for governments focused on the cities.

Instead, their priorities came first and we kept falling further and further behind.

Always last in the queue to get the support and investment we needed.

But I refused to accept that this was as good as it gets for us.

The people I grew up with could be just as successful as those in any other part of Scotland.

And Moray could deliver as fulfilling a life for my family and thousands of other families as Glasgow or Edinburgh.

But we just weren't being given a fair chance.

The deck was stacked against us.

And it was the Conservative Party who best understood the importance of community.

Of the ties that bring people that live in the same area

together, and how they can be a source of deep pride.

I wanted to campaign and win for Moray to get the tools and resources that we could use to build our own version of success.

Because I believed that our views should determine our future.

We knew what was best for us better than distant governments in both Holyrood and Westminster ever could.

We just needed to be given that fair deal.

Now more than a decade and a half on, having campaigned across our country as Leader of the Scottish Conservatives, I see my story replicated in towns and villages in every part of Scotland.

Replicated in rural areas without the infrastructure and services to be successful.

And working towns and communities blighted by deprivation and crime.

The same story of people across Scotland being held back because of where they live.

This reality has only been turbo-charged by an SNP Government that is obsessed with centralisation.

That has stripped funding from communities and local services.

The result is that after 15 years in the SNP's Scotland, place has a huge impact on the quality of life you will have.

Wages in Moray are nearly half of those in East Renfrewshire.

Pupils in East Renfrewshire are around two times more likely to get a top grade in their Highers than those in Angus.

And the life expectancy of people in Glasgow is six years lower than people in East Dunbartonshire.

Just think about that...

Where you live will define your education, your salary and even how long your life will be.

How can that be fair in today's Scotland?

And that injustice within Scotland is only continuing to be ingrained by this SNP Government.

Three week waits for alcohol and drug rehab treatment are four times more likely in Argyll & Bute than they are in Fife.

Children get to study fewer subjects at my old school Forres Academy than they do at Eastwood High.

And average internet speeds are more than 1,000 times faster at Murrayfield Terrace in Bannockburn than they are on Grant Road in Banchory.

The ferries fiasco has undermined island life on the west coast, hugely damaging those communities and people's livelihoods.

Right across Scotland, so many parts of our country are not being given a fair chance to succeed.

They are being held back by an SNP Government whose answer to the challenges of delivering services is to centralise into a one-size-fits all approach.

For too many people, the Scottish social contract is already broken.

They face the worst A&E waiting times on record.

An education system that is falling down international rankings.

And the highest taxes anywhere in the UK.

Yet those who live in our rural and working communities face even greater challenges which leave them permanently stuck lagging behind the rest of the country.

But in contrast we as Scottish Conservatives believe in opportunity.

In giving individuals the same fair chance at making a success out of their lives.

However, we also recognise the importance of place and belonging.

People in Scotland shouldn't feel that they have to leave the community in which they grew up just to have access to better jobs, healthcare and education.

I would love my two young boys to build their lives in Moray, just like I did, and my parents before me – but ultimately that will be a choice for them.

However, I would hate if they felt like they had to leave because Moray didn't offer them as good a future as they could find anywhere else in the country.

How can everyone have a fair chance if there are inbuilt disadvantages based purely on where you grow up and live?

As Conservatives we need to make it our mission to deliver opportunity equally across Scotland.

To give everyone a fair chance.

The SNP, the Greens, Labour and the Liberal Democrats have all had opportunities to address these challenges but did not use the powers of the Scottish Parliament to do so.

They were all more interested with nation building, with creating Scotland-wide solutions to local problems – instead

of devolving the powers of the Parliament down to the communities it should serve.

And so, we the Scottish Conservative Party must reach out to be the party to stand up for the communities of Rural and Working Scotland that have been left behind.

Those who have been failed by a Holyrood consensus, which is obsessed with imposing one-size-fits all approaches across Scotland.

Building a fair deal for all of Scotland starts with education.

If a child starts their life with a poorer education than their peers in other parts of the country,

then they are already at a disadvantage from their early years.

This is what is known in political jargon as the attainment gap.

It should be the mission of any decent government to close that gap to ensure equality of opportunity for kids of all backgrounds.

It was once Nicola Sturgeon's mission too.

And yet the reality is that, under the SNP, kids from the most deprived areas of Scotland are less likely to go to university than similarly disadvantaged youngsters in England and Wales.

For a First Minister and an SNP Government forever boasting of how 'progressive' they are, that is a shameful badge of failure.

My party is committed to succeeding where the Nationalists have failed.

That is why we have said that it should be a national requirement that all pupils have the opportunity to study seven subjects in S4.

This would ensure that there is investment in our education system across our country to deliver for every pupil regardless of where they live.

However, learning should not end at school.

Too many Scots leave school with little or no qualifications and go onto get stuck in low paid jobs.

Where they cannot afford – or commit the time to take on a training or further education opportunities.

There they remain trapped. Unable to break out and make a success of their careers even if they wanted to.

As Conservatives, we know that education is the greatest driver of opportunity and the route out of poverty and deprivation.

Yet far too much of the focus and debate is on school and not on adult learning.

No-one should be written off. No matter their situation. No matter their age. No matter where they live.

We should always give people a route to prosperity if they have the determination to put in the work to achieve it.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would set up a National College of Scotland.

So that further education and training is available virtually wherever you live.

Our National College would be a partnership of Scotland's colleges and universities,

designed around delivering bite sized, modular courses to help people to learn around their busy schedules.

Many courses would be sponsored by employers to ready learners for a career in their sector.

And give businesses access to a workforce with the skills they need.

Alongside our guarantee of funding for training through our Right to Retrain plan, this would be transformative in ensuring that no matter where you live in Scotland, or what your personal circumstances you can study towards qualifications that will help you to seize new opportunities.

However, we know that in many parts of rural Scotland those job opportunities just are not available.

We have seen a continual brain drain away from villages and towns outside the Central Belt for years.

Yet the SNP have done little to stop this. Instead, they call for more immigration.

But what about roads, housing, transport, jobs, education and healthcare services.

All the things that they are responsible for and have a big influence on people's desire to move to and stay in an area.

Ferries six years late.

The R100 broadband programme also six years late.

And permanent solutions for the Rest and Be Thankful Road proposed a decade ago by the SNP Government have still not progressed.

Those delays would never be tolerated in the Central Belt but for Rural Scotland they are all too commonplace.

We deserve a Scottish Government for all of Scotland not just the parts that vote SNP.

It seems simple to me that if we want people to live and work in those parts of our country then they need to have access to same opportunities as the rest of Scotland.

And that approach needs to be lead from government.

Because it will always be more financially prudent to invest in areas where there is already investment.

Which just leaves left behind areas falling even further behind.

If we believe in delivering opportunity equally across our country that means some parts need more of a helping hand to catch up.

It means recognising their current disadvantages and supporting those communities to overcome them.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would adopt a 'Rural First' approach.

That means new initiatives being rolled out in the north and south of our country first and then taken into our population centres.

We will also ensure that every policy is rural proofed so that the resources are in place for it to be rolled out in sparsely populated areas.

Then we have to ensure that there is access to the investment needed to create opportunity.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives would set up a Rural Development Bank.

This would provide dedicated funding for projects that will create jobs and prosperity in rural areas or support our

agricultural sector to increase production or diversify.

Taken together these policies would ensure that Rural Scotland gets the fair share it deserves

That government takes its rightful lead in revitalising left behind rural areas.

This morning, the Chancellor has confirmed a change to the budget that was presented 10 days ago.

I think he has made the right decision. The best parts of the government's growth plans remain and the area that caused the most concern has gone.

Politicians have to listen and respond – and that's exactly what the chancellor has done.

But let's look at this package of measures in the round.

It is right that helping families through the cost-of-living crisis has been at the forefront of the political agenda.

I welcome the capping of energy bills for both households and businesses announced by our Prime Minister.

Other than the furlough scheme, the cap and the other measures are the largest package of support delivered by the government to families in my lifetime.

Yes, they are major spending commitments, there is no getting away from that.

But they send a strong signal that our new Prime Minister and this UK Government are prepared to do whatever is necessary, to help the British people through this crisis.

However, Scotland has been in the midst of a housing crisis

since long before energy prices began to rise.

A housing crisis caused by the failure of the SNP Government to meet their own housing targets.

In the last three years alone, the average price has increased by 25%.

Yet the SNP have refused to raise the threshold for LBTT which has remained stagnant since it was introduced.

And they closed the First Home Fund and Help to Buy schemes.

Now the SNP's rent freeze plan will lead to more properties being taken off the market

Just look at the situation in Glasgow.

University students are being forced to abandon their course because they cannot find accommodation.

This is a crisis that is only set to get worst.

And at its heart, is the unwelcome truth that home ownership has become an unaffordable dream for too many Scots today.

If we believe in delivering opportunity to working Scotland, then we have to unlock that ambition.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives are committed to being the party for home buyers.

We have already said that we will cut the tax on home purchases to save buyers up to £2,100.

But we also need to help individuals and families to save up the funding they need for a deposit in the first place.

Which when stuck with rent and other bills can be too much of a stretch for many people.

And so the Scottish Conservatives would introduce a Rent to

Own model.

This would see renters being given back a quarter of their rent by the Government to help them to purchase the property that they live in.

This would allow buyers to save up for a home through simply paying their rent.

This could be a step change in helping families who are stuck in rented accommodation and unable to afford that little bit extra that they need to save each month to put down a deposit.

This would give more Scots a stake in the community they live in.

Today we continue to show that on education, economic development, housing and so many other areas the Scottish Conservatives are Scotland's Real Alternative to this failing SNP Government.

That we have the positive ideas and policies to take all of Scotland forward and deliver opportunity and a fair deal to every part of our country.

Friends last month we saw our nation united in grief to honour our late Queen.

As the coffin travelled on its long procession from Balmoral to Edinburgh children, adults, horses and tractors lined the sides of the roads.

It was a moment of shock, that a constant in all of our lives was no longer there.

An enduring link to the generations that had come before had been carried by her faith from this World to the next,

But the legacy she created in her seven-decade reign will live

with us all.

When our whole United Kingdom needed reassurance, certainty, stability and warmth most, our late Queen was there to give it.

The tens of thousands who lined the roads and streets and queued to pay their respects at St Giles are testimony to the admiration and love that was felt by Scotland to our Queen.

And we know that Scotland occupied, and I quote, “a special place” in her heart.

It was a devastating blow that left our nation a darker place than it was just weeks ago.

However, it was also a moment when Scotland came together as one nation.

When the bitter political divides that have held our country back were lifted – and we realised that there is more that unites us than divides us, more to our nation than the constitutional debate.

Just imagine what we could achieve if we had a Scottish Government focused on tackling the big challenges.

If we had a Scottish Government that would work with the UK Government rather than manufacture grievance at every turn

If we had a Scottish Government that governed for all of Scotland not just for those who agree with its narrow political interests.

Then we could focus on tackling the inequalities of place – that blight our nation.

The inbuilt disadvantages that hold working and rural Scotland back.

We could deliver the same opportunities to people living in

both Edinburgh and Elgin.

And make every part of our nation a success.

I started my speech by talking about my own political journey.

About the pride that I feel in the place that I grew up.

The place I now raise my young family.

The place I call home.

I know that there are so many people across Scotland, who just want the best for their local community.

Who value home, like I do.

Who have plans to build a better future for the place they live.

Who just want that fair deal from government to make it happen.

In many cases they won't be typical Conservatives.

But they share our values.

And those are the people that the Scottish Conservative Party needs to reach out to represent as we build Scotland's Real Alternative in the years to come.

Thank you.



Scottish Conservative leader Douglas Ross on a walkabout in Davidson's Mains with local candidate James Hill ahead of the 2022 local government election PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh

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