

[Transcript] Leading / 34. Ed Davey: Leading the Lib Dems, fighting the Tories, and a coalition with Starmer's Labour?

Welcome to the Restless Politics Leading with me, Alistair Campbell.

And me, Rory Stewart.

And our guest today is, I'm going to call you Ed Davy, not Sir Ed Davy, I don't like all these honours, is that okay?

You can call me Ed if you like.

I'll call you Ed, great, actually.

So Ed Davy, who I'm sure all of you know is the leader of the Liberal Democrats, and I suspect this interview may be a tale of two coalitions.

The one that Ed Davy was part of, under David Cameron Nick Clegg, and the one that he might be part of, who knows, after the next general election when Keir Starmer might or might not be Prime Minister.

Elected in 1997, and elected by 56 votes, three recounts, so pretty tense stuff.

Stayed there till 2015, when the electors have served and decided they've had enough of him in the coalition government, of which he'd served in the Cabinet, kicked him out. But he hung around and came back two years later, and then three years after that was leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Does that sort of sum it all up reasonably well?

It's a brief, I guess so.

You know, we've got to be brief, but we're going to cover your whole life and times.

And I think Rory tends to be the Freudian amongst us, he always likes to start with childhood.

Oh good.

Oh good.

So Rory, dig into the childhood.

There's more on the kind of Jungian side in this kind of relationship.

So Ed, thank you really very, very much for coming on.

I mean, we'd love to start with a sense of your childhood and growing up and what formed you, and particularly I think very difficult, very challenging, very in some ways quite tragic family history.

Could you just tell us a little bit about your early life?

Yeah.

I was born in Mansfield Woodhouse to John and Nina Davy.

I was the youngest of three boys.

And my dad, he'd come from a sort of mining community in North Nottinghamshire, met my mum when he was doing his national service, and he was doing pretty well.

But aged 38, he was diagnosed with cancer, and so this is sort of 70, 71, I was four, and he died within three months.

So my mum was widowed aged 36 with three boys under 10, so it was extremely challenging for her.

I didn't really know my dad.

Do you have any memories of him at all?

Yeah, one memory when I was picked up from play school, he was in the back of the car with a large overcoat because it was winter and he was obviously being treated and that

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was affecting him.

So that's about the only real memory I have of him.

I do, I found the, I'd been elected for a while and I was going through some photographs of my lovely Nana one day, 20 years ago, and I found a press cutting of him.

And it was my dad speaking to the Sutley and Ashfield Liberal Association in the 50s, saying that only the liberals understood the NHS.

And it was a real moment because I'd have thought he was a Tory because he'd gone and my mum used to say he used to play snooker at the local Tory club.

But he clearly wasn't.

Oh, okay.

And that meant, you can imagine how that meant to me.

Yeah, absolutely.

Even if he was wrong, it's actually lame that he says that, so it's just, and then, so he died and then your mother died as well when you were in your teens.

So obviously I was close to mum.

Mum was bringing three of us up and then she got breast cancer, had a mastectomy.

And then when I was 12, she was diagnosed with secondary cancer on her bones.

And that's not unusual for women who have breast cancer, but it's a very painful cancer.

And so my middle brother and I, because my eldest brother had also gone to university and so on, Henry and I nursed her for three years at home.

And yeah, it was quite tragic.

It's a very, very painful disease.

I have to administer morphine.

We had a bell jar of morphine.

Can you believe that in our kitchen?

We used to have to help her put these pads on her body to get, so she could give herself electric shocks to dull the pain.

So it was quite, it was full on, full on care.

While I was going to school.

While I was going to school, yeah.

And this was, this was you and your early teens, sort of 13, 14, 15.

Yeah, it started the sort of full on care when she was clearly terminally ill.

Starting when I was about 12.

And then she died when I was 15.

In fact, I was, by her bedside.

She was, in the last two weeks, she was in Nottingham General Hospital.

They put her on a dementia ward, which was not great.

She wasn't in the hospice.

And I was there with my school uniform aged 15 by her bedside.

And she died while I was there, when I went to school.

So yeah, that was obviously quite a, quite a moment.

What's this meant for the way that you think about life, about death, about families?

I mean, how's it made you different, do you think, from other people?

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Well, I think there's quite a few other people who go through difficulties.

Let's be clear.

I mean, I was a young carer.

So I have quite a lot of affinity for young carers.

And it's an area that I've worked with cross-partial.

I do quite a bit of work on charter bereavement,

campaigns on bereavement allowances, widows allowance and so on.

I think for me personally, when you lose both your parents, you sometimes you can go one of the best ways, can't you?

For me, I remember we lived in a little bungalow just on the outskirts of Nottingham.

And I'd go back there first with my brother and his year off.

Then I'd go and live with my grandparents in North Nottinghamshire.

Then my eldest brother came to study at Trent Poly.

Is it what then was Trent Polytechnic back in the day?

And I lived with him for a bit.

But I would go there because we kept the bungalow on for a long time, often beat by myself.

I organised the best parties at school, as you can imagine.

But one day I remember being in the kitchen, it was before my own levels.

And I was thinking, why am I going to do all this hard work?

Because previously I'd worked for my mother because I think kids do, don't they?

Young people do. They work to make their parents proud.

And this work for me was a real Rubicon moment where I just thought, right, I'm either going to do it for myself or I'm not going to do it.

And I had to sort of take the decision that it was and I could have taken different pathways, but I decided to knuckle down.

Do you feel that you grew up faster than other children do because of those appearances? Inevitably.

I think when you look at young carers and people who lose parents, there's a number of things that often come out from the research.

There's this empathy.

There's a degree of time management because you're juggling lots of of different things. I think resilience, you have to be pretty resilient, obviously. And yeah, that plays into your how you approach life and your relationships, your work.

And you obviously were quite moderately bright.

You went to Oxford University and got a first in PPE.

Flute it, obviously.

Can we come in on that?

Because the next stage in your life becomes a very sort of conventional, almost success story.

You go off to Oxford, as Alistair says, get a first.

You become president of your junior common room.

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You become a researcher to the Lib Dems and you find yourself elected into the House of Commons very young.
You're part of basically the same generation as David Cameron, Ed Balls, Ed Miliband, but you enter Parliament before them.
Don't you? You come in very young so that by the time the coalition comes along in 2010, you've you've been there for 13 years.
I mean, you're really quite long in the tooth for somebody who's who's by that stage only in his his forties, mid forties.
Yeah, I mean, I think there's a bit before Oxford that's quite important in my own story and certainly my political story.
Because obviously my my parents weren't around to influence me.
I sort of thought they were sort of what we might call heathite Tories is my impression, but obviously it wasn't a big thing.
My my first political meeting was a Tory disco, young conservative disco.
Age 12, my eldest brother, who was the chairman of Nottingham Conservative, he dragged me along to this and it was dreadful.
Put me off them for life, I tell you.
But the really influenced on me to be serious for a minute was my cousin, a wonderful man called Peter Lawton, who suddenly left us, who was very much into the environment, into conservation.
He worked particularly in developing countries on family planning, the rights of women, female education and health care, prime health care in many, many of the poorest countries in the world.
And his commitment to global justice to the environment was something that really influenced me.
And then I had a year off between school and university, where I traveled a lot Hitchhight and under around a bit.
And I read quite a lot.
And I read a book called Seeing Green by Jonathan Plorer.
It had one page on climate change and the rest on lots of other aspects of environmental politics.
And I went up to to Oxford.
This is a slightly non-conventional Rory.
I went around Freshers Fair.
And the only thing I joined was the Student Ecology Group.
And my first bit of political spin, Alistair, was to change its name to Green Action.
Not bad.
Not bad at all.
A lot better.
So that that was how I sort of got in.
And I, you know, I went to different places at Oxford traditional.
I didn't like the Oxford Union, didn't join the Oxford Union.

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I went to Oxford Labour Club, didn't join that, didn't join any political organisation actually at Oxford. If you'd said to the Ed Davey aged 18, 19 going to university, you will be a politician. Would you have thought that was possible? Possible, but not likely. So two of my finals papers on development, economics and development politics. I really wanted to work abroad, actually. And I applied to get an MSc in agriculture, economics, to see if I could be of use to people as opposed to just sit in a chair. And the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fishery and Foods and their wisdom didn't give me a grant. So I went around my girlfriend at the time, had a good summer, got the odd job here. When I looked after my grandmother, my nana, because she'd broken her hip in Maxon. So I looked after her for a bit and then applied for various jobs. And I applied to the social and liberal Democrats to be their parliamentary economics researcher. I wasn't a member of the party. Who was who is leader there? Paddy Ashton, Paddy Ashton. He was leader when you became an MP, wasn't he? He was why he was the ultimate reason why I joined the party. Right. Ed, I mean, so I think there's something really interesting and intriguing for people here about the tension between your extraordinary early life. I mean, the sadness of it, the heroism that you were showing as a young teenager. And then you entering what seems to many listeners to be the much more conventional world of being a sort of special advisor. I know we specialize very much an advisor to a party and then becoming an MP very young. So there's a sort of tension between that real life experience for your teens. But you never actually went out to, you know, do your agricultural economics and in the depths of wherever. And you've spent a lot of your life, I guess, within Westminster. So one question is, how do you how do you work to keep yourself in touch with the world outside politics, given that you've been in politics for so much of your working life? Yeah, I mean, to be honest, I'm almost an accidental MP because I could have ended up in development. I could have ended up in the green movement more broadly.

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I applied for a job at Friends of the Earth, for example.
Lots of things I might have ended up doing.
You know, even when I took the job with the Lib Dems in Parliament,
I wasn't a party member.
And then I didn't expect to get to stand as an MP.
I didn't expect to get elected.
So it's all been a little bit accidental.
And I think that's meant that I've always sort of been free in touch
with my family and my community.
I mean, I like to think, well, my feet are quite firm in the ground
when I get back home, you know, I have a disabled son who's now 15,
is wonderful, but he can't walk or talk and he needs 24 seven care.
And I think we actually always will.
My wife's got a mess.
So while she's amazing and fantastic support, there's huge amounts.
That's still challenging.
So at home, I'm pretty grounded because I'm a carer
and have to think about the family the whole time.
And, you know, if you're a Lib Dem and I don't mean this in any disparaging way
to labour or concertive colleagues, not at all.
But you tend to get reelected by being really hardworking in your community
in a way which if you're a Labour MP, a Conservative MP,
you have quite a bit of a push, you know, from the national party.
You get much less of that in the Liberal Democrats.
And so you really have to earn your spurs.
And that means being engaged, doing lots of advice,
surgeries, knocking on doors, being as involved in communities you possibly can.
So and to be honest, I really like that.
I enjoy that sort of what you we often call community politics.
I like that bit and that keeps you grounded.
We do want to come back to to talk about about your son
and how you deal with that as a politician, as well as as a father, as it were.
But I just want to go back to 1997.
It was obviously a wonderful year for British politics.
Nothing to do with your your election.
I just want to because I knew Paddy Ashton very well
and you said that he was in a way the real reason that you really got into politics.
First of all, your impressions of that government through that period
when you were sitting as a Lib Dem MP, but also whether you were aware
of the discussions that were going on between Tony Blair and Paddy Ashton
about what I think Tony would like to have seen as the beginning
is of a proper realignment.
Were you aware of that?

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What's your views on that?

And I guess I'm asking what you feel about the Labour Party today and how you see possible relations between you and Labour in the future.

Well, let's stick first of all with what happened in the 1907 and then the 1907 government.

I think all active Lib Dems were aware that there was conversations.

Part of that was because we were all wanting to remove this conservative government being in power for a long, long time.

There were lots of things going on, tickling constitutional reform, the Scottish Convention, Social Justice Commission, a whole range of things where there was very clear an overlap between Lib Dem policy and Labour Party policy.

And there was a movement where there was a lot of encouragement of tactical voting and what we didn't mention about my university career. You were part of that campaign.

I was involved in tactical voting in 1987.

So being involved in encouraging anti-conservative voting for a long time. Rory.

So we were aware of that.

But of course, you know, as soon as the election happened and Labour got this huge majority, many has felt, well, we hope Labour will keep on with its progressive agenda.

And in many respects, it did, particularly in that first parliament.

And I probably voted with Labour Party, Labour Government then, more than the Exalted Party because we were agreeing with the longest of the policies you were doing.

They were in how manifesto, you know, it changed over time.

But inevitably, I guess.

But and this is really quite important, where there's a distinction between people like myself and even Paddy, who is my hero, let's be clear.

We were suspicious of a Labour government that had a huge majority, which wasn't delivering on things like electoral reform.

You had the Jenkins Commission, but it wasn't delivered on.

And so the key parts of that reform agenda, which never happened.

And as we began to sense a bit more illiberalism coming in, particularly from the Home Office, the distances grew.

But at the start of it, there was a lot of meeting of minds.

So tell us a bit about the distances growing.

And, you know, I've read some of the stuff that she said in the past, but it'd be nice to get a crisp, clear analysis about what, from your point of view, was less good about the second half of that Labour government compared to what you liked in the first half. First of all, the first half, I thought that its biggest problem

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was it was very cautious.

I mean, perhaps understandably so, given the history.

But we found that we were arguing for more tax and spend.

So for a period, we were to the left of Labour economically because we felt our public services, where Labour had actually historically now had a good record looking back over the 13 years.

For sure.

But in the I'm not done, not complaining about that.

But in the first four years, I think you will also agree that there wasn't so much.

Yeah, we had got elected on the promise not to mess around too much with tax.

Yeah. And we were saying that you need to do something.

So we were already already.

You had what we call the longest P in history, which is everything was going to go with this extra fence. Well, of course, of course, you would say that I wouldn't.

And I would say it was a very good policy to make sure that education was properly funded.

And we spelt it out.

And remember, as my education spoke at the time, spending out to Jack Straw, exactly what we were spending the money on to improve people's life chances.

And I was very much involved.

Can I just interrupt and explain this joke to listeners who aren't in the middle of this joke?

So the Lib Thames had promised an extra penny on income tax, which was going to go to education.

And hence Alistair's joke about the longest P in history, because he thought it was going lots of different directions.

Yeah, because he intended to get promised for all sorts of things as interviews.

Well, as someone who is the party can always advise for a long time, you help develop the policy and who cost the manifesto.

I can assure you that we as a group of liberal Democrats were very clear what we were spending the money on.

And so there was that sort of criticism of Labour to go back to your question,

Laurie. And then there was this degree of slight

authoritarianism coming in from the Home Office,

whether it was over civil liberties or over immigration and asylum in particular.

Give us examples, because people don't remember this very well.

Well, I think I don't exactly when it happened.

But removing the right of asylum seekers to work, we thought was a really bad idea.

We still think it's a bad idea that asylum seekers still can't work.

And we think that's bad for them, their health, their dignity and bad for the taxpayer.

And so we objected to that. That's a good example.

We had Miriam Gonzalez-Durante's next life on recently.

And I've talked to Miriam lots and I feel I agree with her about lots of things.

And I've had this argument about what is a liberal?

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What does a liberal think and do that I don't think and do?

OK, well, I'll tell you what my lyrics, I can really put it in a nutshell.

I think liberals are about empowering people and holding the already powerful to account. I believe that.

So it's about power and how you give power to ordinary people and how you make sure the powerful have to be accountable for how these people are. But I believe that.

Good, well, come and join us.

No, because.

Well, I think means you looking through some of the stuff, you know, just on the last couple of days, reading some stuff that you've said in the past, my sense of your liberalism is that you really don't like the nanny state.

I was very shocked, for example, to read that you were opposed to some of the measures when we were tackling smoking in pubs and clubs.

Let me let me. But it was only one tiny bit of it.

So I voted for all your legislation, the Labour Party's legislation to ban smoking in pubs and clubs.

But one little bit.

There was one amendment and most of the Democrats voted with the government, but it was myself and a few of those who voted against the eight of you.

OK, eight rebels. Thank you.

And we voted because the concept was if you were meant a smoker in a smoker's club where in that club, the employees didn't have to come in to serve you drinks or take away them. You could just be smokers smoking together that you should have the right to do that.

So is that liberalism?

Well, it's about freedom and it's the state where you draw the line between the state telling people what they can do and allowing people to have some freedom.

And so the argument on smoking was secondary smoking can harm you.

But in the amendment that I vote for as liberal, that wouldn't have been the case.

There would be no harm to any other people.

And I go back to my John Stuart Mill.

Just before we get onto John Stuart Mill and this amazing Oxford finals paper, can I go back to this little disagreement that you had with Alistair there?

So so he's saying, look, I agree with you.

You know, I believe in empowering people.

I believe in challenging power.

I believe holding powerful people accountable.

And your answer to that is, well, come and join us then.

But obviously, Alistair's answer to you was no, no, wait, wait a second.

Why don't you come and join us?

So what is it that stops you being a labor MP?

You're sounding very labor at the moment.

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Why? Why weren't you a labor MP?

Because actually, for the sort of reason that Alistair was was touching on then with the smoking, my impression of labor over the years is ultimately they are more willing to trust the state far more than liberals are.

And they do that on the economy, on personal freedom, on many other issues.

And they say if the state is doing it, well, it must be right.

Well, I as a liberal worry about that because that could take power away from people.

So often the state is the powerful organisation that needs to be held to account.

It's not just private companies, but it can be the state.

And that's the big distinction between, I think, the liberal Democrats who we want to empower everybody.

And sometimes that means pushing back against the state.

You see, I guess my my spirit, I've got a lot of friends in the Lib Dems.

Charles Kennedy, as you know, is a very close friend of mine.

I get the feeling sometimes that Lib Dems are basically you'll be you'll be whatever it takes to be when you fight in that election, in that place.

So, for example, give you an example, I was talking to somebody this morning about housing, and they were saying that they have a real worry if there is a Lib Lab coalition after the next election, because they think if the Libs, if you guys get all the seats that you need to get to be maybe part of a reforming labor led government, you can have to win.

A lot of these seats were at the moment.

Your candidates are going around telling Tories, no, I don't agree with building any new homes either.

I'm going to have to unpick.

I'm going to unpick a lot of what you've just said.

OK, I'm very happy to take the nimbyism on because it's not true.

But first of all, this concept that the conservatives are consistent over time and everywhere. I never said that.

Nonsense. I never said that.

I did not say that.

The Labour Party consistent everywhere is a nonsense.

You guys accuse the level Democrats of doing that.

And actually, I think you guys are more.

No, it's easier for the Lib Dems, isn't it?

Because you know where you need to win.

And where you need to win, the seats that you can win, most of them you can be up against the Tories.

That's right, isn't it?

Well, it is true in this coming election, the vast majority of seats we can win and the seats we can hold our opponents, the Tories, there are one or two exceptions to Sheffield Hall and we're against a Labour one or two of the seats where we might take on Labour,

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depending on how the cards go.

And there's a few against the SMP, but fundamentally right.

And I've fought the Conservatives all my life.

And, you know, back to tactical 87 for us in the political party.

And I want to remove the Conservatives from power.

And to take on the Nimbus, I don't want that to go over that.

We want to build more houses.

The question is what type of houses and where the current system initially was very top down or the Conservatives have changed that a bit.

But it's still very much a developer led system.

Liberal Democrats believe in a community led system.

We actually changed the law in government to our neighborhood plans.

And interestingly, this government's analysis of neighborhood plans, where they've been allowed to operate, have resulted in more houses being built, but more affordable houses being built that have more infrastructure and are genuine communities.

So we want more houses, we want the right type of houses.

Can I just sort of pull you up and really just so I was a huge fan of the neighborhood plan. And when you say you did it in government, you obviously mean you did it in coalition with the Conservatives when you were in the same government.

It was led by the ministers. But yeah.

So I was very keen on it.

Greg Clarke was very keen on it.

I led the first pilot in Cumbria with a neighborhood plan.

We got it through. We did the first demonstration.

So what I'm trying to understand is how does it work with Lib Dems claiming credit for stuff when they're in coalition and then rejecting other stuff in coalition?

How do we know what you did and what the Tories did?

To be honest, I tend to find that Conservatives claim credit for all the things that we initiated.

Same-sex marriage, everyone thought it was David Cameron's idea.

It was actually Lynn Featherston was the real promoter of that.

If you talk about renewables, you know, Ed Miliband did a lot of work.

But, you know, in coalition,

Chris Hume, myself and the Liberal Democrats generally.

How do we know if this is true or not?

I mean, what I remember is David Cameron fighting a really brutal battle on same-sex marriage, taking on his party, taking the campaign, taking huge amounts of political risk.

So how do we give the credit to Lynn Featherston?

Well, you can read her book and you can see how the genesis of that policy

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coming to the Cabinet and how we pushed it.
And you're absolutely right.
Of course, there were Conservatives who worked with us.
That had to be the case. It was a coalition.
And on renewables, there were some amazing
Conservatives supporters, what we did.
I mean, I particularly remember Charles, a guy called Charles Hendry,
I'm sure you know, Amber Rudd and others.
But there were also on the other side, Rory, and I'm sure you remember this.
George Osborne, Eric Pickles, Owen Patterson, all who tried to stop me
on almost a weekly basis, doing the things I wanted to do.
And it became really obvious to me,
is particularly doing official wind and we were putting in the system
which managed to massively reduce the cost of offshore wind
and made Britain the world leader in offshore wind.
When we were doing that, with some help from people like Oliver Letwin,
very happy to give him some credit, but George Osborne didn't want that to happen.
And I know this is a fact, Rory, because after the election,
when the Tories were a majority, George Osborne took the devices,
according to some officials who I won't name, but they worked for me.
And then they had to face a Tory only government.
George Osborne tried to cancel the contracts.
I'd signed for lots of offshore wind.
He took advice on could he cancel them?
Now, we had made them what are called private law contracts.
It's a bit geeky, but it meant that if they had cancelled them,
they would have had to pay to the developer the whole value of the contract.
So we stopped George Osborne by the way we designed the policy,
stopped him stopping the offshore wind revolution.
So I can prove the Tories tried to get in the way.
I won't keep teasing you on this, but I guess listening to this,
I fear some listeners may feel that this is one of the continual challenges
for the Lib Dems, isn't it?
The increasingly detailed attempts to try to explain exactly what you were
responsible for in the coalition and what the other lot were responsible.
And what George Osborne told what other sort.
I mean, is that a big political communications challenge for you
that you find yourselves being blamed for the bad bits and not getting the credit
for the good bits?
To be honest, when I knock on doors around the country,
when we campaign in bi-elections or local elections, we pay for the general election.
People are not talking about what happened 10 years ago.
I know this program, you of course, we all think about it, but the electorate

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have moved on, you know, they've had to suffer Brexit.

They've had to suffer, you know, the pandemic.

They've had to suffer all these conservative prime ministers who are all complete and utterly hopeless, and they want to know what you're going to do for the issues that matter to them today and tomorrow.

And that's the cost of living is number one, how they're going to pay for their bills.

It's things like the NHS and care.

And so as leader of a political party, I'm, I think, understandably focusing on what is the concerns of the electorate are.

And almost no one says, you know, what happened in 2012.

What they might do, what they might do, what people might do is say, oh, I didn't really much enjoy that coalition experience.

I don't think that worked very well.

Some might say they thought it worked well, but I think what people want to know is how could a party that supported people like George Osborne and propped up people like David Cameron and George Osborne, are we now going to trust those people to prop up a totally different sort of government?

I mean, I want them to be a totally different sort of government.

But deep down, you surely want the numbers to fall in a way that you go back into government.

Well, first of all, I think you are running ahead of yourself.

Sure.

Way ahead, if you don't want me to say.

So we've got to campaign for that election and make our case as an independent, proud party with our Liberal Democrat values and policies.

And focus particularly on those seats where you have to win.

Of course, that's that's that's what we all do, isn't it?

But going back to the the Conservative coalition, let's remember, and I'm glad I'm able to put this on the record yet again.

I fought the Conservatives all my life being in coalition government for me at least and for a number of my colleagues was extremely difficult.

It was one of the most difficult things that I've done in my political career, because I disagreed with them with some of them a lot, not with people like Rory, actually, and there were a few that helped make it work.

Most of them have been expelled from the Conservative Party by Boris Johnson.

But you went through the coalition, you've described it as an experience you didn't particularly enjoy, but the truth is for you to get power, the ability to make change for the people who vote for you again, you're probably going to have to do it with a Labour-led government.

Otherwise, I mean, if Labour can have a landslide, you're going to have less power, less ability to make change.

So therefore, is there not a part of you that wants that to happen?

Well, I think there's several things to say about that.

First of all, from the opposition benches, you can make change and influence people.

[Transcript] Leading / 34. Ed Davey: Leading the Lib Dems, fighting the Tories, and a coalition with Starmer's Labour?

I've heard you in a number of areas talk about campaigning MPs, you know, David Steele, the abortion act, most recently Vera Hobhouse, you know, Liberal Democrat MPs making differences and making change, right? So let's be clear, it's not all about getting into government.

But the other thing I'd say about this whole future debate is having been around a long time, as you kindly reminded me.

I've seen a lot of Liberal Democrat leaders approach elections.

Seven. You've seen the seven.

Indeed. And that's quite a lot, actually.

And the thing that I've noticed, the most successful ones don't spend all their time worrying about what happens after the election.

Agreed.

The most successful ones focus on their job in hand.

Correct.

In my case, being as many conservative MPs as possible and talking to the voters, rebuilding that trust, setting out our store on the cost of living, on the NHS, on sewage or wherever it may be, and I think political reform as well, electoral reform, therefore, making sure that however the cookie crumbles after the next election, we have many more Liberal Democrat MPs to champion their community and to champion Liberal Democrat values.

And that is what I'm going to be laser beam focused on.

Can you tell us, I mean, what went wrong in 2015 and 2019?

Because it seems to me that the basic theme of British politics is that it's in the centre.

A lot of the votes are heaped in the centre.

Many of the people who listen to our show are in the centre.

So you would have thought you occupy the kind of natural space in British politics.

I was a fan of Nick Clegg.

I thought you did a good job in the coalition.

You went into the 2015 election and you were completely destroyed as a party.

Then 2019 comes along, you're handed this fantastic opportunity of running against two complete lunatics, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Corbyn.

It should be the ideal moment to make the case for the moderate Liberal Centre because these populist extremists are running the two main parties.

And again, you failed to pull it off. What's going wrong?

Well, I think every election is different.

And so if I may, I think 15 was different reasons for 1915.

We knew when we went to the coalition, it was going to harm us politically.

Now, we talked to our sister parties in Europe, our little parties, about their expense of coalition

because there are many have been in government, either as a senior party or a junior party.

And they said, look, if you're the junior party and coalition,

you get the blame for everything goes wrong and never get the credit.

[Transcript] Leading / 34. Ed Davey: Leading the Lib Dems, fighting the Tories, and a coalition with Starmer's Labour?

That's traditionally what happens in coalition.

So we knew we were going to get a hit.

But I think the biggest mistake we made was not to make it clear that we were pretty uncomfortable with aspects of the coalition, that we disagreed with the Conservatives a lot.

To do that, though, when you're part of a team.

It is because we were trying to make the coalition work, so you could cooperate.

But the lesson that when you talk to some of our sister parties across Europe is that they said, you know, you needed to make it clear that you were having disagreements.

I mean, I tried to get the wind industry to take Eric Pickles to court.

You know, a fellow cabinet member, so I was in a total agreement.

And I said after the 2015 election, because I was very, very loyal to Nick,

because I think, you know, whatever we think about him,

I think he was a brave and courageous party leader.

I said, look, if you're in the middle, you've got to be highly visible.

If you're in the middle of the road, you better put on a fluorescent yellow jacket.

And we didn't.

And I think we we reduced to minimize the differences we had with the Conservatives.

And that meant people didn't see us as a distinctive independent party.

And that was a huge mistake in 2015.

Mistakes in 2019 were different.

So you felt used.

Do you feel that the Liberal Democrats got into power as part of the coalition and the Tories were playing you a lot of the time?

That's how it felt to me.

Well, I was trying to play the Tories.

I mean, as I say, I fought them every day of the week, you're doing my jobs.

And I tried to outmaneuver them.

And many times I did.

And many other colleagues did.

I think the biggest problem that the criticism I've just made of ourselves was we didn't show and tell people about those battles.

And I think I think that, you know, if you are an independent, different party, which we very much are, you need to make sure that people understand that.

So can I can I fast forward to 2019 again?

So we've got Boris Johnson, populist.

He's come in, he's paroled Parliament.

He's lied to the Queen.

He's doing all this.

He's challenging the Supreme Court.

You've got Jeremy Corbyn doing whatever bizarre stuff Jeremy Corbyn's doing.

Brexit is in full meltdown.

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There is a huge groundswell of support for a moderate, liberal centre ground in British politics to take on these two populist streams. Why is that not your moment 2019? Why is that not the moment where the Lib Dems come romping through to victory? I have mainly blamed first past the post system because and let me take you through the thinking because it's the thing that we grapple with in the Liberal Democrats. And it's slightly different from you guys from bigger parties, right? But from our perspective, it really hurts us. And in the 2019 election, we found a lot of people who wanted to vote for us, particularly a lot of former conservatives who hated Boris Johnson, hated Brexit and really, really wanted to vote anything other than the conservatives. But they were scared rigid about Jeremy Corbyn. And I think there were an awful lot of seats that we might have won in 2019. But for people's fear of Jeremy Corbyn. And, you know, I think that's just the reality and in the first past the post, you know, people have to decide who's going to be the winner. And, you know, you didn't need many people to decide originally they were going to vote Lib Dem and can't afford it because of Jeremy Corbyn, the danger of him becoming prime minister, even though Labour MP couldn't get elected in that constituency and they switched back to the Tories. And that's been a real problem for us. We tend to do better when the Labour leadership and the Labour Party is more electable. Why do we do better in the years of Tony Blair, in the years of Gordon Brown? Well, because Labour was more credible then. When do we do badly when you have some Michael Foot and Jeremy Corbyn? And arguably, though, I think they're very different from Michael Foot and Jeremy Corbyn, Neil Kinnock and Ed Miliband. And give me an assessment, then, of Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer. Well, I think Rishi Sunak is completely out of touch. He's a clear, bright guy. He's got more integrity than Boris Johnson, though that's quite a low bar. But I think he's prison of the Conservatives. He looks really weak to me. And as I've made clear on countless occasions, I want the Conservatives out of government and, you know, my job is to beat as many of them as possible in the next election. So, you know, Keir, I don't know very well. I observe him like you do. You probably don't weigh better than I do. He seems to have done a job with Labour Party to move them away from the Corbyn-yester fringe of British politics. And I think, you know, he deserves some credit for that. I still don't quite know what he stands for. Well, I don't know what a Labour government would do under Keir Starmer. And, you know, my job isn't really to worry about him.

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My job is to make sure that the Liberal Democrats perform as well as possible.
So I spend my time thinking about our target seats.
But you said a moment ago that you do better
when the Labour Party looks electable.
Do you put Keir in the Tony Blair, Gordon Brown camp?
Was it Jeremy Corbyn, Michael Foote?
He looks more like a friend of Michael Foote.
I don't like saying Michael Foote, Jeremy Corbyn camp, but you know what I mean.
Yeah, well, I think Michael Foote was a huge intellect, right?
But I don't know who said it was.
The 83 manifesto was the longest.
Gerald Corbyn, yeah, right, yeah, yeah.
So that's what I know in history.
Yeah, yeah, that's what I'm driving at.
I mean, I don't think we know absolutely for sure,
but he looks a bit more in the camp of more electable Labour leaders.
But that's what the polls suggest.
And I mean, he's clearly very different from Jeremy Corbyn.
OK, Ed, Rory, let's just take a quick break back in a minute.
We're Broadway's biggest party.
Our show has got everything you're looking for in a great time.
Megalabs, incredible songs, showstopping, dancing.
And just when you think you've seen it all, a magic carpet flies across the stage.
The party never stops.
So grab your friends and fam and come see us for tickets.
Visit AladdinTheMusical.com today and tell them your amazing, fabulous friend, Jeannie sent you.
So you come from a very particular generation.
In your 20s and 30s, you're the generation that came out of 1989,
four of the Berlin Wall, rise of the great idea of a liberal global order.
Ultimately, Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, we're all believing in free markets.
We're all believing in human rights, spread of democracy around the world.
And that must have had a deep, deep impact on your worldview,
as it does for any of us who are going through our 20s and 30s, the way we view the world.
And then the whole thing came crashing down,
crash down with a financial crisis, crash down with the rise of social media, rise of populism.
So I guess how have you come to terms with the crashing down of the old liberal global order?
What lessons have you taken from it?
And what does that mean for what you're going to propose in the future?
Well, I think that is a incredibly significant question.
It's the thing I think about a lot, actually, because you've got this demise of what, you know,
I thought was a trend of improvement in everyone's life around the world.
And the world was beginning to work together.
I remember, you know, the London Olympics, I remember the Paris Treaty on Climate Change.

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There was a sense, you know, just a few years ago that things were moving the right direction, even after the financial crisis.

And then we got Brexit, we got Trump, we got Boltonaro, all the rest of the horrible stuff.

And it's a wake up call, I think, to progressives and to liberals.

And those of us who, I think, from all political parties who believed in what you described as that global liberal order.

And the question is, how do we fight back? Can we fight back?

I believe we can. I'm a real optimist.

I have to be as liberal as I am, perhaps, but I am a liberal.

I'm an optimist, and I think we can, but we've got to be much smarter than we've been.

So here's one example that I've internalized, and I think, and I'm interested in your views on this, to be honest, what the authoritarians do and the populists do is they speak to people's hearts, but obviously in a way which appeals to people's, no, I would argue they're worse prejudices, but they use emotion.

And what liberal Democrats and liberals and progressives and social Democrats do a bit too often is they talk about the evidence and the reason, the rational argument vital, but they never get to the emotion.

And if you want to win in this global battle between liberalism and authoritarianism, you've got to take people with you.

They've got to believe that there's hope and there's optimism and that you care about them.

And you're not some sort of liberal elite.

And I think, you know, I'm sure all of us do, to be honest.

And that's what motivates us, isn't it?

We want to make life better for everybody in the world.

And therefore, we've got to be smarter in how we make our arguments.

So Ed, I'm completely with you that you've got to develop more emotional communication.

But let's get to the core of the policy itself.

How, for example, did the 2008 financial crisis change your view on economics?

Looking back at the way you thought about the world in the 90s and 2000s, what did you get wrong about economics?

And what's the new economic analysis that the Lib Dems are going to present?

I think the 2007-2008 financial crash was largely a financial sector crash.

And I think the deregulation that occurred went way too far.

And I think banks and a lot of the various institutions that have grown up in London, New York and elsewhere were able to get away with blue murder.

And we're not held to account.

It comes back to my liberalism.

Hold the powerful to account.

But within the liberal Democrat sort of economic sliding scale, you are a deregulator.

You're a believer in the private sector.

You're not a kind of, you're not a heavy regulator.

Well, I actually, I think you may have got me wrong a bit there, I asked.

Good regulation can have a massive impact.

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Let me tell you a story from the coalition again, about regulation.

I was trying to regulate the private renter sector to require landlords to bring up their properties to a higher standard of energy efficiency.

And the regulation that I wanted to get through would say that you wouldn't be allowed to rent your house out unless you met these minimum efficiency standards.

My biggest oppo in the toys was Eric Pickles.

Mr. Pickles, is that your invention?

Well, once because I had a few clashes with him.

And on this one, he said to me at one stage, Edmurel Chum, regulations are communist.

Regulations are communist.

And I said to him, Eric, thou shalt not kill is a regulation.

And it came in before Karl Marx.

So I think the case for regulations in some areas, be it the financial sector, be on climate energy efficiency, the regulation, the case for regulations is really strong.

OK, so just come back in.

Firstly, huge congratulations on your amazing imitation of Eric Pickles.

I thought that was very good.

We'd like to hear your impression of William Hague and various others, but that was very good.

That was very good.

But I want to push you one more time on this question.

OK, everybody agrees we didn't regulate the banks enough, but that's not quite enough, is it, to make a real economic policy that deals with some of the fundamental problems? Why did the Northeast get left behind?

Why have we ended up with an unbalanced economy?

So what's what's the new economic policy that's going to be different from the liberal consensus, which we all grew up in?

Conservatives, Labour, Lib Dem and the 90s.

I'm including myself in this.

I was part of that whole world.

OK, I think I see we're driving up.

But I wouldn't blame the financial crash of 2007, 2008 for this bit.

I think it was much longer running.

And it was how globalization more broadly played out.

And that goes way beyond financial markets.

It goes in manufacturing, a whole range of different parts of our economy.

And I think there you have a point, because I think globalization.

People forgot you mentioned the Northeast.

I think we forgot regions of the UK, nations regions of the UK all the time.

I think it was really poorly managed and thought through.

And if there's one area, I don't think they've done very much about it.

But, you know, an area that's debated now under this

Conservative government and levelling up, I think we all agree that we need to level up in our country.

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Don't we? It strikes me that they've stopped even talking about it.

Well, yeah, but to respond to to Rory, I mean, that that there's it's absolutely true.

Some of the poorest regions and the whole of Europe are in our country.

Rory wants to know is what the Lib Dem will go to in the next election saying that the Labour and the Tories wouldn't say.

Well, there's I was saying a number of things.

But I think I mean, from my own experience,

if I take what I think is going to be massive over the next decade or two,

it's it's how we think about a changing economy to deal with net zero.

And there's huge opportunities here that we could lead the world like we were leading the world in offshore wind.

And the great thing I saw with renewables investment

is that investment isn't all in London, the Southeast.

It's around the whole of the country.

And, you know, we often talked about the renewables

jobs we were getting the Northwest, the the Northeast in Yorkshire, in East Anglia, in Scotland and so on.

And I genuinely think that if we did the right policies of net zero,

whether it's in transport, electricity, heating, buildings, aviation,

we could not only make us a world leader in many of these areas,

and we could really be innovative and ahead in the technology.

But you could begin use that as a vehicle

for addressing some of these gross inequalities in our country.

Now, let's talk about Brexit.

It took a long time.

So we get through it.

I mean, as I was driving with Fiona and I coming back from France

earlier today and sitting there and I said, right, we'll talk to David later.

What shall I ask him?

She said, ask him who you should vote for

if what you really, really, really, really want is for Britain

to be back in the European Union.

So what's your answer to that?

Well, if you really want to vote for the most pro-European party

in British politics, who can exercise real influence

Westminster as you vote Liberal Democrat, that may not be exactly what Fiona wants.

But we remain in terms of a UK wide policy.

You've got very quiet on Brexit.

You've gone very, very quiet.

You bear Labour, don't talk about it.

You don't talk about it.

Well, and it's a disaster.

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We it is a disaster.

I mean, listen, we campaigned against it.

I think it's a disaster.

We voted against the deal.

We actually have well thought through policy about how we would rebuild our relationship with Europe.

The challenge that we've all got to recognise, I think, is first of all, we've got to work out the language that we take people with us in this country.

You know, we're talking about emotional language and dealing with the authoritarian debate before.

We've got to find a language that's not divisive.

We do not want to go back to the divided nation that we suffer and we need to take people with us.

And I don't think we're quite there yet in that sort of language.

And we're working hard at that.

But do you, do the Liberal Democrats want the UK one day to be back in the European Union?

We want Britain to be at the heart of Europe.

That's not quite as...

He's answering your question there.

The reason why I do that is he's going to be a journey because I mentioned the language that we talk about this to rebuild the pro-European case in Britain.

I take that very seriously and we massively contribute to it, I think.

But there's also the other side of the call, which never gets thought about, which is how European countries and politicians think about us.

You know, thanks to Mrs. Johnson, Trust and SUNAC

and the whole most exerted party with a few

and other exceptions like Rory, they've just lost trust in us.

And, you know, they're going to take more than just a change of government to simply go, oh, right, that the British nation wants to be part of Europe again.

And we've got to find a way to reach out to our European colleagues.

And so when I talk about this as a passionate pro-European,

I talk about rebuilding that trust, rebuilding those relationships

so we can cooperate more on trade and security and climate.

And all the many things that are absolutely in our national interest.

That sounds to me like a wrenching shift in the Lib Dems.

I mean, I remember you in 2019 being the absolute standard bearers for rejoining the European Union.

And it now looks like you're very, very cautious about saying the kind of things that somebody like Alistair would instinctively want to hear.

And is that not a bit of a problem for your voter base?

I mean, I guess there are many, many voters like Alistair out there

who want to hear a party say, this is a terrible disaster and we're going to fix it.

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We're going to rejoin the customs union at least or we're going to get back into the single market and we've got a plan to try to get it back in.
Are you not missing out on 30 percent of your voter base?
No, I think we're really credible on how you face up to this issue, taking the UK with us because I don't think anyone wants to go back to those divisions and facing up to the reality of where European politics is at.
That comes from a very pro-European business.
We haven't we haven't given up on the idea that cooperation with our neighbors is our interest and we were in international.
No, I get that. But both you and Labour, I think, are missing huge open goal in going out to the people and explaining.
Get you got to be get the emotional language right.
They've been sold a pup.
It's a disaster.
It's damaging them and their lives and their livelihoods and their public services.
And we've got to fix it.
Yeah. Well, I mean, to say this, then we do say that.
But to a very sort of logic, no, because I tell you, you know this, you've been a campaigner for your life, Alastair, when you talk to people on the doorstep, what are the issues that come up that we have to address?
Cost of living and cost of living and health service by Brexit.
Of course they are, but not exclusively and suggest that they are.
No, I don't suggest that.
Well, and therefore, because voters don't know that it's not just the European thing that's affected the health service.
The conservatives have made a complete hash of it.
Cost of living is not just what's happened in Ukraine and so on.
It's a lot of very poor economic policies.
They want to know what you're going to do about that.
They want to know how you're going to help pay for their food bills, their mortgages, their rent, their energy bills.
They want to know, you know, when they're going to get a GP appointment.
Can they get an NHS dentist?
It seems to me reasonable for a political party who wants to be lots of conservatives to point out where they're failing people on the issues that matter most to people in our proposition next election.
Yes, of course, we will also set out our European agenda.
We're not hiding it.
We come on the Liberal Democrats.
One of the things we like to do is pass policy.
We have got lots of policy.
What I want to do is to make sure we're connecting that to people to rebuild trust in politics in the Liberal Democrats.

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And that's why we are a lot of our campaigns are reflecting the concerns of people.

OK, policy then as quickly as you can.

One minute, summarize your vision for policy,
what the policies were expecting for the Lib Dems.

Well, we will focus on the economy.

We will focus on the NHS and care and we'll focus on things like the environment.

There will be our issues and within those on the economy.

We're going to have a very ambitious green strategy,
environmental policies linked to the future economy.

We're going to have a very, very ambitious position on trade
because we absolutely our trade position is in a dire straits.

We're going to do a lot on small businesses
who feel pretty neglected, the self employed in particular
feel incredibly neglected by this government.

So those are sorts of things on the economy.

There's plenty of others, but they are some of our key areas.

And then I'd say on NHS and care, one of the things that I've said
when I first became the leader, partly because of my personal experience,
but also because of my own analysis, I think you've got to sort out social care
and how families are supported in the care they give to loved ones,
given they deliver most of the care in our country.

And if you don't sort out that, you will never sort out the NHS.

So my sort of sound bite is if you care about the NHS, you've got to care about care.

And that's the sort of professional social care that everyone talks about
from care homes, domiciliary care and so on, when you deal with that aspect of it.

But I think the family care is a bit that's not talked about enough.

The care allowance is a scandal. It's so low.

The level of support, the respite care is dreadful.

And if you look at mental health among family carers, you look at poverty,
if you look at the way women have to do so much of the caring,
you know, you can deal with so much in our society
if you get policy right for family carers.

Now, my penultimate question, it won't surprise you.

Here's about Brexit.

I would ask you this.

What on earth was Joe Swinson doing in gifting Boris Johnson
the election that he'd been gagging for just at the moment
when the People's Vote campaign, which you were involved in and I was involved in,
felt like it actually finally got the momentum that it needed.

And she comes out and says, we're going to have this election
because I can be prime minister.

Madness. I think a slightly writing of history.

She's exaggerating.

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Probably a major in writing, actually, Alistair.
It's not quite how I remember it.
So she basically came out and said this was the right time of the election.
It couldn't have been a worse time to have an election.
Well, first of all, people forget that the conservatives were quite capable of getting election themselves.
And there was a lot of nonsense spoken about.
They could have got the election that time.
When I reflect on being leader now for a few years, I also felt that Joe was leader for a very short period.
She was took over from Vince and had what, four, five months before she faced Electra.
That was challenging for anybody.
For sure. But I just sort of feel she, the Tories laid a trap and she and the SMP jumped into it.
Well, there were lots of debates there and part of the debate was is the election going to be now in three weeks time, in three months time?
There was a real sense that election was going to happen.
It was a question of when some of us wanted to stick out for a little bit more of a chance to get a vote on the second referendum.
It would have been another vote.
We'd had previous ones.
But, you know, I think Liberal Democrats would champion the case for a second referendum.
And we, you know, needed to push that as far as we possibly could.
But, you know, these the judgments are always difficult.
But I think I think to blame Joe Soliff, that is unfair.
Can I just come back then with my last question?
I'd love to give you a chance to reflect a little bit back on caring for a disabled son and what that experience is like and what you've taken from that.
And I think maybe how that was different from caring for your mother.
Well, I mean, caring for my mother was mostly fairly tragic.
I mean, I got to know her really, really well.
And so I became very, very close to her because I'd sit on the bed and talk to her for hours.
But, you know, she was dying.
She just, you know, there's not there's not a happy ending, really.
Whereas for my son, you know, I wish he could walk and wish he could talk.
And I wish he didn't have his learning disabilities and so on.
But I have a great relationship with him.
And yes, it, you know, like all parents caring for disabled children, it's time consuming, it's challenging.

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And it's not has its downsides as well.
And it's pretty full on personal care.
And it would be difficult if I wasn't a London MP, I tell you,
because I need to be there.
But I have a great relationship with him.
And, you know, it might sound odd to you,
but we joke about his naughty parrot.
I bought him this parrot that talks back to him.
And it's a big thing, his naughty parrot.
He is obsessed by it.
And at the moment, his latest obsession is Henry the Hoover.
He likes hoovering his room and wants to do it the whole time.
And so we have our little jokes, like I think most parents do with the kids.
But my biggest thing for him, and I'm sure this is for parents of all kids,
but I think it's particularly for disabled kids is my biggest worry in life
is what happens when I'm not there, you know, because I'm a relatively old dad.
You know, we are we work hard to improve his independence.
You know, I call it first of all, toilet independence.
And I had a red letter a few years, a few days ago, a few weeks ago,
you went to the toilet by himself.
He's speaking. We originally thought he'd be nonverbal.
He says a few words now.
He's under some amazing speech and language therapists.
He's beginning to put senses together so he can express what he wants.
So I want to make him as independent with all these amazing people
so that when I'm not here, he can be as independent as possible
and express his concern and tell people who love him and care for him.
What's happening?
So, you know, I think when you are a carer for your child,
I guess it could be for any person you love, you do worry about what happens
when you're not there and you try to do as much as you possibly can
without, you know, not going to live in the moment as well and enjoy.
Enjoy that.
But you have those you have to think and you have to plan.
So the health fear that I were talking about at our long drive back was
because we talked about about this and your son and what that must be like.
Because there we we weren't party leaders.
We were working for a party leader with three
healthy, able-bodied children doing well at school
and yet found the pressures of parenthood sometimes overwhelming.
And I think Roy feels the same that sometimes that just as as parents
of healthy, able-bodied children, the full time commitment that you need
to work in campaigning and you're going to be leading a party

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in a pivotal general election campaign for this country's history.
I don't know how you do that.
I don't know how you find the energy to to be the carer.
The main answer is my wife.
Right. I mean, Emily is fantastic.
But you you're going to have to campaign and at the same time.
I mean, how much time do you envisage spending with your son when you're out in the campaign trail?
Not as much as I like.
But, you know, we have carers who help us.
And that's challenging because finding carers is not always easy.
We have family who help us.
And, you know, when you are caring for anyone, it's happened with my mother, it happens with John.
You find people who were just amazingly wonderful and supportive.
I mean, when my mum was ill, it was the Malhotra family across the road.
And the doubters who were a few streets away, who were his friends of the family who come with either curries or with lasagna or whatever.
Isn't that amazing? They both got the names of Labour MPs.
Something is happening here, Ed.
Something is happening here.
Listen, there was a Sue Doughty was a Liberal Democrat MP.
So don't don't get two parties in on me, Alistair.
Go, you want to spin, Doctor, always a spin, Doctor.
Just trying to get you guys closer together, just in case that others fall.
So, you know, that's how you get through, you know, good, strong families.
And the thing about my mother, with my grandmother, my son is we were lucky in that we had strong, loving family.
And I worry about and I think we should all worry about are those people who've got these demanding caring roles where they don't have that support.
And, you know, I was talking about the difference between Liberal Democrats and Labour people earlier.
You know, sometimes the state can help and the state does need to support carers, family carers and care professionals far more.
And, you know, it's one of the things I, as you can see, I'm not really passionate about.
We're really fortunate, you know, we're not badly off.
We have the support network, family support and elsewhere.
But what about those carers who don't?
And it's a serious issue because if we don't get this right, if you look at all the projections, demographic projections and aging population and so on and the number of long-term illnesses

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that are predicted and so on, if we don't get this right, the NHS will be in a problem.

So I'm going to be campaigning, come back to my policy next election, Rory. I'm going to be campaigning for carers. That's what I'm going to do.

Very good. Well, thank you.

I mean, I really, really appreciate it.

It's been wonderful to have you be so wide-ranging, so honest, so personal.

And I'll hand back to Alistair for the final words and thoughts.

Thanks, Rory. Thank you.

No, I've really enjoyed it.

And I hope that you promise me that you won't do too many of those awful Lib Dem campaign stunts during the campaign.

Oh, many more to come on.

Oh, there'll be lots and lots of those.

Don't you mind them? I thought you loved them.

I don't mind them. I don't mind them.

But I think sometimes your desperation for visibility can take you to some dark places.

I think they put a smile on people's faces.

I think that's great.

So there'll be more of those.

Yeah, yeah.

Good. Definitely.

All the best. We love you talking to you.

Thank you.

Thank you for wearing a Burnley colour tie.

I'm a not-scantist supporter.

I know.

All the best. Thank you.

Bye.

Goodbye. Thanks a lot.

So Rory, Sir Edd Davie, qu'est-ce qu'on pense?

Well, I thought...

I mean, firstly, I think very, very moving and extraordinary his experiences and the echoes between caring for his mother and caring for his son.

And I think almost that's where he becomes most alive, where he's most fluent, where he's most emotional.

I do still remain not completely sold.

And I'd be interested in you as a communications expert if you can reflect on why someone like me, who should be the perfect kind of Lib Dem voter in the next election, what do you think he could have done more

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to really win over a swing voter like me?
Because I liked him, but I didn't feel completely energised
to rush out and put my tick in the box.
I agree with you.
I think he's very, very likable.
You're up in Scotland doing this down the line
and I'm in London and was in the studio with him.
So have that sort of bit before and after and all that.
What I really liked about him is the conversations
that we're having outside were very similar
to the ones that we're having inside.
There's a sort of, I think, a naturalness to him,
which is very likable.
That's the first time I've met him a few times.
The first time I've had a sort of proper conversation with him.
What could he have done for you?
I think when we were on to policy,
I got the feeling that he's still trying to work out
exactly how the Liberal Democrats are going to position themselves
at the next election.
And also, I think that I'd have liked a bit more maybe of,
I thought he was going to take us down the whole kind of science,
technology, artificial intelligence route with a bit of detail.
But I agree with you.
I think where he really came alive was when he was talking
about being a carer and translating that into policy.
Which, by the way, he is right.
There doesn't need to be that.
I just wanted a bit more of, you know,
I guess economic education policy, that kind of thing.
It does feel as though the election,
I mean, without being unfair to them.
But in a sense, Rishi Sunak, Ed Davey, Kirstama,
all are sort of, you know, feel as though they're slightly,
it's tonally similar.
They're quite sort of, they come across as quite kind of earnest.
They're obviously projecting themselves as kind of diligent.
So there's nobody going into that next election who's really,
I think ticks the old fashioned charisma thing.
But I also thought as a ex-politician that if somebody asked me,
go and give us a minute on your policies,
that should be totally fluent.
That should be just ready to go.

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You should have three sentences bang off the top.
Our economic policy is based on this on trade,
this on industrial strategy, this on regulation.
My care policy is going to be based on this income,
this expenditure, this change.
I mean, because you're supposed to have practiced it again and again
so you can do your one sentence and one paragraph,
that sort of thing, and it's odd that he's not quite there yet.
Yeah, I think that's right.
I thought that was, he seemed to be thinking aloud a little bit to me.
I've not heard him do many long form interviews.
I've not really heard him before talking about his childhood in that way.
I've not heard him talk really much about his son.
I suspect that they came into that interview thinking,
right, well, this is a long interview.
We're talking to people, to a very politically engaged audience.
The one thing I was interested in, I don't,
I think he didn't want to come over as a sort of retail politician
coming on a program like this and thinking, right, now I must land the right soundbite.
It's interesting when he talked about a soundbite.
He actually said, you know, the soundbite I use is,
and I almost said to him that, you know,
because Keir Starmer does that as well.
He often, he'll get a question and interview
and he'll say, as I've said many times before,
and, you know, it's a way of saying,
I'm a bit embarrassed to say this because it's a line,
but actually, part of the art of political communication is just say it
like it's the first time you've ever said it, yeah.
You've got to embrace it and believe it with conviction
because you've got to be proud of it
because your job is to communicate and translate.
And I mean, it would be, I mean, you need the faith.
I mean, it's true that I guess if you were a priest,
you're not embarrassed reciting your creed.
That's the deal. That's what your job is.
He did quote one of the Ten Commandments, though, didn't he?
That's right. That's right.
To Eric Pickles, no less.
Had any of you know this or he was born on Christmas Day.
No. Goodness. Well, there's this.
He could do something with that.
That could be a real lip-dump campaign stunt.

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Absolutely. God knows what.
Anyway, I did like him, though.
I found him very, very likable.
Yeah, I really want him. I really want him.
And I thought his personal story is extraordinary.
And of course, it's reassuring having somebody like that running.
I mean, I think he will be a deeply reassuring figure.
He's somebody who I'm sure would, you know,
be a really good person in government.
It's unfortunate in a sense that he's running an election
in which that's sort of what the other two candidates
are trying to run on to.
So it's less easy for him to differentiate himself.
I have to say, I hope he wasn't being
wholly uneconomical with the truth when he said
that he didn't see Kier Starmer very often.
I hope they see each other very regularly to say,
right, listen, I'm not campaigning here.
We have nobody there.
That would be a free ride because I really do think
that the country wants that to happen.
The big driving thing is he said is get the Tories out.
So best way to do that.
100%. And I think final reflection is just interesting
that he's three years into it.
I didn't quite feel that he was three years into it.
It felt slightly as though he was newer to the job.
I'm surprised that this is somebody
who's been the leader for three years.
Yeah, but you know, one of the differences is
this is why parliament matters so much.
He doesn't get called at Prime Minister's questions
very often.
You know, the third party now is the SNP.
Right.
So the SNP leader gets two questions
and Ed gets called every now and then.
It's very hard for the Liberal Democrats to get visibility.
Well, thank you, Alastair.
Thank you for bringing him on.
I thought that was a really, really interesting interview.
And I shall see you soon.
See you soon.