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First Published  
27 September 2010

### **Party Conference Season**

Party conferences can often seem like an anachronism in the age of constant emails and 24 hour rolling news. The reasons they were originally held; to help all branches of a party communicate and to give everyone a clear understanding of 'the message' for the coming year are now rather dated. Indeed the idea of spending the entire year on one campaign or message seems, in our modern political climate, almost naive.

But the party conference season is still a vitally important part of our political landscape and very much a highlight of the year for me. It is an annual time taken out, from the Leader down to the activist knocking on doors, to think about what direction the Party is going, to bat around fresh ideas, to look at things differently. Some of the best and brightest policy ideas we come up with begin as off-topic brainstorming sessions at a fringe event, and a question from the floor to a minister can change the entire direction of a debate.

There are also still moments of high drama; I remember vividly David Cameron's famous speech without notes when he stood for the Leadership and even this weekend we have seen the election of a new Labour leader in Ed Miliband against the odds (and seemingly the voters too).

But more than anything, in this time when we are in a Coalition, Party Conference is a chance for us to all gather together and assert our identity as a Party. We are working very well with our Lib Dem colleagues in this coalition and I think the country is seeing that we are delivering the good, strong stable government that we promised after the election. We have found much common ground with Nick Clegg, on school reform, on the need for tackling our national debt, but we are still a distinct party with a unique vision on how our country is best served. Next week is a wonderful chance for there to be a restatement of what it is we believe, what it is we want to achieve in Government and how we plan on tackling the challenges ahead.

There are three political parties in this country, and this is something we should celebrate. Of course we need to work together at this time of real economic difficulty for the whole country, but our Government and Parliament are at their best when there is intelligent, thoughtful debate, when all three parties present a different visions for how to move our country forward. Party conference is a chance for all of us, Conservative, Liberal and Labour, for MP, Councillor, and voter to refresh our thinking, asses our achievements and to come back in two weeks time with new impetus and different ways of working together.

Much of the media coverage will, of course, try and play upon and tease out differences between the Conservatives and the Lib Dems, this is something we should take with a pinch of salt. We are, after all, partners making up one Government but we are also two very different political parties. This is something that we should be proud of. We can disagree, sometimes profoundly, on policy but we will still be coming together in October to govern in the national interest. That is what the new politics is all about.