

COLUMNISTS

This issue, **George Freeman MP** tells us why he's a Bright Blue parliamentary supporter

WHY I'M
A BRIGHT
BLUE MP



GEORGE FREEMAN is the MP for Mid Norfolk, Minister for Life Sciences and co-founder of the 2020 Group of Conservatives

The Times recently held a debate pitting Tim Montgomerie against Matthew Parris, trad versus mod, the Conservative party a house divided against itself. Indeed, it seems to be received wisdom that our future is a divided one, a repeat of Labour in the eighties. But I profoundly disagree. I am a Bright Blue MP because I believe the most successful political party in history can draw on the best instincts of our liberal and conservative families and build a Progressive Alliance for our generation which is relevant to the profound challenges we face, a new Gladstonian vision of reform. Indeed, as a great great nephew of the Grand Old Man, I can't help but agree with Margaret Thatcher, who once said: "I would not mind betting that if Mr. Gladstone were alive today he would apply to join the Conservative Party."

This means the Modernisation 2.0. Bright Blue has so eloquently set out. I believe the ongoing economic crisis of debt, structural deficits, cost of living and social mobility can still be our opportunity for a much more profound and unifying modernisation and renewal that unites social liberals with social conservatives around a new Progressive Alliance. As well as the divisions over issues like gay marriage, we have seen examples of how all wings of the party can unite around the most progressive measure of this Parliament: taking the lowest-paid out of income tax – achieving progressive ends through conservative means.

Seen through this lens, it quickly becomes apparent that economic modernisation is not just a potential election strategy, but a geopolitical necessity. I think it is no exaggeration to say that the financial crisis signaled the death-throes of the post-war model of growth, fuelled by ever-bigger Government and blind to the challenges from the emerging world. It was a historic wake up call for the UK economy. The Brownite con – fuelling a false boom through the steroids of debt and a wave of cheap migrant labour – was the last gasp of a broken economic model.

The most successful party can draw on our liberal and conservative families

It called first for a rescue, helping retain the confidence of the bond markets. But it also called for a new vision for the economy. Now, in the light of the worst financial crisis in a century and the certainty of further fiscal crises in decades to come, we can show in 2015 how our rescue operation has moved to a truly modernising view of a more innovative British economy fuelling a more mobile British society.

Progressive economic modernisation insists that you can have both innovation in economics and a politics of belonging – economic wings and social roots, in David Willetts' terms, the two great strands of Conservative thought – brought together, tackling the "hollowing out" of the British economy and society of which the Prime Minister spoke so powerfully in his leadership campaign.

The world faces huge structural challenges in the decades to come: in health, welfare, pensions and credit-addicted economies. Indeed, the challenges of the twenty-first century will be first and foremost economic. As the West slowly begins to lose absolute dominance in the race for resources, the global race for food, energy and medicine will intensify, something I spend my days tackling as the first ever Minister for Life Sciences at the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Department of Health.

As Bright Blue has pointed out, the Right always has to be reminded that the Left doesn't have the monopoly on optimism. Punching the Labour bruise on debt will be a vital element of a successful election strategy for 2015. But creating an Innovation Economy and Opportunity Society based on increased social mobility, productivity and competitiveness is the only way to put money in people's pockets and drive a really sustainable recovery, one of the central missions behind the 2020 Group of Conservatives I co-founded in 2010.

As the Prime Minister set out in his once-in-a-generation conference speech in September, it is only the Conservatives who have a vision for what Britain can look like in 2020 and beyond. An economy based on scientific discovery, innovation across the public and private sectors, world-beating infrastructure and a global outlook. It is both modernising and optimistic.

I am a Bright Blue MP because I believe, as the Prime Minister highlighted, that all wings of the Conservative Party can unite around a Progressive Politics which delivers #GrowthForAll in 2015. ●