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24 January 2013

Dear Andrew

I am sure you will agree that it is vital that public debate is informed by accurate use of statistics.

However, in a Party Political Broadcast by the Conservative Party last night, the Prime Minister said:

“We are now halfway through the coalition’s time in government and in two and a half years we have achieved a lot but I know people don’t just want to hear from me, they want to know the facts... So though this government has had to make some difficult decisions, we are making progress. We are paying down Britain’s debts.”

As you will be aware, figures from the Office for National Statistics published this week show that the national debt is not being paid down, but is actually rising. Since this government came to office, public sector net debt has risen from £811.3 billion (55.3 per cent of GDP) in the second quarter of 2010, to £1,111.4 billion at the end of December 2012 (70.7 per cent of GDP).

The Office for Budget Responsibility has also forecast that public sector net debt will continue to rise and the government’s target to get it falling by 2015-16 will not be met.

This is not the first time government Ministers have made similar claims about the national debt. However, last night’s Party Political Broadcast is the first occasion I am aware of when the Prime Minister has made such a claim in a scripted broadcast. This suggests that the Conservative Party may be attempting to deliberately mislead the public about these statistics and the government’s record.

I would be grateful if you could bring some clarity to the situation and advise on how we can ensure that in the future debate on the national debt is accurate and based on the facts.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel Reeves MP
Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury