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**Waugh Zone Live: Rt Hon David Gauke MP, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in conversation with Paul Waugh**

**Paul Waugh (PW):** Asked Gauke about the problems that have arisen from Universal Credit (UC).

**David Gauke (DG):** Began by focusing on the 6-week delay in people getting their payment, he said this is so it imitates the way workers are paid their wages. Gauke mentioned the system of advances under UC this are in place to help people who find themselves in hardship as a payment is made and then deducted over the next 6 months. It is possible people were not aware this was available and it should be made more public, over the last 6 months these advance payments have increased and same day bank transfer is available for the advance payments.

**PW:** Has the concept of payments being in arrears been rethought as people are not exclusively paid this way when working.

**DG:** It is true that people are not always paid in arrears or monthly but UC tries to keep things as stable as possible, one of the intentions of UC is to make people more independent. Gauke singled out work coaches and said the work they do is impressive and the enthusiasm they show towards their job is great.

**PW:** Currently job centres are being closed; if they are great why is this?

**DG:** Answered by saying the amount of staff who are helping claimants of UC has gone up, and the offices being closed is due to many contracts on property's coming to an end. Gauke said the coverage of job centres is still very good and recruitment is going well.

**PW:** You have suggested a number of reforms; will these change UC and solve the problems people are facing?

**DG:** The entire approach with UC about testing and learning and changes have been made as it has been rolled out, each week that goes past the situation is getting better and better. Gauke does not want people to get carried away with the roll out over the next few months as everybody is learning and nobody will be reckless.

**PW:** MPs in your own party may want the roll out paused as concerns have been raised.

**DG:** These concerns are understood and as he said earlier he wants the system to always be getting better.

**PW:** One of the main criticisms of UC is that it is really a money saving exercise and some will be worse off due to the taper on earnings.

**DG:** Comparisons are unfair when looking at what people get from the system as some get more and some get less. Gauke went on to question the wisdom behind 16 hours being the standard number of hours for a single parent to work, he put this down to legacy benefits putting people in this position. The taper rate was made more generous in the last budget.

PW: You used to work in the Treasury do you think is this why you are now at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)?

DG: The only thing he wants is for the welfare system to be affordable and sustainable.

PW: You were name checked by the Prime Minister (PM) The Andrew Marr Show. She is not popular amongst the public and is unlikely to go into the next election, Sajid Javid didn't answer a question when asked about her a couple of days ago and Boris Johnson is viewed as causing problems.

DG: Said he thinks the PM should lead the party into the next election as if she can deliver the Brexit she is proposing and faces the challenges that are currently present she will have a strong record to back her up. Boris is a big figure in the country and has a view on events. He does not feel the country care about the people in charge but the Government doing a good job.

PW: Asked whether he would want to be leader of the party Chancellor or PM.

DG: Does not personally feel he has the qualities or the desire to be able to do the job. The current PM has shown tremendous resilience and he doubts whether he could in the same circumstances. Gauke also pointed towards having a young family and wanting as much time as possible with them. Being Chancellor is interesting when his family are older mainly due to his time at the Treasury. He complimented Philip Hammond saying he is excellent.

PW: More people are thinking about universal basic income, what where his thoughts on this?

DG: Said he knows many people have done research on universal basic income but does not think the sums add up despite it being appealing. Gauke presented two situations he would see occurring where people do not have enough income and need support or where taxes are not desirable or deliverable.

PW: Asked about the two-child limit on some benefits that will have an impact on over 100,000 children.

DG: This is about fairness and when people are working they must think about the size of their own family and worry about the costs associated with this. As a father, he knows difficult decisions must be made when people are working out if they can afford a child or another child. He does expect a change in behaviour to come, Gauke dismissed the view that this is similar to China as people are allowed to have as many children as they want it is tax credits that are limited.

PW: The Government have found flexibility on public sector pay will they find the same flexibility to address the benefit freeze?

DG: The public finances are not in a strong position this can be seen by people borrowing a lot of money each year, Gauke pointed towards the Labour Party who have not yet pledged to end the benefit freeze.

PW: The High Court have made a ruling stating that imposing the benefit cap on single parents who have children under the age of two is unlawful and did damage. The DWP is appealing this decision what is your view of this?

DG: It is not his place to comment on the likelihood of success of this appeal. Again, he spoke about fairness and how people who are not working should not be getting more than those who are. The benefit cap is more about the principle that the economic cost for him.

PW: Wanted to know what Gauke's take on food banks what is.

DG: They play an important role in society he of course does not want anyone to ever use a food bank. He does not think it is fair that the amount of money people get is seen as the reason, he pointed to Germany who have a generous welfare state and people use food banks.

PW: Some personal independence payment (PIP) assessments have been proved as being totally wrong how will this be addressed going forward.

DG: A total review of PIP is not needed and he is fully aware of the tough cases that people have assessed. He does want an improvement in the quality of these assessments so it is more accurate.

PW: Realistically how much longer can the triple lock on pensions be in place?

DG: Said it will not be reformed this Parliament but it will not last forever. He pointed towards several factors for this, the expenditure on those above the retirement age will soon be more than those under it. The triple lock would be able to stay in place if earnings were rising. Gauke did not comment when asked if the Conservatives would change their stance on pensions in the future.