

How long will it take to win the Election? Just 104 minutes... says JAMES FORSYTH

By [James Forsyth for The Mail on Sunday](#)

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Tory MPs gathered in the most English of locations for their away-day, the Cotswolds. David Cameron welcomed them on to his patch by joking that they were all now members of the Chipping Norton set. But it was an American, Jim Messina, who put fire in their bellies and sent them home believing that they can win the next election.

Messina ran Barack Obama's successful re-election campaign. Last year, the Tories announced that they had signed him up to advise them ahead of the General Election. It was a prestige hire. But many, including several senior Cabinet Ministers, admitted that they didn't expect him to actually do much.

Yet, in recent months – perhaps, spurred on by his old rival from the Obama campaign David Axelrod joining up with Ed Miliband – he has become increasingly active. He was at the Tory conference at the end of September and jetted in this week just so that he could address this away-day. One Downing Street source purrs: 'Messina is rolling his sleeves up. He wants to win with us.'

Messina is rolling his sleeves up. He wants to win with us says one Downing Street insider

In a sign of the American strategist's importance, his presentation was introduced by Cameron himself. Many MPs were in the mood to be sceptical, regarding Messina as an over-paid hired gun. But his analysis persuaded all but the most negative MPs.

He told them that the average person thinks about politics for just four minutes a week and there are 26 weeks to the General Election, meaning just 104 minutes to get re-elected. He said that they need voters to think three things in this time: that Cameron is fixing Britain, that he and his team are creating jobs for you and your family and that only the Tories will keep this going. He warned them that if you campaign on things that your opponent is strong on, you'll lose.

Many of those present took this as an implicit plea for the party to stop going on about immigration, Ukip's great strength. Indeed, at the top of the party there now seems to be an acceptance that the recent emphasis on this subject has been a mistake.

Messina told them that three things determine who wins elections: raising money, persuading and identifying voters, and turning them out.

He argued that on all these fronts, the Tories were ahead and that is why he was confident they would win. He said that on jobs 'you guys have an even better story to tell than the President' did in 2012. He also emphasised Cameron



was well ahead on leadership too, scathingly remarking Mitt Romney was a poor candidate. But, obviously, 'not as poor as Ed Miliband'.

The Tories hired Messina because of his expertise in using new technology to connect with voters. His message was that people go to bed with their smartphones and they are the first thing they think about when they wake up so they need to find a way to reach voters through these devices. Messina finished by boasting: 'I've never lost an election and, believe me, I'm not starting with Ed Miliband.'

Tory MPs all but fist-bumped their approval. But they were brought back down to earth by Cameron's remarks. He reiterated Messina's argument that the economy was their strongest suit and their road to victory. But he cautioned that immigration was an obstacle and that they had to get this boulder out of the way before they could head down this path to victory.

Cameron's problem is that Number 10 hasn't yet worked out how to do this. The PM's big speech on immigration will now not take place until after the Rochester by-election, which the Tories are now resigned to losing to Ukip, on November 20.

But why wait? The quicker he moves off immigration and on to the economy the better.

After all, if the average voter is going to think about politics for only 104 minutes between now and polling day, the Tories don't have any time to waste.

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