

[Transcript] The News Agents / Exclusive: Matt Hancock on NatCon, Covid, WhatsApps and "being human"

This is a global player original podcast.

Since we started the news agents back in September, for one reason or another, there has been one person, one politician who has been consistently in the news and someone that over that time we have really, really wanted to get into the news agent studio.

The person in question was a cabinet minister during COVID who was caught snogging his special advisor on camera, who then went to the jungle for redemption where he ate sheep's vagina and camel's penis.

He handed over 100,000 WhatsApp messages to Isabelle Oakshot, a journalist with a reputation for burning her contacts from time to time, and then he was caught on camera trying to get £10,000 a day from a Korean company that didn't exist.

We're talking about Matt Hancock coming up next.

Welcome to the news agents.

It's going to be a cracker.

The news agents.

It's Lewis and it's John and we are joined in the studio now by Matt Hancock and I suspect Matt Hancock, what has got you animated is the NatCon conference this week, the National Conservative Conference, which we spent quite a bit of time discussing on the news agents earlier in the week.

What did you make of it?

I saw a lot of the news that came out of it and I thought that if these voices, if these arguments win a debate within the Conservative Party, then I think the Conservative Party is finished.

And what I really dislike is this sort of sense of an attempt at a Trumpian takeover, looking at some of the things that have happened in American politics, especially on the right, and trying to bring them into British politics, which until recently had been basically defined by a debate around the centre about what's best for the country and has over recent years had much more extreme voices come to the fore, a more shrill debate.

In my time in Parliament, in 12 years, and in my time in politics, just under 20 years, that's been a big shift in how politics has happened.

And I think it's bad for political discourse, I think it's bad for the country.

But specifically, this National Conservative Conference at the weekend and some of the arguments that were being put, which was clearly a sort of attempt to claim the soul of the Conservative Party, it mustn't go unopposed because the views put forward were wrong and deeply unattractive.

And if the party decides that that's what it's going to stand for, it would be a massive mistake.

It's not what the vast body of the Kirk, if you like, of the Conservative Party believe, but it sure as hell off-putting for the sort of people we need to attract for the Conservatives to stay in office.

So do you think it was a mistake for serving ministers and cabinet ministers to be speaking there?

Well, I definitely think that giving credence to that sort of approach is a mistake.

It depends what people say, right?

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Actually I watched Michael Gove's appearance and he took on some of the arguments that the conference as a whole had stood for, and I admire him for that.

He's quite brave as a politician generally, and so it's not wrong to take a platform if you then make the right argument, if you see what I mean.

So I'm not going to criticise them directly for going.

The key point is that this is not what conservatism is or stands for.

Well, I wonder whether we should just play a little bit of Suella Brouhamann, who is a very senior minister.

Just let me play you this clip.

And there is something peculiar about our current political moment where those of us advancing unfashionable facts are beaten over the head with fashionable fictions.

The ethnicity of grooming gangs is the sort of fact that has become unfashionable in some quarters.

Much like the fact that 100% of women do not have a penis.

The problem with what was coming over the airwaves from the weekend was not just the substance of it, but also the tone.

You know, a tone of divisiveness and trying to split people apart.

You think that's what Suella Brouhamann was doing?

Well, I think actually from her whole speech she had quite a lot of very good points.

And some of what she was saying there is important, especially on grooming.

We shouldn't be afraid of calling out bad behavior because of oversensitivity to cultural concerns.

But we should talk about it in a very cautious and careful tone.

And I think that the reason I've called some of those making the arguments and some of those at the conference, conservative Corbinistas, is because I think it's an enormous irony that the tactics that are being deployed are the same sort of tactics that the Corbinistas deployed on the left, you know, momentum and all that.

And they will be just as destructive to the conservatives as a force on the centre right if they take hold as they were to the Corbinistas on the left.

And there's another reason that I've spoken out and that's because the moderates within the Conservative Party, right, my one nation colleagues, we're always really careful about speaking out.

We don't want to give, you know, the oxygen of publicity to the people we're arguing against.

We believe very strongly in party unity.

And so often don't speak out.

So you get these big noises and these big debates on the right and everybody, you could take away from that.

Oh, that's where the Conservative Party stands.

But that's exactly what you're going to be accused of now for coming into the news agent studio and saying all the things you've just said.

And I suppose what I'm saying is enough is enough.

You cannot put on a performance like that and imply that this is the future of the

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Conservative Party without somebody standing up and saying, no, that is wrong.
That is not what the mainstream of conservatives stand for.
It is a dead end for conservatives to go down that route.
It is a surefire where not only of losing the next election, but staying out of power for years and years and years.
And we've got to make the positive arguments for a for a for a progressive conservatism that directly addresses the needs of people and delivers for people and brings people together and builds coalitions rather than dividing.
But the point is, is, is that these people, I mean, I suck through, you know, a day of that conference, and these people, they argue that much of what has happened over the last 13 years when you've been a minister and government minister wasn't really conservatism. And it was completely rubbish.
You know, they argue this on the day that the PISA tables show that we've gone up to fourth in the world in in our language abilities of our children.
That's because of Michael Gove and Nick Gibb, of course, and a whole load of a movement of teachers and headteachers, right?
That is conservative policy in action.
It happened at the same time.
So this argument, we haven't really been conservative in in office.
And what a load of rubbish.
I mean, after all, right, when did the 50p rate get cut, right?
It got cut by George Osborne in a coalition government.
When did I was a minister, one of my responsibilities early in my time in office was I was the deregulation minister.
Is that you're part of the party?
You've already alluded to this.
Why does your part of the party take it?
I mean, there have been very few voices.
That's why I'm here.
But that's why you're here.
But you're not even a conservative MP.
No, I'm an independent.
You're leaving parliament.
Right.
So where are the rest of your colleagues?
Is Rishi Sunak doing enough to stand up to these people?
Well, Rishi is just getting a grip.
And I've got a huge amount of time for what he's doing, the approach he's taking.
I want him in at the right moment.
And I'm not calling for it now.
I'm not putting pressure on him.
He will, I'm confident, set out his big vision for the future, for the next parliament, you

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know, the pitch for the next election.

You know him well.

I mean, what do you think he makes of all this stuff?

He'll have seen this stuff this week.

Oh, he'll think it's a terrible distraction.

He, you know, one of the things that I really admire about Rishi is he's in politics to make life better for people.

Right.

I mean, he is, as I think many people have noted, you know, he's dry as dust economically.

Of course, he'll cut taxes when he can, but he'll only do it when it's affordable.

You know, we did try the whole unfunded tax cuts thing, which I've spent my whole political career arguing against.

We did try it in the autumn briefly, and it was exactly the disaster that many of us predicted it would be.

So Rishi is, Rishi is, is a strong conservative, but what he really cares about is not this signaling.

And this is another reason it's like the Corbynistas.

It's all, it's all signaling and dividing lines.

It's not delivering for people.

And that's what politics should be about.

Well, we've talked about economic policy.

Yeah.

Also, I mean, I was struck by the NatCon conference by social policy and attitude and let me just play you this clip of, you've already got your hands over your eyes.

Because I don't want to hear it again.

I've already heard it twice.

I mean, honestly, I know what you're going to play.

Let's play it.

The normative family held together by marriage, by mother and father sticking together for the sake of the children and the sake of their own parents and the sake of themselves.

This is the only possible basis for a safe and successful society.

It is so offensive and it's so wrong.

I mean, tell that to the king.

You know, he doesn't have a normative family and he is absolutely a strong basis for society.

I mean, to make the argument that if you're in an abusive marriage, you must stick together for the sake of the kids.

Otherwise, you're somehow undermining society.

Now, Danny and I, we used to be very close.

He, in fact, worked for me when I was a minister before he was in Parliament.

He was with David Cameron.

He was, I worked for George Osborne when he worked for David Cameron and, you know, he has a huge amount to offer and to say, especially on civic society, on charities.

But this is, it's just, if Danny really, really believes that I'm a tolerant kind of guy,

but don't try to impose it on everybody else.

Thank you very much.

And certainly don't try to give any impression that it is anything other than a completely fringe view within the Conservative Party.

Why, after all, should we, as the party, essentially of equal opportunity and of freedom, have a view on other people's marriages?

I mean, please, can we stop talking about this because it will hood us out of power for a generation?

I mean, it's completely opposite of what Cameron tried to do in opposition for Europe.

Not only tried to do, delivered.

Detoxify the Conservative Party on all these other marriages.

It's like 2005 to 2015 never happened, listening to that conference last weekend.

And look at the numbers in terms of the electoral effect of having this sort of tone to the fore.

You know, it isn't just that the under 25s don't vote Conservatives, you know, for years, under 25s haven't voted Conservatives.

It's the under 50s who are no longer voting Conservatives.

We got 10% of under 50s in the local elections.

I mean, actually, on this course, I mean, if this is the route that the Conservative Party is going to go down, I mean, do you think this is, I mean, this could be extinction type stuff for the Conservative Party with younger voters?

If the, if the Conservative Party goes down the route of the National Conservative Convention, it will not be a force, a political force with any prospect of government, any time it makes those views clear, you cannot build an electoral coalition based on those views.

You can impart in America, America is a very different country.

You cannot hear.

And the reason is because people are tolerant and generally forward looking and optimistic.

And if you don't look like you care about modern Britain, in fact, you know, love and embrace the wonderful nature of modern Britain.

I was reflecting on this that, you know, the Conservatives generally, one of the reasons you're a Conservative is because you basically believe in individualism more than you believe in, in state collectivism, right?

That's basic political philosophy.

Well, individualism means that you really believe in diversity.

You celebrate the difference between people.

You're not looking for to collectivise everybody into a mush and assuming that they're all the same.

Diversity is our strength.

Look at the Cabinet.

Look at the Prime Minister.

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That all came from David Cameron's drive to broaden out the Conservative party. But doesn't part of your part of the part, Matt, have to take some responsibility because in a sense, year after year, particularly if you go back to Brexit, after Brexit, after 2016, your part of the party is just caved to this wing of the party time and time again.

Richie Sunat, who you say has no particular truck with a lot of these views, he talks about all this woke stuff all the time.

He talks about rewriting history all the time.

He's put Soella Braverman as Home Secretary and she knows he knows exactly what her views are, which she articulated at NatCon.

So it's just this, it's just this consistent tale of giving in and not standing up for what your part of the party believes.

Well, it's true that there is a tendency in my part of the Conservative party, the liberal, progressive, forward-looking, optimistic, positive, cheerful part of the Conservative party to try not to have big rouse, right?

And to try to put lid on it and be a team.

And the other side of the debate doesn't seem to have that approach quite so much to put it gently.

But I also would actually take on your characterisation in the question, right?

On social policy, for instance, one of the reasons that I could back Boris Johnson and do that wholeheartedly when he became Prime Minister is because he's a massive social liberal.

I mean, he's an economic liberal as well.

And, but you made the comparison.

And so actually, actually on these issues, the Conservative party has been in the right place for a long time.

Cameron, Theresa May, Boris Johnson, all are on that side of the argument.

And Rishi, I assume, absolutely is not going to upset that.

But we cannot have just the argument being one without others standing up. Right.

And you are standing up and you said you are the one who is prepared to say enough is enough.

Do you worry that you're the wrong person to be doing it, that you don't have the moral authority given all that has happened over the past year?

I far, far rather this was a cacophony of voices and it will be, I'm sure.

You know, I've seen, I've seen Robert Bucklin, Mr.

Byersell, we've seen Damien Green often makes these arguments.

I just want to give confidence.

Of course, all of us can make arguments with our both our particular way of doing it and everything and all the baggage, we call it,

John, that you bring to an argument and I fully accept that.

But, you know, somebody, somebody wrote, well, this is the right argument.

The Tories should listen to Matt Hancock, but they probably won't

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because of everything that's happened.

Well, yeah, fine.

But I don't have a choice over that bit.

I don't have a choice over the past, but I do have a choice about whether I'm going to stand up and say anything.

And actually, I was going to just, I was just going to be quiet, but I just couldn't, I can't put up with the Tory party going backwards so much.

Right.

Matt is going to stay with us and we will be hearing more from him after the break.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back.

Matt Hancock is still with us in the studio.

You've come to the news agent studio, you've talked about the baggage and there's some stuff that you haven't discussed before.

And we would very much like to discuss.

What on earth were you thinking when you handed over to Isabel Oakeshott, those 100,000 plus WhatsApp messages that were intimate correspondence with some of the most senior people in the country, the most senior people in the country?

Well, I'm not intending to get very far into this because it doesn't, it doesn't merit it.

But obviously, I believe in the rule of law and I'd signed an NDA and actually in government, you share details of an awful lot and it, and it tends to stay private because people respect the law and they respect commitments that they've given.

And it is obviously, I've said that what a, you know, a betrayal of that trust it was, but I'm not going to say anything more because I don't, I hear I certainly don't want to give the oxygen of publicity.

It's just not.

Well, I mean, you happen to be sitting in the same chair as Isabel Oakeshott when she came into the studio to talk about you.

I just, I just wonder if what you might say to something that she said at that time, let's just hear what she said when she came into the news agent studio at the time a couple of months ago, when those messages were released.

You should not poke the hornet's nest.

No, my priority is not protecting my relationship with Matt Hancock.

I'm not going to get into a, he said, she said, war of words with Matt about how he behaved towards me during or after that project.

There's plenty I could say.

I really, no, I'm not going to do that.

I really want to maintain the moral.

I really want to maintain in so far as possible.

I would like to make this not about him or about me because it isn't.

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I mean, you were about to use the phrase maintain the moral high ground.
You would understand if he were here, he would say that that moral high ground does not exist because you broke an agreement.
Oh, wow.
We are so not going to get into the moral high ground.
Trust me, you know, I'm not going to deploy nuclear weapons, but I have.
But they exist.
These new clip.
What about him and his behavior?
I'm just not going to go there.
OK, but if he should not poke the hornet's nest.
Because there are things that you could say, which would be very damaging to him.
Yes, I'm not going to do it.
Not unless I'm pushed to it.
I'm not going to do it because this isn't about him.
I've absolutely no hornet's nest, nuclear weapons.
What do you think of?
What do you think when you hear her talking in that way?
I mean, it must have been an extraordinary period.
What do you think of that?
Well, I just think it was it was a very significant betrayal.
But was this an era of judgment?
Do you now reflect to have given her all those WhatsApp messages?
Well, with hindsight, obviously.
But when you work with somebody, you you work on the material together.
She had a reputation.
I mean, she had a reputation.
Yeah, but I'd also known for 20 years, right?
I mean, one of the as well as one of the few people I knew before I in Westminster, when I first came to Westminster.
So did she tell you?
Did she tell you she's going to do it?
No.
Didn't know if you find out.
I found out from other journalists phoning up and saying,
have you got a response to this thing that the Telegraph are dropping tonight?
What was your reaction?
How has it made you feel?
I'm not going there.
I'm just not going there.
Just clarify this for me.
Are you taking legal action still because you threatened it at the time?
I'm just not going there.

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I just don't what I just.
But you did threaten it at the time.
So you did threaten legal action at the time.
I mean, it's a matter of matter of matter of fact where the legal action is.
There's no legal action going on.
There isn't. No, I'm it's just.
There was no substance to what came out.
We all know that you've everybody's been through it all.
In fact, what it showed is a lot of the conspiracy theories
that have grown up around the pandemic, like on contracts.
For instance, they're not true because by ironically,
by releasing all of this and the Telegraph going through it
and not finding any confirmation that actually demonstrates
that a whole series of the conspiracy theories
that I've had to sort of fight off over the last couple of years.
Are not true and they're not.
But no, I'm just I'm just I don't want to go.
You can understand we've also got the inquiry coming up now quite soon.
Of course. And I'm just not going any further.
I understand. I understand your reticence and reluctance to go there.
Good. Just just that.
That's that's all I'm about.
It doesn't mean we agree with it.
It doesn't mean. But but but the but is that she said she had nuclear weapons.
You say that's I don't know what she's talking about.
At the time you threatened legal action, now you're telling us you're not taking.
Well, because that would suggest.
I mean, maybe that suggests that Isabel Oakshock does have nuclear weapons.
And that's why you're not going ahead with the legal case.
No, what happened was just to be totally clear on that.
There was a legal exchange at that point.
The Telegraph stopped publishing things and I thought it was best to let it lie.
So they stopped publishing things because I don't know.
I don't know whether it was coincidence or I don't come to a sudden end.
I'm just not going any further on it.
I don't it was it, you know, I've had to put up with a lot, right?
And of course, everybody makes makes misjudgments.
But I also, you know, had this extraordinary role during the pandemic
and, you know, led played my part in leading the country through a very difficult time.
We delivered some things that were totally extraordinary,
like the vaccine project and roll out.
And I and I have to deal now with a whole load of often quite mad
consequences of what people think because of that time.

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You'll have seen that, you know, there's a lot of there's a lot of stuff from another MP.
And I just don't want to just don't want to be suing you for calling him an anti-vaxxer,
which he obviously is when he compared the vaccine program to the Holocaust.
I mean, just so I I just I'm just not going that because it is not fair or right
to give any more credence to a whole load of arguments, which are fundamentally based on nothing.
Well, what you said, obviously, there was there was nothing in the message.
I mean, there was some stuff of substance in the messages that we learned.
And I accept you will say, of course, that was coming in the inquiry.
I'm not going to comment on any of it.
We're not going to talk about it in the inquiry.
Don't there's no point in spending any time on it.
So when you said that Rishi Sunak's intervention on the out to help out was making
I'm not going I'm just not going there.
You don't stick to that now.
Is that still your view?
I didn't say that.
I'm just not going there.
We're not having a discussion about it.
You said you said at the time in this message,
Lewis, I just want to let you know directly,
Simon case that we had lots of feedback,
eat out to how it's causing problems in our intervention areas.
I've kept out the news, but it is serious.
So the reason that I didn't put any other comments out after I first commented
on these leaks is because this is a completely partial account.
And the pandemic, but those are your words.
Thank you very much.
The the pandemic was a very, very well,
it was an absolutely huge catastrophe for the world.
And the right thing to do is to go through it properly and objectively.
That's why I haven't commented any more on on the very partial accounts.
And what you can do in any enormous exercise is take individual messages,
individual communications and try to pull them apart.
I'm just not going there.
Do you think that I mean, you obviously felt betrayed by what Isabel Oak shot did.
Do you think that Simon Case and Rishi Sunak and others felt betrayed
by you handing over those messages to a journalist?
I obviously with hindsight regret doing that.
But the but I also fundamentally, John,
you've got to believe in this country in the rule of law, right?
And when you sign an agreement with somebody,
a contract that there is confidentiality in the same way that in government,
you work with people with an agreement on confidentiality.

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And there's a huge amount of paperwork in government and tiny hardly anything gets leaked, even in the leakiest of administrations.

And you've got to be able to work on that basis.

And there'll be there'll be people listening to this who use, who have confidential discussions every single day and the idea that somebody should then break that to the extent that she did.

That was a huge betrayal.

So of course it's on me, you know, choosing the wrong person as my to help me write the book.

But it but I did not leak those messages and it would be wrong to to sort of have the impression that it's bloody difficult for a lot of the people.

Of course, it was a total outrageous act.

And you handed them over.

You handed them over basically.

No, I work together with them.

I mean, you handed them over working together with her on a project to enhance your reputation.

No, not really.

So there's not because you say you don't want to talk about the pandemic now, but you wrote the pandemic diaries.

Yes. I mean, that was your book about the pandemic.

And you're now saying you don't want to talk about what happened in the pandemic as the inquiry.

You wrote a book for which you handed over these messages, which was an attempt to your manager, manage your reputation and what you did in that affair.

It was it was it is a book about explaining what I did and how it looked from my point of view, including what went wrong.

But that's the point.

You were willing to hand over those messages to her in a selective where your your objection now to answering questions about them is that you're saying they're selective.

You were only handing over selective messages to her.

So you were happy to do that as long as it was being curated and that process was being curated.

You're just not happy to answer questions now.

It's in the public domain.

Oh, I'm not answering now because there's going to be an inquiry when we can go through everything properly.

The point about the selective leaking of of the WhatsApp messages is that it's a partial account.

The book isn't a partial account.

It has it has it is how I saw it, right?

And the and the inquiry won't be a partial account.

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It will be a full account, not only for me,
but also from hundreds of other people and how and what they did
and how they saw it.

And I think it's I think it's quite wrong to kind of imply
that there's a that there's some kind of similarity
between writing a considered account,
which of course will be available to the inquiry because it's your account.
Yeah, but it's my account.

It's my account, right?

And I was the secretary of state and then just taking some of that material
and leaking it in a in a in a in a in a way that, frankly, is, you know,
broke the law because it broke the contract that we had signed.

Did you break the law?

No, you don't haven't finished my question.

Well, I haven't broken the law.

Well, well, never.

When not that I can, I'm well, there was there was the whole rules
in place about social distancing at the time when you got together
with your special advisor.

No, and the police have looked into it
and confirmed that there's no action to be taken.

So no, but on the 6th of May, no, we're still in stage two COVID restaurant.

Well, you might sigh, Matt.

Well, I sigh because it's at the end of the day.

This is important to a lot of people.

No, you may sigh.

The reason that I sigh is because the reason I sigh is because
I came on to talk about the future of the Conservative Party
and you're asking a question that's been asked many times.
And you don't give many interviews.

So you will understand why we need these questions.

No, I don't agree with you.

And it's part of the maybe you should think about how how
how best to handle these sorts of things when I have given interviews,
including been asked this question.

And then subsequently, it's been reiterated by the police
that they've looked into this and the answer is no.

So you will understand it's a matter of great public interest.

You were the secretary of state at the time of a pandemic
and you were telling people to obey the rules
and you're saying you didn't break the law.

And the law is telling you says no person may participate in a gathering
which consists of two or more people and takes place indoors.

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There was an exception for work purposes,
but only if the gathering was reasonably necessary.

Do you think what you did with with your special adviser was reasonably necessary for work purposes?

Actually, there's so many things wrong with that question and you've got the facts wrong, but I'm just not going there.

The answer is it's been dealt with.

OK, you don't want to take any more on this question.

Are you clear how the video came to light and who put the cameras in?

Yeah, there was a whole investigation into that.

And but the police decided there wasn't enough evidence to prosecute.

What do you think happened?

I think that the security team took a video of the CCTV that they saw.

But I don't want to get into that either, John.

So I'm not going any further, right?

And the reason is because out of especially out of respect for my family, who've been through a lot and actually out of respect for myself, because I've been through a lot and just not getting into it.

Let's talk about your future now, because I mean, it has been.

I've always kind of wondered whether politicians are wired differently from ordinary mortals about their ability to kind of withstand.

So that's one of the reasons I've stopped answering questions that I've answered many times before, like the ones that you were just asking.

But I mean, but but what has happened to you?

Yeah.

Over the past two years, you know, in office, then you're forced to resign over falling in love with somebody, falling in love.

Well, you know, you know, you're in love with breaking your own rules.

[illegible]

I am a Lewis, stop.

I'm a human being, right?

Yeah.

OK, I know state.

Don't interrupt me now, because I'm going to say something that I'd like you to listen to.

I'm a human being.

John's question is leading up to essentially how do you cope with this amount of stuff as a human being?

And part of the answer is that, of course, politicians, you know, have to take the rough with the smooth.

And I have learned a huge amount about resilience.

But I also, now, I'm just not interested in having people just go over old coals again and again and

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again.

It's not it's not fair and it's not right because we are human too.

Of course.

And I have, you know, I've said I have put myself through the most extraordinary amount of scrutiny over everything that happened.

And the inquiry will rightly do that again in a proper format for learning the lessons for the country.

And I'm enthusiastic about playing my part in that.

But I'm also now perfectly willing and totally within my rights to say.

Sure, sure, sure, sure.

I just wonder, you know, as you look towards the future,

do you feel a sense of I don't know what the right word is, shame, embarrassment, regret over.

I mean, you know, most recently caught on a video saying I'll take £10,000 a day, you know, from some Korean fake company or whatever.

And it's just, well, OK, Sting, whatever you want to characterize it.

You do seem particularly accident prone.

Well, I think that's a bit, you know, we're all, we're all human.

No, no, I understand that, of course.

And we've all got friends.

One of the things that's happened is partly because of the extent to which I'm known and partly because of the being the, you know, the forefront in the pandemic.

I do get an absolutely colossal amount of scrutiny and I get the same questions being asked over and over again.

But you chose to be in public life.

You chose to be the secretary of state.

You could have walked away.

Absolutely.

It is perfectly legitimate for people and journalists to continue to ask you questions about your record in that time.

It was you or about your own admission.

It was an enormous event of global support.

And what I'm saying is absolutely.

And and and I have talked about resilience, but it doesn't sound very resilient when you're answering in that way.

Because actually, you know, I'm now leaving Parliament, right?

I care about the future of the country and about the future of the Conservative Party.

So I want to talk about these things.

But I'm also, but I'm also a human being, right?

Of course.

And one of the reasons, so I'm absolutely up for scrutiny on the substance, but I'm also, I think it's also reasonable to say enough is enough.

OK, what are you going to do?

When you live in Parliament, do you want to stay in the public eye?

Or would you, I mean, I suppose that when I was asking the question, which I didn't quite get out

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about politicians being wired differently.

I think if the same things had happened to me under the glare of publicity, I would lie in my bed, pull the duvet over my head and wouldn't get out.

Well, you have to be, you do have to be resilient to be in politics.

You do.

And also, you've got to you only you only have one life.

So you might as well get out there and live it, you know, so I'm not one for pulling the duvet of my head,

because I think that I think that, you know, we get one shot at this and we all make mistakes.

And also, one of the things that's because of everything that's happened to me and the way in which it's happened.

I I just feel like I can speak more freely at a more human level than almost any other person in politics.

And the and certainly more freely and more at a more human level than I used to.

You know, I was well known for being one of the most most sort of well trained and and and constrained, I suppose,

politicians on on messages exactly.

And I've taken all that down.

Actually, that means that I'm much I'm not have a much less thick skin than I used to.

You know, as I've just been straight.

That's because I'm more enormously because I'm more human.

I'm more in touch with, you know, the impact that this has on me.

And actually, it was quite it was quite a big call, whether to even come and have this discussion, because I knew that after the discussion, important discussion about the future of the Conservative Party,

you might have another set of questions.

So what are you going to do?

I don't know.

I don't know.

And in fact, what do you think I've decided not to decide this year?

I'm going to be in Parliament until the next election.

That's going to be at some point in 2024.

We don't know exactly when, but at some point.

So I've decided this year to make your whole life pretty much, hasn't it?

More or less.

I was in a tech company before I went to the mainstay.

But it's been I've been it's 20 years.

Yeah, 20 years at the heart of the Conservative Party really.

How do you find people react to these days when you're walking down the street?

Do you really want to know the honest answer?

I want to know the honest answer.

It's basically 10 to one.

So 10 10 people will come up and say they say things like

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thank you for the vaccine.

I think you did a good job on the jungle.

I think you did a good job on covid loads, wanting selfies and quite a lot saying you don't deserve the amount of shit that you get.

That is like and especially in the last couple of months and after the I was going to say, that's probably changed.

Yeah, that's happened quite recently.

The one thing I get is people coming up and really grabbing my arm and saying you did a good job and you get so much shit and you don't deserve it.

And then that's 10.

And then warm is, you know, less pleasant.

You know, one of the conspiracy theorists.

Well, I had a guy assault me on the tube.

Yeah.

And there must be more a more modern version of the guy on the tube.

What did you say? Why are you shouting?

You killed thousands of people, right?

Because there's a whole series of mad conspiracy theories about what we did and why we did it.

And there's a whole, you know, there's anti-vaxxers, the anti-lockdown people.

And so but that's but that's that is massively outnumbered by the number of people who come and and and want to selfie or show you that was the jungle that did that. I assume it changed.

It definitely I'm definitely more recognized than I was before the jungle.

But was there redemption from the jungle?

I think I showed humanity in a way that I hadn't when I was in office.

Matt Hancock, thank you very much indeed for coming into the news agents.

It's mostly been a pleasure.

That's you know what, that's better than we normally have mostly.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back. Well, John, your thoughts?

Extraordinary.

I thought that he might walk.

I did spend a little bit of time kind of inwardly thinking

or maybe just slightly out of body experience thinking,

why have you agreed to do this when there are so many difficult questions?

And I think the phrase that one uses as a time like this is to say, he has been on a journey.

Yeah, I have to say, I mean, if anyone sees the clips of this

and just to be clear, we decided to leave that interview

that you've just heard unedited to give you the full experience as we experienced it in the studio.

And if you see any of the clips on social media,

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you know, you will see that various points of that interview.
And the reason John and I did think he might walk sometimes
is that at various points when being asked about what happened between him
and his former special adviser,
he looked like he was about to be absolutely overwhelmed with emotion.
I'm not sure if it was quite tears.
I thought he might or anger or anger or both or both.
But it's as if somehow he has already moved into in his own mind,
even though he's still an MP and he is still completely
in what irritated me, you might probably be able to tell,
is that, of course, he was a secretary of state during the pandemic
and he is and he will forever be, whether he likes it or not,
whether he likes to answer questions about it or not,
accountable for the decisions that he took.
But I think in his own mind,
it feels to me like he has already stepped out of the politician door
and into I'm Matt Hancock.
I'm a member of the public and he's adopted these.
I think, John, when you say he's been on a journey,
that's exactly, exactly right.
In a sense, he's adopted these almost quite kind of millennial style ways
of maybe talking about himself and talking about his sort of worth.
And he's moved into that quite individualised kind of space
in the way that he sort of thinks about himself and talks about himself.
And he's just moved out of politics, it seems to me.
But as I say, whether he likes it or not,
he's going to be having to answer these questions,
or at least these questions are going to be put to him for a very long time to come.
And he will have to answer those questions
because he's going to give evidence to the inquiry at some point.
And so that will be a time when this comes back.
And so that will be a moment as well.
You know, when we talk about the journey, there was a little bit of me
thinking in terms of the way that he was speaking,
that there were elements of Prince Harry.
He'd started speaking Californian, which is what I'd heard.
Senior Royal had said of Prince Harry
that you didn't understand a word he was saying.
He's speaking Californian and I thought there were elements of that.
But my God, he has been on a journey
which has been at times traumatic.
It will have taken its toll.
I mean, I can't believe that any person could go through that and just think,

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oh, well, just brush it off.

And I thought that on one, all the times he said, I'm a human being,

I kind of thought, I think you've mentally come to terms with you are in a different space now.

But I thought there was still a fragility.

Yeah, I mean, I wouldn't have been surprised if he'd started talking about my truth.

At one point, you know, you could totally imagine him sort of start now speaking

in that kind of vocabulary and vernacular.

And maybe that's as much about like what he intends to do for the next stage of his career

in terms of being a sort of celebrity, perhaps with a more

of an orientational focus on slightly younger people than where he is now.

But I think the slight frustration for me and look, he's an interesting character.

He's sort of bouncy and has this sort of unusual edge.

But nonetheless, I do think it is a bit rich.

If he turns around and said, look, there was no excuse for that hypocrisy.

There was no excuse for it, but it did happen.

And I'm sorry, in a way that ends it, but he won't even engage in it

and simply starts using phrases like I'm a human being or I fell in love.

And the fact of the matter is, as we were discussing when we were thinking

about how to prepare for this interview, we're all human beings.

Lots of people fell in love.

He was the guy who literally prohibited people falling in love.

And he has to be held accountable for those decisions.

And, you know, to be honest, I think it's a bit feeble to just start turning around

saying, well, I'm a human being and I've left that behind.

Lots and lots of people affected by that pandemic haven't and won't.

Yeah, I suppose in his defense, you would say, look, it's taken a terrible toll

on him, probably mentally, on those around him.

He's just trying to find the words to say, I really don't want to go there

on the personal stuff.

And is this to vindicate exactly what we were saying at the very top

that this guy is never out of the news?

No sooner than had he walked out the studio or got in his cab five minutes later,

but another story about him, this time connected to, again, PPE contracts

and the connection between Tory donors and him and PPE contracts

during the pandemic dropped on the Guardian, but we didn't know that was coming.

So if you're sat there going, why didn't you ask about that?

It's because all dropped five minutes after he walked out the studio.

I thought just going back to the first half of the interview,

you thought, well, he is a gifted politician.

He has got a very clear argument to make about how the conservatives

need to be electable again.

He expresses it powerfully, expresses it cogently, and he clearly believes

that a battle for the soul of the Conservative Party needs to take place.

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I suppose my question, Mark, is he the person to lead it?

Funny enough, I think he's right about one thing, which is that and the conservative right, I'm sure wouldn't like this much at all.

But you know what?

Matt Hancock is more in touch with the average person in Britain than a lot of what was going on at the National Conservatism Conference, not in terms of his own record and all that stuff around the pandemic and how that is viewed, perhaps, but in terms of the kind of moors and kind of politically, socially, where Britain now is, it is much closer to Matt Hancock than that come.

And that is us done for an extraordinary day.

I, of course, will be putting my feet up tomorrow.

No such luck for Lewis.

See you soon. Bye. Bye bye.

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