

[Transcript] The News Agents / "I'm Joe Biden and I'm Irish"

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

In case you hadn't noticed, Joe Biden is in Ireland.

Not the first president to go there won't be the last, because claiming Irish heritage is so important back in the US of A.

When my great-grandfather left here to become a Cooper in East Boston, he carried nothing with him except two things, a strong religious faith and a strong desire for liberty.

Like the seeds of the shamrock, Ireland has scattered its sons and daughters to the forewinds.

And the White House has not been exempt from Ireland's spell.

Many of our presidents trace their roots to Ireland, and I'm proud to trace mine to Valley Porine and County Tipperary.

There have been many presidents of the United States who had their roots in this soil.

I can see today how lucky I am to be the first president of the United States to come back to this city to say thank you very much.

The colors of the American flag, of course, are red, white and green.

And there is much talk of the diaspora, of the Irish that have fled Ireland and started their new lives in America.

So you just heard from Kennedy, from Reagan, from Clinton and even this guy.

I've come home to find the apostrophe that we lost somewhere along the way.

Barack Obama.

Welcome to the news agents.

Mr. Barnett, where's the BBC?

The BBC, I'm Irish.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis.

And later on, we are going to be hearing from either the Prince of Darkness or the great hero, Elon Musk.

You pay your money, you take your choice.

He's done an interview with the BBC's technology correspondent on the West Coast, James Clayton.

And it's fascinating.

The interview came about, the speed with which it was organized, the fact that Twitter broadcasted it before the BBC could.

There's a lot to unpack there, and we will attempt to do that.

But we've just been listening to Joe Biden.

It's 1.36.

He wrapped up about 10 minutes ago.

He's been speaking to Ulster University in Belfast in Northern Ireland.

He's there.

I don't know if you caught it, actually, but Joe Biden is actually Irish.

No way.

No way.

Apparently he's got Irish.

No way.

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You should talk about that more.

No, I don't know why he's so shy about it, because unlike every other US president who's got Irish roots.

Ancestry.

Yeah.

Which is pretty much all of them.

All of them, I think.

Yeah.

I mean, one day we'll find a US president who doesn't claim to have Irish ancestry, but not yet.

Apparently Andrew Jackson was quite Irish.

I'm not sure if he talked about it quite as much.

He's probably a lot more recent than old Joe, but yeah.

Right.

So we will be coming on to Joe Biden and his Irish ancestry and what that means in US presidential election campaign in a moment, and we will also be talking about power sharing.

I mean, that is the thing that is not working in Northern Ireland right now.

And over that 25-year period, actually, hasn't worked for about 40% of the time.

But first, we want to give you some juicy extracts.

I might be overselling that slightly, but some extracts anyway.

Juicy.

Juicy Biden speeches.

Juicy Biden speeches.

Yeah.

Up to a point.

Right.

Have we got you on the edge of your seats for this one?

Because especially when the distance of history, we forget how hard-earned, how astounding that piece was at the moment.

It shifted the political gravity in our world, and literally it shifted the political gravity.

In 1998, it was the longest-running conflict in Europe since the end of World War II.

Thousands of families had been affected by the troubles.

Losers are real.

The pain was personal.

I need not tell many people in this audience.

Every person killed in the troubles left an empty chair at that dining room table and a hole in the heart that was never filled for the ones they lost.

Peace was not inevitable.

We can't ever forget that.

There was nothing inevitable about it.

As George Mitchell often said, the negotiations had, quote, 700 days of failure and one day of success.

I think you can tell in that, juice or not, that, you know, Biden cares about this stuff.

He's genuinely, emotionally, politically committed to this.

He's obviously been around for a long time, and he's watched it.

He talked about being a young senator, first visiting Northern Ireland back in the 70s, and then not imagining, you know, what could be possible in the Good Friday Agreement in the late 90s.

I think it's no surprise.

Look, his agenda, apart from, you know, he's met with Sunak, he's going to be speaking to the Dorel, the Irish parliament, but his agenda is pretty light, policy-wise, and the White House isn't even pretending that this is necessarily a big policy visit.

This is emotional for him, but the fact is, as Emily has already alluded to, they had hoped he was at Ulster University, he was praising it as a venue and as a university, but there is no doubt.

Look, they wanted to be making, and Sunak wanted him to be making this address, which has long been talked about, in Stormont, in the Northern Ireland Executive, and he can't do that because it still isn't sitting.

Speaking of what you say about Joe Biden sort of travelling light on policy detail, that's absolutely true, but make no mistake, that within the White House, the staff around him are passionately committed to this.

And when there was talk under Boris Johnson of ripping up the Northern Ireland protocol, the people who are around him on the National Security Council were absolutely firm, making it clear to the British Embassy in Washington there could be no backsliding.

And so some of the people around him are deeply immersed in the detail.

Joe Biden may be an emotional Irishman, but there are an awful lot of people who are cold, pragmatic, hard-headed about the way forward on what you need to do to make progress in Northern Ireland.

And I also think it's quite interesting how nervous he is about this trip.

I was speaking to somebody in the sort of entourage and I said, you know, was it meant to be a longer trip?

Did they cut it short?

And they said, well, actually, it was always scheduled to be a shorter one in Belfast.

It's a more complicated place, was the phrase, more room for error.

And I thought, oh, what does that mean?

Does it mean sort of security?

Are they nervous about, you know, how they can keep him safe?

And they said, no, spelling it out, he's nervous about saying something wrong.

It seems like the slightest misstep has such an impact, which is absolutely true.

I mean, even as journalists, we find that when you're covering Northern Irish politics.

So God knows what it's like if you're the leader of the free world.

At least you're self-aware.

There are other presidents.

Who knows maybe Gaff or two.

Yes, but I would say there are other presidents who probably walked into that one and not being quite so self-aware.

But I also think that when you look about him being light on policy, I wonder if that's partly from Rishi Sunak saying, don't push this one.

Don't push the Windsor framework because it is super delicate right now.
And so I understand that when he met with the five party leaders there, it originally started off as a meet and greet, and then it just got slightly downgraded to a greet.
In other words, minimal talking.
That's what I think this is about.
And it's also about him playing to an audience in America because the Irish-American vote is hugely significant and no one has soft power like the Republic of Ireland does.
Come St Patrick's Day when rivers are died, literally died green, and the whole of Washington, you have to be wearing something.
It's the real special relationship.
That is the real special relationship of soft power.
But also it is bipartisan, and Biden talked about that as well.
Those of you who've been to America know that there is a large population that is invested in what happens here, that cares a great deal about what happens here.
Supporting the people of Northern Ireland, protecting the peace, preserving the Belfast Good Friday Agreement is a priority for Democrats and Republicans alike in the United States.
And that is unusual today because we've been very divided on our parties.
This is something that brings Washington together, it brings America together.
I spoke about this with Northern Ireland's political leaders as well as the T-shirt and our St Patrick's Day celebration at the White House.
It's been a key focus for me throughout my career.
Just to say I went to Boston in 1997, and I read the Boston Globe, and one of the news in briefs on the front page was, a milk float has overturned in Tipperary, no one was hurt.
And I just thought, my God, the relationship.
It wasn't Biden's grandfather.
It wasn't Clinton's.
It wasn't Clinton's.
It was just a milk float that would struggle to make it on the news of the local in County Tipperary, and yet was on the front page of the Boston Globe, and I thought that was very telling.
But his, in a sense as well though, his Irishness and his, how passionately he feels about it and his self-proclaimed Irishness, which actually even for, even recent American presidents like, you know, Obama or Clinton or whatever, who have worn it a bit more lightly, in a sense is a potential problem or inhibition with this, right?
Which is that the DUP, who ultimately are the main roadblocks in all this, do not perceive him to be, and we've seen outriders for them, including their former leader, Day Marley and Foster talk about this, do not perceive him to be a neutral player.
Now whether that's fair or not, you can argue, but perception in Northern Ireland is everything.
I mean, Foster was talking about him being, you know, just in the last 24 hours, him being a Republican, saying he hates the United Kingdom, and all of this sort of thing, so they perceive him as an aligned player, which means that his utility, his usefulness in being a kind of arbiter in this, in a way that perhaps Clinton was in the late 90s, is less obvious.
But that said, even if he did have that, it's not obvious what anyone could do.
Well, I think Brexit, quite frankly, got in the way of all this, because when Clinton

was trying to negotiate, as Biden just said, this was a story that the Northern Ireland Troubles was on the front page of every single bulletin paper, every single day.

I mean, I remember working as a journalist in Hong Kong in the 90s, and yet Northern Ireland was our bread and butter.

I mean, it seems impossible.

Yeah, it was the Middle East and Northern Ireland.

It was so dominant in the news cycle of world news, quite frankly, of conflict.

And I think that's why what he's saying there about, you've forgotten 25 years ago, that's a lot of lives saved, even when he uses, that you said it's the one that he used the whole time over COVID, the empty chair at the table.

But there is a real sense of poignancy about that, and a real sense of pride, I think for America, that it was helping to be, if you like, the peacekeeper, the world's policeman at a time, pre-2001, pre-911, pre-Iraq, pre-Afghanistan, that worked.

And now, of course, Biden cares deeply about Europe, and he cares about the relationship between America and Britain and Europe, and I think that's what messes up his relationship with the DUP.

Yeah, but look at the difference in the role that America plays in Northern Ireland politics compared to a lot of other conflicts around the world.

In other conflicts, America comes in and says, right, we're here, we're gonna sort this out.

In Northern Ireland, when it was right to meet Gerry Adams, when it was right to meet Martin McGinnis, that was being driven very much by the British and Irish governments.

And America rode in and helped by lending their muscle when necessary.

But they were not the people at the table banging their fists and saying, you've got to do this.

And I think that that is part of what Biden is doing now.

There's only a limited amount that he can do, given the circumstances, given the impasse, with the Ulster Unionists saying no.

But it's also led to this really interesting, and I kind of find slightly odd thing, having spent so long in America, the weighing of the special relationship, but he's only spent half a day in Belfast, and he's spent most of it asleep, if he really loved Britain, he would have spent longer.

And I just think in America, that counts for absolutely nothing.

American TV viewers will be waking up to the news that Joe Biden is in Ireland, and there won't be a lot of distinction between whether he's in Northern Ireland or the Republic.

Fundamentally, there is an impasse.

And there is an impasse because neither side at this point, if you think about where we are, the Windsor framework, the EU and the UK have said, it's the only thing on the table. It ain't changing.

That's it.

So you either go back into Stormont or you don't.

And the DUP still analyse that their interest still lies in resisting, because although 70 to 80% of the Northern Ireland population want to get Stormont up and running, their voters, their core voters, don't, because they still think there is further amelioration, further changes that could be made in their direction.

And until that balance of interest changes, we're going to just be in exactly the same position.

And at some point, presumably, end up facing further elections.

Yeah.

I mean, it was put to me that there is a nervousness on the part of the DUP at a resumption of power sharing, quite frankly, because they don't actually want to see Sinn Féin working alongside them.

There is a nervousness.

It'll be a first minister.

It'll be the Sinn Féin first minister.

Be the first minister.

The dynamic has shifted.

The population has shifted.

The voting pattern has shifted.

And now it's first and second place rather than second and first place.

There is also a wider point about the Good Friday Agreement, which obviously with the 25th anniversary, everyone is rightly venerating it and thinking back to what an enormous achievement

it was.

I want you to say that there are an increasing number of people in Northern Ireland who are saying, this thing can't exist in Aspic forever.

Not only does it not work some of the time, or at least the political power sharing bit doesn't work quite a lot of the time, but also it was designed for a period in the late 90s when unionism and nationalism were still everything.

And increasingly in Northern Ireland, as it's developed, that isn't the case.

There was an increasingly big, non-aligned vote who don't consider themselves nationalist or unionist, who want politics in Northern Ireland to be more normal, to be more left-right, to be more managerial.

You know, look at their growth of the alliance party.

Well, if you ask young people who didn't live through the trouble, totally, how they see, for example, Sinn Féin, and I know this will be probably horrifying and very difficult for some of our older listeners, but they say, oh yeah, Sinn Féin's the party, the environment.

The left.

You know, the party of gay marriage, the party of progression.

And so they don't see it in those terms that will have been how, you know, many of us were raised.

But in terms of the government, unionism and nationalism within Stormont, just because of the way it works, basically has a veto over everything, there has to be consensus on nearly everything.

Nationalists and unionists vote, without getting into too much of the detail, basically count more in the Northern Ireland Assembly when it is sitting in Stormont.

And there are just more and more people who say, this needs to be updated, this needs to change.

But obviously, people are, for totally understandable reasons, very, very wary about starting to unpick something or even trying to augment something, which has uniquely, at least delivered, which is uniquely at least delivered peace after decades and decades of division and strife.

Emily, you spoke a moment ago about how older listeners will find it hard to hear people talking about Sinn Féin in these very neutral terms.

I was reporting in Northern Ireland, kind of in the 80s, when, you know, the Anglo-Irish agreement, and then we would report on the Alliance Party, and we gave them an absolutely artificial sense of importance, because they were minute, and yet there was this sense of, oh, well, let's report on the Alliance Party, because they're the nice people who are not sectarian, they're not either unionist or nationalist, and they used to get far too much coverage given their weight.

And now, 25 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, they do matter, and that is a sign of extraordinary progress in politics, that extremism and the kind of religious identity politics is playing less of a role, even though the constitutional arrangements give it an outsize role.

And this is, I guess, the note on which Joe Biden left the speech today, which was the optimism that actually the last 25 years heralds for the future, a future he talked of as being one for our kids in Technicolor.

I come to Belfast to pledge to all the people of Northern Ireland, the United States of America will continue to be your partner in building the future the young people of our world deserve.

It matters to us, to Americans, and to me personally, it genuinely matters if you travel my country.

So let's celebrate 25 extraordinary years by recommitting to renewal, repair, by making this exceptional piece the birthright of every child in Northern Ireland for all the days to come.

That's what we should be doing.

God willing, you'll be able to do it.

Thank you all for listening and may God bring you the peace we need.

Thank you.

Well, Joe Biden there in his morning in Belfast and some handshakes afterwards.

And selfies, I learned today that Joe Biden knows the right angle at which to hold a camera for a selfie.

Plus his aviators on, of course.

So you can teach old dogs.

Nutrics.

Howly rude, John.

I know.

And obviously, before we move on, worth underlining that Joe Biden is going to be spending a good part of his visit in the Republic, reconnecting with family roots.

And maybe there is just one eye on a 2024 election bid there, or maybe one and a half eyes or entirely surprised if next week, Joe Biden decided to relaunch his 2024 presidential bid.

Great if he launched it in County Tipperary and the place with the milk car.

And my guess is he will have a videographer with him taking nice shots of him on the Emerald Isle that will be seen at some point in campaign videos.

I was a guest.

It's a guest.

I may be wrong, but I think that that's what they will probably be doing.

Anyway, let us turn now to the former T-shirt, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland, John Bruton.

He was Prime Minister in the lead-up to the period that resulted in the Good Friday Agreement, but also has been the EU ambassador to Washington and got to know Joe Biden very well then.

We'd love to hear your thoughts about this visit by Joe Biden.

What do you think it is actually going to achieve in concrete measures?

I think the aim is to improve the atmosphere as between, first of all, as between Britain and the European Union.

I think that has improved a lot as a result of the Windsor Accord and I think President Biden wants to see a good and close relationship between the UK and the European Union.

This is part of that.

His support for Rishi Sunak in this matter is very important.

Also the whole thing is very important from the point of view of promoting peace in Ireland and sketching out for people in Northern Ireland in particular.

The opportunities that they have if they go with this accord and take their seats in the Assembly and work the Executive because we really don't have an operating Good Friday Agreement unless we have all the parties relevant taking part in the Assembly and in the Executive. Is he seen as an honest broker though in building that confidence when there is a deep suspicion on the Unionist side that really he supports a United Ireland, he's not really interested in the British side of things at all?

I don't think that is the case, I think it's been consistent US policy and it's not just under this administration to be even-handed here.

In the past, because Britain was a major military ally of the United States, the Irish voice wasn't being heard at all in Washington, but in more recent times, thanks to great efforts by Irish diplomats, now there is an even-handed approach being taken.

But I think it's important to recognise that the problems of Northern Ireland will be solved in Northern Ireland by the people living in Northern Ireland and representing the people in Northern Ireland.

There is a bad habit I think that has developed of looking elsewhere for somebody to arrive on a white horse to solve the problems of communal relations in Northern Ireland.

These relations are the responsibility of the people living in Northern Ireland themselves and I would like to see the efforts being put on reconciliation within Northern Ireland by the people themselves rather than looking for the United States, Joe Biden, Rishi Sunak, Leo Radker or anybody outside to come in and solve the problem.

That takes us straight to the heart of the DUP then and the Windsor framework which they are refusing to sign.

Are they scared of power sharing?

Are they scared of seeing Sinn Féin in that leading position?

What is this about?

I would have thought they shouldn't be because they have some very able politicians in the Democratic Unionist party, but unfortunately there is a reluctance and it's not confined to the DUP, but it certainly exists in the DUP of taking responsibility for a solution.

Remember, the DUP opposed the Good Friday Agreement originally.

They have a difficulty saying yes to any arrangement and that's something that's unfortunate because

eventually if there's to be compromise everybody has to say yes and you can't go on saying no and it is fair to say that huge efforts have been made to find a solution that accommodates the needs of the European Union, the needs of a single open market to which Northern Ireland uniquely in the United Kingdom is to get access as well as the needs of Northern Ireland trade and the symbolic issue of consultation.

But John, do you just need to show infinite patience with the DUP and just say you can have weeks, you can have months, you can have as long as it takes or do you need at some point to say look this has passed through Parliament at Westminster, we need a decision? I think that point will be reached and probably reach fairly soon, but I don't think we want to talk too much about that because it sounds like savoring or threatening.

The fact of the matter is, is he's in the best interest of the people the DUP represents that we have functioning executive.

They can make better decisions in Belfast about what's good for Northern Ireland than could ever be made, either in London or for that matter in Dublin if that were to arise.

Local responsibility is what I think we need and that's what I think, and I hope, President Biden will be promoting local responsibility.

It sounds like you're trying to convince them that that is right.

I mean, I've been told that actually there's a real reluctance on the part of the DUP to see Sinn Féin in any kind of power.

They prefer direct rule.

They actually prefer direct rule as things stand at the moment with no autonomy, with no attempt to get power sharing back on because it kind of suits their purpose better.

Well, in that event, of course, they're not going to have direct rule.

There will be some form of joint activity on the part of the Dublin and London governments because going back to 1985, Mrs. Thatcher agreed in the Anglo-Irish agreement to an arrangement which would involve consultation with Dublin in respect of the exercises of the powers of direct rule in matters where that's relevant.

So I don't think the option that the DUP are holding out for, if that's what they're doing, is going to operate and also suggest that they're in bad faith because it's only a couple of weeks ago that they were clamoring against the protocol because it didn't accord with the Good Friday Agreement.

They were defending the Good Friday Agreement.

But if they now take that position that you're suggesting they might be taking, they're opposing the Good Friday Agreement.

They're not being consistent.

Can I just take you on to Joe Biden himself?

Because I'm guessing you got to know pretty well when you were the EU's ambassador in

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Washington, when you were T-shirt, you've had dealings with him.

Do you think he has got one eye on the next presidential election spending a few days in Ireland and all the kind of goodwill and misty-eyed romanticism that Ireland engenders in the United States?

You show me that the politician that doesn't have an eye on the next election, they all do.

But I think he does.

I think the Irish-American vote is exaggerated.

More Irish-Americans vote Republican than vote Democrat at the moment.

So I don't think this is particularly necessarily a very big political coup for him to come to Ireland.

But I do think it represents something about himself.

He has a sense of rootedness in Ireland.

Some people who have third-fourth generation Americans have that feeling about the country they came from originally.

Others don't.

He does.

But I can't help feeling it will play well in America.

It will play well in New York.

It will play well in states that he's going to win anyway.

I don't think the Irish-American vote is going to be crucial for him in any of the swing states.

No, I may be wrong.

Really interesting to speak to you.

John Bruton, we wish you well.

Thank you so much for joining us.

Thank you.

Thanks a lot.

Bye.

And coming up next, in a shade over 280 characters, we will be discussing Elon Musk and an interview

he's given to the BBC.

An astonishing exclusive that I woke up to and thought, oh, my word, Elon Musk has spoken.

I need to listen to this.

That's in a moment.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

If you had to compile one of those fantasy dinner party lists, obviously mine would be like no one at all, but I'm reliably informed that top of most people's dinner party lists of the people you just want to talk to is Elon Musk.

He is, if you like, the interview that we've all been after since the day he took over at Twitter.

The interview is not a dinner party, Emily.

You're...

Yeah, exactly.

That's why no one will turn up to your house.

They do leave.

Just slightly pale and worn.

Yeah, just interrogate them for two hours over the volavons.

Yes, I'm now understanding how I've been going wrong in my social life.

Anyway, James Clayton, who is full transparency, an old friend of ours from Newsnight and is now the San Francisco, the West Coast technology correspondent, was the lucky guy, or the brilliant guy, we should say, the brilliant journalist, who got Elon Musk to say, yes, and that is quite the scoop, but there is a moment when the most important man or the most powerful technology person in the world says, yes, and a little bit of your heart just stops beating.

Well, it's like you think you leap up and down, and I, you know, leap up and down with joy and excitement.

I've got the bloody interview, I've got the interview, I have got it.

And then, holy shit, what am I going to do now?

Because I've actually got to deliver on an interview with someone who is so high profile.

We use the phrase that this was the tweet of the day.

Look, around the world, this is the interview of the day to have got Elon Musk sitting down.

But it comes with a price tag attached when you're dealing with Elon Musk, because he's no fool, and he's going to do things on his terms, and he is going to try and corner you.

And so, what was fascinating about it was there were some great news lines that came out of it on Musk's attitude to all sorts of things, but also his attitude towards himself

I thought was fascinating, and then his attitude towards all the thousands of people he's let go.

It's been really quite a stressful situation, you know, for the last several months, not an easy one.

But apart from the pain, I mean, so it's been quite painful, but I think at the end it should have been done.

I think, were there many mistakes made along the way, of course, you know.

And but, you know, all's well that ends well.

It's an interesting exchange that because at one point where James is saying to Elon Musk, did you really have to do that?

That was brutal.

Did you really have to do that?

Elon Musk turns it around and goes, what would you have done?

And for me, as an interviewer, that is a red flag moment.

If the interviewee ever tries to turn the tables and say, what would you have done?

Or what's your salary?

Or aren't you getting paid?

Or when was the last time that you went there?

You just think, don't go down that track.

But the point of this interview is whilst Elon Musk said yes to James Clayton, but Elon Musk put it straight on Twitter Spaces, which is just to explain a live forum, an audio

forum where people are listening and can ask questions.

And in so doing, Elon Musk retained the power over that interview and got it out first and entire.

The point as well, isn't it, is that Musk has obviously done this with James.

He's done it on his terms in the sense that he's given him almost no notice whatsoever.

So it's gone to your point, John.

It's not as if saying, yeah, come around next week and then you can sit with your producers and have a thing and say, well, if he says this, you can say this, I'll go there, whatever.

He has done it in such a way as to try and maintain maximum power.

Amazing scoop, but you can see people will always criticize whatever interview you do on Twitter and people will be doing it here.

But people have no idea, really, how hard it is in that arena when the profile is that high and when you've had almost zero time to prepare for it.

And the one thing you can't do, even though it might be tempting, is to say, oh, Elon, yeah, I'd love to do an interview with you, but can we do it in a couple of days' time when I've had time to prep it?

Because you can't do that, because the danger then is that Elon Musk turns around and rings up Sky or ITV or CBS or NBC or the news agents were waiting for his call as we speak.

And then you're left in the position of, oh, crap, well, I've got to do it.

And you're then thinking, well, have I got everything I need to know?

Have I got my backup?

And what we try to do on the news agents, if we've got a big interview, is we try to wargame what the likely answers will be and where we go if they get that answer and if they give a different answer, where we'll go with that instead.

I suspect that James would have been thinking, oh, my God, have I got a film crew?

Have I got a car to get me there?

How am I going to tell people back in London that we're getting this?

All of that sort of logistical stuff.

I'm not thinking editorial.

If you look at it, and this is the thing that struck me, from what I've seen so far, and it could be wrong about this, but visually, the whole thing is on a two shot.

In other words, you have both their faces in profile all the way through.

Now, what that would indicate, seem to indicate, is that there was only one camera, and maybe it wasn't even a TV camera.

Maybe it was just a carefully positioned phone or iPad on a tripod.

And what it also means is that you can't zoom in.

You can't actually zoom in just to the face of Elon Musk or just to the question that's being asked.

You don't have that power to edit it in a way that takes a response and an answer and another response and another answer, because you're just exposed on that two shot forever.

Well, that's what, of course, that Elon Musk has released.

I mean, the BBC may have had more cameras there, but Elon Musk released it instantly with that two shot.

And with that, Emily, you were saying a moment ago, cardinal rules or red flags.

When someone says, but what would you do?

And what would you do?

I mean, that's where it got a little bit uncomfortable for James Clayton.

And listen to this exchange that there is over whether the Twitter has become a forum for hate speech.

Strategic dialogue is the two in the UK.

They will say that.

Look, if people will say all sorts of nonsense, I'm literally asking for a single example and you can't name one.

Right.

And as I've already said, I don't use that feed.

But how would you know that?

I don't think this is getting any better.

You literally said you experienced more hateful content and then couldn't name a single example.

Right.

And as I said, that's absurd.

I haven't, I haven't actually looked at that feed.

And how would you know this hateful content?

Because I'm saying that's what I saw a few weeks ago.

I can't give you an exact example.

Let's move on.

We have, we only have a certain amount of time.

I think this really reminds me of is, I mean, I think, as we've, as we've been saying, I think so much about this interview and the way that it's been constructed and the way that it's happened is actually itself deeply revealing of the way Musk operates and is very revealing about him as a person, which I suppose as an interview is all in a way of what you want.

It's what you want.

It's what you want.

But I think what it reminds me as well, I think people always overestimate how much control and power you interviewing someone as an interviewer have.

People think you're in the driving seat.

And in so many ways, you're really not, you know, because ultimately, as soon as they try and turn it around on you as Musk does repeatedly there, you sort of lose control.

I was thinking, I mean, in terms of the two of you, probably had that happen before, particular moments where you just think, Oh God, I've lost control of this.

There's still anxiety dreams.

I mean, those are the stuff you still sweat about.

I used to do the politics show on BBC one on Sunday lunchtime.

I think, I think it was fun enough with a guy called Alistair Campbell, who I think has another podcast.

Yeah.

Anyway, and I, and I think I said something that was contentious and stated it as a fact and you kind of, where's your basis for that?

What evidence have you got of that?

And I just thought, because, you know, someone had shouted something in my ear, why don't you ask this?

And I ask it.

And then you see, he comes back at you and I think, Oh my God, I haven't got any ammunition here.

I wonder whether Alistair Campbell hung out with a certain Peter Mandelson because I remember doing an interview where I ascertained that Tony Blair wanted the presidency of the European Union.

And Mandelson just turned to me and went, Oh really, Emily?

How well do you know him?

Do you know?

Is he a good friend of yours?

Is he a good friend?

Is Tony Blair a very good friend of yours?

Have you had that chat?

Well, as soon as this goes back to my golden rule, as soon as it turns on to you, you become the defensive.

You become the person fighting to sort of, you know, tread water and stay afloat.

And it should never be like that.

But the other thing it reminded me of just going back to Musk was an interview that I did with Marta Zuckerberg, right?

And it was really hard one, that interview.

We spent two weeks in July with them.

Then we went back two weeks later in, I think, September, October, still trying to get this interview locked down.

And I do remember this awkward feeling of walking into, you know, the Facebook headquarters with the heaviest, most cumbersome TV equipment and thinking, Oh, we're old media.

You know, it might be good quality, but it takes an hour and a half to set up and everyone in Facebook has their phone, right?

And has their feed and has that instant access to put whatever we done straight up.

Well, you suddenly realized just the shift, as you were saying, of media power, because it isn't necessary.

Because legacy media just doesn't have that.

It's hard, right?

It's a much harder thing to do.

Or it's the opposite.

You're doing it on the fly, right?

So my equivalent of that is when I doorstep Dominic Cummings.

Oh, that was the endless walking shop.

The endless walk up, because that's completely the opposite, right?

That story of that was that Sky had sent me because they'd heard that he was going to Stuart Wheeler's birthday party, Stuart Wheeler being the sort of UKIP pro Brexit donor.

And Cummings was apparently there, and they sent me down at the last minute, and I was

waiting there for 90 minutes, two hours, and I thought, he's gone, he's gone.
And then someone who I'd known who was on the inside text me saying, he's leaving right now.
He's leaving right now.
I'd gone to get some dinner.
And so I pegged it down Piccadilly, back to this place where it was.
And then, but you know, during a doorstep, it's pure, pure adrenaline.
And Cummings, who in so many ways is just completely called as a cucumber, right?
We're asking these questions.
And then he does exactly that.
He tries to find a little vulnerability and then, like, stick the knife in as much as possible.
So we're talking about the Ben Act.
And he just says, do you even know when the Ben Act is due to take place or it's due to happen?
Prime Minister's accused of not taking the concerns of MP safety appropriately seriously.
He called it humbug.
Do you agree that it's humbug?
As I say, the Prime Minister can speak for himself.
Well, I mean, he's not answering any of these questions.
So I'm asking you, do you think it's humbug?
Do you think MPs are unsafe as a result of what do you think?
I think MP safety is as a cause of grave concern.
You're in my job now.
What would you do?
I'll answer my question.
Would you?
Yeah, absolutely would.
Do you think it's a...
So you're answering...
It's not a lot for matter-missed Cummings.
So you answer your question.
Is it a matter of concern?
Do you think it's Labour MPs or any MP safety is a matter of concern?
Are you responsible for whipping up an atmosphere of danger for MPs with a rhetoric that you and the Prime Minister are responsible for?
Okay, for that.
Answer the question.
You know, when you're doing a doorstep, you've got the adrenaline, you're thinking about your next question, and you're literally thinking, where am I going to stand?
Where am I going to walk to?
Because the cameraman...
Where are they coming?
Where am I standing?

Where are we going?

The cameraman is, like, right in front of me.

Is he going to trip?

Am I going to trip?

And I had this just little beat, and then he just used that moment and said, you don't even know what you're talking about, do you?

And that's it, right?

Or then the whole sort of power dissipates.

We should explain that, actually, if you're doing a doorstep with a cameraman, camera woman, quite often you are also watching their back.

Because they're walking backwards, they have no idea.

You're kind of like their bodyguard as well as the journalist.

And so you've got one hand on the small of the camera person's back.

They are trusting you because they're getting your footage, and you're trying to hold it.

Do your interviews, hold the mic, and make sure they don't end up in a flower bed.

But what do you think of Elon Musk at the end of it?

I mean, I thought he's pretty smart.

He stayed on to answer questions.

So in Elon Musk's terms, he hasn't done an interview with James Clayton.

James Clayton's done an interview with Twitter, right?

And then Twitter Spaces was open up to everyone to ask questions.

I mean, it's quite unusual for the interviewee to hang around.

And what often happens is that in these interviews, and I don't know whether we're getting too much in behind the scenes of the making of the sausage, but we would try and establish what the ground rules are, when it's going to be broadcast, when TX date, what editing will take place, what we're doing.

And we will try and assert all these things on our terms, and none of this was on James's terms in the end.

He was told, get here, get here now, and you can have an interview.

And he turns up, and then Elon Musk is ready to go with certain amounts of ammunition to use against the BBC.

Fundamentally, though, would you, you know, if somebody said to you, if Trump or if Xi Jinping or if Putin said, get here now, or I'll do you on Zoom, there are no ground rules, would you say no?

No.

You'd have to back yourself.

You'd have to back yourself.

The thought of getting that interview, but you would crap yourself in the process.

And in the end, James got the interview.

And like I say, I think the thing is, is that whatever the content of the interview, which actually so many news lines and so on, it is revealing about him, as we've already said, that's what you can hope for.

And James will be the one that always got Elon Musk.

And he might never do another interview.

[Transcript] The News Agents / "I'm Joe Biden and I'm Irish"

He said he might sell Twitter.

He might never do another interview again as Twitter CEO.

So there you go.

Back after the break.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back.

Now, Joe Biden may be on this side of the Atlantic, but we have sent an equally big beast, ferocious, to the other side of the Atlantic, and she is delivering a speech at the Heritage Foundation.

If you don't know what the Heritage Foundation is in Washington, it's a sort of pro Margaret Thatcher body, pro Ronald Reagan.

And who are we talking about?

We're talking about Liz Truss, Mary Elizabeth Truss, the one and only.

So she is there making a big speech about how we, I think how low taxes ended the Cold War.

But I may have got that wrong.

Anyway, we're going to be watching it closely.

Yeah.

It's all the fault of the woke.

I've never heard the word woke used by anyone under 70.

So what, the invasion of Ukraine is down to people being too woke?

Yeah.

She's going to say, we've allowed our opponents to own our institutions, crowd our campuses and fill our airwaves.

Not long ago, the United States and the UK were absolute bastions of free enterprise, free markets and free speech.

So you see, the problem is, if we'd had lower taxes, Putin would never have gone into Ukraine. We wouldn't have won the Cold War, of course, if we'd been woke back then.

The Soviet Union was famously, famously woke.

Yeah.

That's why they lost.

That's right.

Exactly.

So Liz Truss' thoughts on the anti-growth coalition and the future of the West tomorrow on the news agents.

Bye.

If you're lucky.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

This has been a global player, original podcast and a Persephoneka production.