

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

This is a global player original podcast.

What I don't want to do is make yet more short term decisions, easy ways out that ultimately not be straight with a country about what those mean for them, the cost that those are imposing on them.

I don't believe that's the right thing to do.

I want to make the right decisions for the long term of our children, of our country and that won't be easy.

Oh, what a relief.

Only thinking about the next 10 years, that's marvellous.

No eye at all on the general election probably next year.

No focus group testing about whether these policies will be popular with older voters like keeping the triple lock, like maybe getting rid of inheritance tax.

It's all about the long term.

Yeah, it's all about thinking about our children and our grandchildren who definitely won't want a connected railway system when they grow up and definitely, definitely won't want a greener country.

If you thank God we're thinking about the long term, welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And he is back, our very own Slim Shady, newly returned from his Antibodane Trails, Travels even, Trails.

Trails, Travels.

Yeah, meeting all sorts of people on your planes.

Yeah, at all sorts of odd hours where people are coming up to you where you're bleary eyed and you've got the eyed blinkers over your forehead because you've just got up and some are saying, I really love your podcast.

You think I can't even speak?

Maybe they mistook you for Peter Crouch.

Yeah, maybe because we are very similar billed.

Exactly.

I am six foot seven.

Anyway, it's nice to have you back.

We were just saying it'd been very quiet.

Yeah, really quiet.

Very quiet.

Honestly, there were times when I was walking in Sydney and listening to the podcast.

And thinking, God, that's such a good story.

And I'd love to be part of that.

I thought the Russell Brand coverage was brilliant.

There we are.

That's the one nice thing I'm going to say.

I can't tell if you're now our fan or our main presenter.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

No, it was just a reluctant kind of listener while I was in Australia.

Anyway, it's lovely to be back.

But you have had the distance, presumably, to listen to the past week and try and work out.

I'm genuinely curious how it sounded because we were covering Rishi Sunak, Ditches, Green Texas.

Rishi Sunak now wants British bacculaureate.

Rishi Sunak is talking about taxation.

Rishi Sunak on HS2.

Did that sound like a man with movement behind him?

Or did it sound absolutely crazy?

No, I thought it sounded OK.

What I thought was it sounds politically smart in the sense that you've had the Uxbridge by election.

And you start thinking, I know what we could do is get rid of some of this green nonsense.

You even got Donald Trump saying Rishi Sunak has been smart.

I mean, I don't know whether you want Donald Trump saying Rishi Sunak has been smart over this, but you could see what he's trying to do.

Oh, this green stuff is going too far.

We'll roll back on it.

I just thought that some of the other stuff that went on around it saying, I mean, and you drew attention to it, you know, you won't have to carpool.

Who was ever proposing carpool?

And I thought this is political.

This is nothing to do with the long term.

This is everything to do with the next general election.

But you were wrong because Rishi Sunak made very clear in that clip that he is actually thinking about the long term decisions for a brighter future.

A future.

So we're going to see endlessly now long term decisions for a brighter future.

It's going to be the Tory slogan and it's really clever marketing.

But I think it's the job of podcasts like us to say, huh, really?

Is that what it's about?

Or is it about getting yourself in a position where you've got one narrow pathway to win a general election next year and maybe this is it?

Let's face it, they have been throwing things against the wall and seeing what will stick.

Another one has emerged over the weekend and that is inheritance tax making moves to scrap it.

And it was interesting listening to the debate on that because frankly, if something is run up a flagpole or you've launched a kite in the air and you want to bring it down, you pull it down and they haven't.

They've let this idea run that maybe the Tories will do something big about inheritance tax.

Yeah, listen to Grant Shaps over the weekend because he starts by sort of cutting down

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

the idea that anyone's talking about it and then he happens to let slip in the next sentence. He thinks it's a deeply punitive tax.

We'll let you decide.

What is the question to which abolishing inheritance tax is any sort of plausible answer?

What is the question to which it's an answer?

Look, newspapers spend the time having to fill the columns, right?

And they write stories.

Oh, and so I think that's a bit unfair.

They don't write them just because they make it up.

Look, it's right that every single tax is kept under consideration.

I mean, I just mentioned, I think that inheritance tax is particularly punitive and unfair.

So why if you've got any priorities at all?

And let's face it, it may be that money will be released if they stop HS2 and stop it, you know, this great white elephant that goes from Acton to just outside Birmingham and does not link up the country at all.

Is that the old oak place?

I don't know where it is.

I mean, you know, it's not going to go to Houston.

They've done all this work on building, getting, you know, just down the road from where I live, you can see the huge HS2 works that are going on and they're going to be stopped.

We've got this brand new train that might or might not go from Birmingham to not London.

Exactly.

It's just kind of why can't Britain do infrastructure properly and why does it always take so long and why are you bailing now?

But if you bail now and you suddenly release, I don't know, X billion pounds, then maybe wouldn't it be amazing if there was room for tax cuts and room to deal with inheritance tax, which affects incredibly few people and you will be making a statement of priorities. If the Tory government says, right, the one priority we've got is to do something about inheritance tax, which only affects the 4% of wealthiest estates and the rest of us are unaffected by it.

So it kicks in on properties, on estates.

I mean, we say estates, but it means like you own, right?

It kicks in on anything over £325,000 at 40% of flat rate, nothing to do with your earnings, nothing to do with any tax you've previously earned.

And actually, there are lots of countries.

You were mentioning Australia hadn't paid inheritance tax since, I think, 1979.

New Zealand, Canada, I'm looking down, Mexico, Hong Kong, Estonia, Singapore, they're all out of inheritance tax.

It's clearly, we wouldn't be the front runners to get rid of inheritance tax.

It looks like much of the English-speaking world, although interestingly, America does have inheritance tax, I assume, does pay it.

I think the problem with getting rid of it at this point, and this is a point that Labour have sort of flagged up very loudly and vocally, is that it would save Rishi Sunak's own family

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

almost £300 million.

And the vast majority of households wouldn't benefit.

And I'm sort of laughing as I say that because I'm just imagining it slightly awkward if you're the Prime Minister and you've brought forward this policy which you're trying to make out is a really decent way to make the tax system a bit fairer and a bit simpler and recognise that actually people had already been taxed.

And you suddenly go, oh yeah, and it also does land me another £300 million.

It's not going to be a great look.

And there are a lot of very wealthy cabinet members, like Jeremy Hunt, who had a very successful business career, sold a business, Grant Shaps was a serial entrepreneur, has made a lot of money.

There are others as well who've made big, big sums of money and it becomes very politically awkward if in a general election the Labour Party were to start saying, how much would this one gain?

How much would that one gain?

How much would someone else gain if there was no longer any inheritance tax?

There's a good intellectual argument about why you shouldn't have inheritance tax and that's why some of those other countries, you just listed, have got rid of them.

Because this is money you've already paid tax on that you've built up and you want to leave to your kids or your grandkids or whatever it happens to be.

But I just think that if you have got one choice, I mean, it was like, you know, we're a year on from the kamikwazi budget.

And we'll remember the kind of reaction there was when we're no longer going to put a cap on bankers bonuses.

Yeah.

And finally, finally we've got something that will make the country as a whole happier and better.

Exactly.

Yeah.

You don't want to be putting yourself in that position.

I also think we used to hear a lot about this terrible phrase getting the barnacles off the boat.

In other words, just stick to your core ideals.

And Rishi Sunak has been doing that up till now.

He said, these are my five pledges.

And whether you agree with them or not, he would trot them out to every possible invitation.

You know, hello.

I'm Rishi Sunak.

Start the boat.

Yeah, exactly.

Carving the inflation, national debt or the rest of it.

So at least they became things that people knew about.

Suddenly you've got a hell of a lot of barnacles creeping in there now.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

You know, whether it's inheritance tax, whether it's the stuff about the Greens, whether it's a British baccalaureate.

I love the idea of a British baccalaureate.

It's like, don't worry, it's not the French kind.

We won't make your kids do anything related to Europe.

This is a British one.

But this whole idea that actually you're starting to talk about a lot of things.

And this one in particular, you cannot talk to people about the cost of living crisis.

And in the same breath say, but don't worry, the millionaires are going to be much, much happy with this, even if it does make intellectual sense, as you say.

Yeah.

And you can maybe construct an intellectual argument about why HS2 is a waste of time.

But you've had successive governments backing the idea.

You've had very little political opposition to it.

It is one of those things where you think, well, this is probably good for Britain to have a high speed rail link that's going to deal with the kind of disparity between north and south of the country.

And suddenly you've got Rishi Sunak saying, well, we're going to put the brakes on it.

We're not going to go ahead with it.

And he is facing some real strong headwinds.

When you've got David Cameron, Boris Johnson, George Osborne, Michael Heseltine, all coming out and saying, you must be joking.

And I wonder whether he will see that through, because there's going to be a lot of conservative opposition.

And how does it fade?

Don't forget that is also about their legacy.

And I'm always surprised by how important it is for politicians to sort of remind the country of what they did when they were in office.

I mean, we're going to come on to that a little bit later when we're talking about Joe Biden and Donald Trump, but it is funny to keep on hearing these things sort of almost through the lens of like, we did that, please don't undo it.

And don't forget, this was originally a labor project.

That's the irony is that we think about the people who are coming to the rescue right now are the Tory voices like George Osborne, who we saw in the Times today.

I think it was originally conceived under Labour's Brown government when he was Prime Minister.

In 2009, it started off at a sort of 30 plus billion.

And I guess the point is that if you announce something that sounds very positive, you're going to get a lot of people saying that sounds great, because our imagination just assumes that it will be completed within your lifetime.

Now, Labour, I don't think is 100% sure what they would do if it came back to them, if they win the election, if they have to make decisions on HS2.

Ultimately, there is a £60 billion difference now between those original sums and all the

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

changes, the cancellations, the alterations and what we're looking at now.

And actually, all they need to do right now is keep reminding people that from the moment the Conservatives had it in their hands, 13 years later, this project doesn't exist and is £60 billion more expensive.

And then you get the Conservatives saying, well, actually what we'll concentrate on in this whole levelling up agenda is we'll concentrate on the East-West route between either side of the country.

The non-Roman route.

Yeah, exactly.

And you think, well, hang on, if you've sunk billions of pounds into a route which runs from not quite London to not quite Birmingham, why the hell should I bloody well trust you to come up with something East-West when no one has agreed on the routes yet?

No one knows what the cost will be.

The idea that this would be planning for the brighter future, I just think it's a terrible fudge that has happened.

I mean, actually, it was a no-brainer.

It should have been a no-brainer to do East-West to start with.

I mean, honestly, just several...

The plans panel.

I remember a Newsnight editor calling me urgently and I was in Hartlepool.

I've been covering an election in Hartlepool and saying, can you get down to Birmingham now?

And I was like, have you ever tried to get from Hartlepool to Birmingham?

It literally doesn't work.

And actually, if you'd instantly or earlier been thinking East to West, rather than how does London get connected all the way?

Yeah.

And the one bit of successful infrastructure that you can point to, and this is where I think Britain falls behind so many of our European competitors with the difficulty of getting infrastructure.

You know, people have been talking about an extra runway at Heathrow Airport.

It's been going on for years.

Nothing's happened.

You think about the kind of bypass that was going to go around Salisbury and Stonehenge.

Well, absolutely nothing agreed, still an absolute hideous bottleneck if you're ever trying to get to the West country.

The one bit of infrastructure that we have managed to do is East-West, is the Elizabeth Line.

Yeah.

And that's fantastic.

Well, that was delayed, Crossrail.

Yeah, Crossrail was delayed.

I mean, funny enough, when it was delayed, we called it Crossrail.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

As soon as it opened, we called it the Elizabeth Line, the stamp of the Queen and everyone loves it.

Everyone loves it.

And you can understand that if you are in Leeds and Manchester or wherever it happens to be, and you think, hang on, we could really benefit from a much stronger East-West line linking up the country.

And it's happened in the south of England, it hasn't happened in the north.

And I think the optics of Sunak cancelling HS2, particularly in those red wall seats, it's not going to be good.

You mentioned something earlier about Donald Trump lauding Rishi Sunak.

And I actually think that's quite important.

This was on the question of the green taxes, the green levies that we were talking about a bit last week.

I do see this as a route for future populist governments, actually, to come in and say, don't you realise what the crazies are trying to make you do, telling you the world's about to burn, telling you the world's going to explode, all the rest of it.

And actually, if Trump is imagining a future four years, and we know he is, then I don't think he's going to be prioritising environmental levies.

I don't think he's going to be prioritising green taxes.

So he and many others like him, sort of populist authoritarian leaders, will be looking around the room and saying, Rishi Sunak's done that.

That's great.

There's a blueprint for this.

There's a blueprint for a new type of sort of populist leader who says, the people will not stand for this energy tax.

The people will not stand for this stuff that looks to the future.

We need to look at people's finances now.

And I think Rishi Sunak may very well be part of carving that out, you know.

It's a really interesting thought.

I know you had Lewis helping with your son's homework the other week on the podcast.

Are we saying that Rishi Sunak is a technocratic populist?

Because that is one thing that we haven't seen yet on the charts of authoritarian and populism.

It's a really good word.

Technocratic populist.

Just to go into this for a moment.

When he first came to power, obviously, compared to Lewis Truss and compared to Boris Johnson, he seemed like the Mario Draghi, didn't he?

He seemed like the boring suited Saper of Hands, the man who would just sort of get everything back into shape, didn't have to be wildly imaginative.

So soft shoes, Goldman Sachs sort of sort things out and here's your clipboard.

But I think really, for the last nine months or so, we'd have to accept that Rishi Sunak plays much, much more to a populist gallery than perhaps we, the commentary at, have ever

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

been willing to say.

Which is what I think we've been trying to say today when looking at Rishi Sunak's long-term plans for the future.

This is The News Agents.

We thought we'd talk to you about polls.

There's one man who really, really loves polls.

Remember this?

Washington Post, ABC, crooked as hell.

It's called suppression polls.

You know what it does?

It suppresses the vote.

You get depressed.

The Washington Post had Biden up 17 points in Wisconsin and it was basically even, they were up by about 17 points and they knew that.

That was in the 2016 election, ABC, crooked as hell, have bought out a new poll which shows that Donald Trump, who is the front-runner, the Republican nomination would beat Joe Biden by 10 points.

I've always said that ABC have got the best polls.

Right.

And it's quite an interesting leap that because we are not even in the primary stages yet.

I mean the primaries of the 2024 American election, the caucuses don't even begin until January.

So here we are, four months out and Donald Trump is not only sounding like the clear front-runner, like the man who has already beaten all the other candidates to the nomination.

But the man who, this particular poll, and it is only one poll, caveats abound, all the rest of it, but it is ABC News.

It is quite an established set of pollsters here showing that Donald Trump could beat Joe Biden by 10 points.

That is not a margin of error.

That is quite a big dose and I think it will be worrying to the Democrats even though it is a lone figure.

Oh, I think for the Democrats, the worry is already there intensely with Biden's poll ratings on the economy, on immigration, absolutely through the floor, approval ratings, terrible.

And of course, this persistent question over his age and his cognitive abilities and whether he's just too old to run again.

And I just think all this polling evidence just builds the pressure about whether Biden will run again and whether there is an alternative out there that could replace him.

I tell you the other thing I found fascinating about this poll, not just the headline figure that shows Trump up leading Biden by nine or 10 points.

It's the retrospective polling that when Trump left office in January 2021, 38% of Americans said they approved of the job that he had done.

Now some people might find it astonishing that as many as 38% approved of the job that he'd done just after we'd had the attempted insurrection on Capitol Hill.

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

But now, looking back, they're finding that 48% of Americans say they think he has done a good job and that should really terrify the Democrats because if ret with the passing of time, Donald Trump's position is improving and this mellowing and this in the face of four indictments, you just think, oh my God, what is it going to take to stop Donald Trump? Well, unless it's not in the face of four indictments and this is actually the Democrats' worst nightmare, those indictments are not just earning him money, helping him fundraise, helping him self-publicise, but they are also endearing him to more people in the general population.

And I think we should put this in context because it is a slight mirror world thing that's going on here because America's economy is actually doing extraordinary things right now.

I mean, relative to many other places in the world, inflation is down below 4%.

You've seen the Inflation Reduction Act.

I mean, it literally is in the name, but it was Joe Biden promising jobs in green energy with subsidies.

It allowed him to hail an America first position, but to do it almost within the welfare state framework.

So there are more jobs, inflation is lower, people are getting better paid.

By most normal counts, Americans should be able to answer that question, are you better off than you were four years ago, with a resounding yes.

And yet, when they're asked the question, they're not feeling it or they're not saying that they're feeling it, which suggests that we might now be entering into this really odd parallel universe where whatever the facts say, the perception or the noise or the social media commentary is contradicting it.

And people are going away offering their views on the on the latter rather than the former.

Yeah, I think that it may be that in a few years time, people will look back on the Biden presidency as a period of extraordinary legislative achievement and also economic achievement coming off the back of the pandemic, that America was one of the first economies to rebound and rebound well and brought inflation under control more quickly, certainly than the UK has done.

He has managed to get things through.

He has worked across the aisle.

He's done all these things.

And if you look at the polling evidence, he is getting absolutely no political reward for any of it.

And I think that that is all playing into this narrative of Hunter Biden, the Biden crime family and also his own age about whether he's up to the job.

And so he's not getting the political kickbacks that you would expect, given some of the objective measurements which we've got on how he's done.

And that is a really terrifying thing for Democrats, I would think.

And the question I guess is, will Democrats lose their nerve?

Will they really envisage a move to try and replace Biden?

Because I honestly don't know how they do that, because I don't think there is anyone

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

waiting in the wings.

It certainly isn't his VP, Kamala Harris, not in popularity terms.

I don't think it's any of the younger members of his cabinet.

There was some talk of the California Governor Gavin Newsom being about to enter the race.

But here's the problem.

Either you say he's done this extraordinary job and you try and tell the economic story, or else you say, oh yeah, don't worry, he is a bit old, we're going to replace him.

You can't actually tell both stories in the same way, right?

You cannot.

Joe Biden, I will say, cannot be replaced, even if the polling is against him.

And I think we know something like 62, 64% of registered Democrats think he shouldn't run.

Think he shouldn't run.

They're the people that are already in the bag, right, as it were.

And that will drive down turnout if they've, you know, are you going to vote for him when you think, oh my God, he's too old.

So what would you do?

I think that Joe Biden is running until the moment he's not.

And I think that there could either be a kind of decisive moment of somebody breaks, a big name breaks and says, we've got to talk about this.

I am running.

I'm putting my name forward for New Hampshire or whatever it happens to be.

And I've heard of very well, kind of someone who served in the Clinton administration, who still watches Democratic politics very closely saying, watch New Hampshire, which is where Biden did appallingly four years ago, which will be at the end of January, which will be at the end of January, that someone might just suddenly put their hat in the ring and then it opens it all up and Biden announces that he's not running.

But what it won't be is a seamless transition.

I'm not running.

We're all getting behind Kamala because they won't all get behind Kamala or we're all getting behind Gavin Newsom.

They won't all get behind Gavin Newsom.

And the irony of that is that the Republicans are meant to be in the sort of the narrative of this particular four years.

You normally have the incumbent Democrat who you know is going to run again because he's going to go for his second term.

The incumbent president normally will go on for a second term and you have this whole array of candidates on the other side with the Republicans.

Those candidates are kind of fading into the darkness quite quickly now.

I mean, we're going to be up at four o'clock on Thursday morning watching the next Republican presidential debate that's coming kind of live from California.

But in some ways, you're kind of thinking, what for, right?

If Donald Trump is so far ahead, what are we doing?

[Transcript] The News Agents / Is Rishi ditching a tax that would make him and his mates richer?

We're just watching for a potential VP now.

Donald Trump is already running for the general election.

He stopped running for the nomination.

For the nomination.

He's got the nomination.

Yeah.

Unless something extraordinary happens, the nomination is his and he's already starting to run to broaden his appeal and it's, you know, one to watch.

Trump is being very clever at the moment and I think the Democrats have got a lot of difficult questions.

We'll be seeing if he turns up on that Thursday debate stage and we'll bring you that live on Newsagents USA.

I don't know.

I said live.

Of course it won't be live.

Of course it won't be live.

What are you talking about?

We're on the radio.

Yeah.

We're at the movies.

Breaking news.

Yeah.

All the time.

Breaking news.

We don't do breaking news.

We've just broken it.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye-bye.

Bye.