

This is a Global Player original podcast.

I want to be careful about what I can give you in terms of the specifics of a complaint. I cannot get into specifics, I'm not going to get into the specific conversations with the presenter. Again, that is a matter that I think we have to respect the privacy of an employee. Absolutely, I cannot comment on that. That is not information that I'm party to. I think that's not something for the BBC, bluntly. I can't answer for everyone in the department. I can't speak to complaints that come in immediately.

So you can't even say that that's... No.

And that's the BBC Director-General, Tim Davy, speaking on the BBC, giving us the slightly less than definitive account of everything that happened in the case surrounding the BBC presenter. My guess is he'll be really pleased with that interview. He said precisely nothing. He gave very little away, and yet he was seen to be transparent, to a point, as the head of the BBC as an organisation. So today, on the news agents, 24 hours after that bombshell disclosure from the 20-year-old's lawyer that most of the allegations were, in his quotes, rubbish, we're going to try and ask a new set of questions. Get to the bottom of what we know now and how that's changed our perception of the BBC and the Sun scandal story.

Welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis. And sometimes in life, the more you learn, the less you know. And that is what it has felt like over the past 96 hours, is it? Since Saturday morning, when this story broke. And this lunchtime, we thought, right, the BBC, Tim Davy, director-general has said as much as he can say, there's not going to be anything more to come today. And then the BBC breaks a story itself at four o'clock in the afternoon, which none of us knew anything about. And maybe Tim Davy, the director-general, didn't know anything about. And it's worth just unpacking what has been said.

So the BBC itself is saying now that a second young person has made allegations about the same BBC presenter. They allegedly met via a dating app. And there was apparently, allegedly, an aggressive and bullying message thread between the presenter and the individual. What we don't know is the context of that. It has been suggested that perhaps the young person was saying that they would out or make public the presenter's name. And at that point, things got pretty nasty and pretty vitriolic. Or maybe, you know, they were quite scared of being sort of outed so publicly. But that is what we now understand is, if you like, a second thread about the same person. What this does not do is mention any kind of criminal behaviour. And I think that's really important because the Sun story suggested criminality. And when we asked yesterday about evidence or about bank statements or about a sense of the person's age, 17, having received money, which would be breaking the law, there has been no evidence on that. So this is a very different kind of case. But it does involve the same person we understand, which probably just complicates the overall picture even more in terms of who is now carrying this story? Is it the Sun? Is it the BBC? Is the presenter himself allowed to feel that he has been maligned? Or is this now becoming much, much more difficult to count? Yeah, it's just worth underlining that this person

who has come forward and spoken to BBC News has no connection whatsoever to the other young person in this case that the Sun has been reporting on. And, you know, just in this kind of Alice in Wonderland world that we are now in, that BBC News has contacted the BBC presenter directly and via his lawyer, but has received no response to the latest allegations as we speak at 17 Minutes Path 4. What it speaks to, though, is the fact that every news desk in Fleet Street in Britain, including the BBCs, are currently now, because they all know the identity of the person involved, and that is part of the weird merry dance and the weird space that we're in at the moment, is currently, it might not be very appealing in lots of ways, but will currently be looking for stories about the person involved. And the Sun has a particular interest, although this is not a Sun story, the Sun clearly has a particular interest in doing that, because the more stories, assuming there are more stories, the more stories which might appear about this person, the more likely it is that we will get to a place where someone, in whatever circumstance, named this person. And when that happens, the floodgates are open for all sorts of other stories and all sorts of other things being written about this person.

So one of the most bizarre things I heard over the weekend was that a prominent BBC journalist was kind of doing their own investigation into the BBC presenter. And I thought, wow, the BBC is eating itself over this, if that is what is going on. And sure enough, this afternoon, a story has been broken by the BBC, presumably because an investigation has been going on, perhaps even predating the Sun story on Saturday. And you just wonder, what on Earth is going on inside New Broadcasting House?

But there's also this odd question about what I'm going to call the balance of empathy, because I think the empathy was very much with the mother, the young person, you know, over the weekend, who'd been sort of named by the Sun. And then there was this switch when the young person's lawyer came and said, this is all a load of rubbish. And from what we understand, the presenter at the centre of this was rightfully feeling quite angry that the Sun had proved very little in terms of its evidence. And I think a lot of people then were rushing to the defence of the presenter and trying to re-correct the narrative. This, I think, throws it off again. Even though it's not the same thing, you're back looking at something that feels like bullying behaviour. Although I would stress, bullying is very much in the eye of the beholder. One person's bullying might not have been intended that way on a thread. We haven't seen these words. We haven't seen the texts or the messages. We don't know what was said in those. I think what it reminds us of precisely because of that shift in the balance of Emily, as you call it, Emily, the shift in the narrative, it just reminds us to be extremely sceptical about everything that we're hearing about this story. Because the one constant about this story that we basically should have known all along and what is very, very clear now is that the pieces are fragmented and many, many of them are missing. Well, this story is dominating the media and all the chat really in the UK. It's also reached NATO. And by that, I mean that Rishi Sunak has fallen into the position that many Prime Ministers do when they go abroad and try and talk about big global politics and they get asked, first of all, about the scandal on their doorstep. What was your reaction when you heard about the allegations against a certain BBC presenter? Well, obviously, they're very serious and concerning allegations. And that's why I'm pleased that the Culture Secretary spoke to the Director-General of the BBC over the weekend

and is confident that the BBC is investigating this both rigorously and rapidly. I think that's the right course of action. What would you say to people on social media? Indeed, some MPs who say they might use parliamentary privilege to try and name this presenter. Look, we have an existing set of laws that govern free speech and privacy. I think it's important that the BBC conducts this investigation quickly and rigorously, given the concerning and serious nature of the allegations. So there you go. That was the line quickly and rigorously, serious nature of the allegations, repeated ad nauseam by the Prime Minister. He'll be happy with that performance because he says nothing. And yet, there is something that we need to discuss with you, which is about the role that MPs and Parliament can play in bringing this subject into the public domain. It's called parliamentary privilege and we've seen it enacted before, where somebody who is unnamed at the centre of these allegations, at the centre of a potential scandal, can have their name said out loud in Parliament, in the interests of public interest and transparency by an MP, and that is then deemed permissible. And that then becomes something that the whole country can take their lead from and discuss. And he was talking about the Culture Secretary Lucy Fraser. It's worth going to the words of a former Culture Secretary Nadine Doris, who has tweeted the public pay for the BBC, they have a right to know who this is and what happened and action taken. Does that pave the way for her, or one of her ilk, to say this presenter's name out loud in the Commons? Well, it would first of all require Nadine Doris to find her way to the House of Commons because she hasn't actually spoken from there in over a year, despite having taken a parliamentary salary for the past year. She hasn't actually turned up to make any comment at all, so she'd have to first find her way there. But if she did, or if anyone did, MPX stands up and says, I name this presenter as Bill Bagging, then every journalist in the country has the right to repeat that because we have qualified privilege to report the events of Parliament. And so that name would then be out there. And the key thing is about privilege is that an MP is not subject to libel or defamation law whilst they're in the Commons. If they said exactly the same thing literally on the red line pub just down the road, they'd be the same as everybody else. But within those four walls of the House of Commons, they can say whatever they like. So why would they do it? This is the question because there is, and I think we should sort of show our workings, there are people now asking us, and indeed a lawyer that we're about to speak to suggest that he thinks it's coming, people suggesting that this would happen, maybe in the interests of transparency, maybe in the interests of, if you like, levelling the playing field. So it's not just people in the media or in the BBC that know the name, but it's the whole country. Or maybe there is a certain kind of animus vitriol towards, you know, BBC's staff or stars that could be exercised in this way.

Well, one party which would benefit enormously, of course, will be the Sun newspaper, because then they would be able to report in far more detail than they are currently choosing to do so. And we know that there are very close links between the Sun newspaper and Conservative MPs. It was notable in that first report that came out on Saturday, there are a whole ream of Conservative MPs expressing their disquiet, their concern, Dame Priti Patel, Dame Caroline Dainish, the list is endless.

I mean, not just close, but actually employed by often. Yeah. The Sun is obviously the sister arm to talk TV, which employs, I think at last count, three or four Tory MPs on their

own chat.

Exactly. So I don't think we would be surprised whatsoever if that were to happen from the government's point of view. I think it was quite interesting that Sunak, although obviously saying he was concerning, he was keeping his distance because I think rightly there was a bit of flak for Lucy Fraser, the culture secretary over the weekend, starting to get involved in calling up the DJ and so on. I mean, yes, the BBC obviously is a public service broadcaster. It's all up to the culture secretary and the government of the day to police internal disciplinary or staffing matters within the BBC, certainly when all of the facts weren't known. So it's a bit of a weird move from her over the weekend.

Yeah. Emily, you made the point yesterday on the podcast, look, you can't ignore the agenda of the Sun of Rupert Murdoch towards the BBC and the poll lectures have been devoted to kind of trying to take the BBC down, clip its wings, reduce the licence fee because commercial competition and then we saw some Tory MPs are just using it as an excuse for BBC bashing. And I just thought the one that took the biscuit last night, this is from Lee Anderson. He's not just a backbench MP. He is the deputy chairman of the Conservative Party. He has got an official role given to him by Rishi Sunak and he said that the BBC had become a safe haven for perverts. I mean, it is so monstrous. One, there are no allegations that have been proven against this presenter or we have allegations. Secondly, I mean, talk about pots and kettles. I mean, we've got Mr Tractor Porn. We have had 15.

We have pinched by name, pinched by nature. We have the Coke Sniffer, which is causing a by-election in the next week. I could go on and on. But to say that the Conservative Party is a safe haven for perverts would be a ridiculous thing to say. They've got some pretty rotten people who are being weeded out. And if there is anyone who has proven to be rotten in the BBC, I'm sure they will go as well. But to say that the BBC is a safe haven for perverts, it's moronic. It's idiocy. It is crass. You don't think Le Anderson lives in a glass house by any chance, do you? I think it's a very fragile glass house with very thin glass. He'll also be really delighted you're having this reaction because that is what he loves doing. Well, I think that sometimes some of these things need to be called out because he's got a big enough audience that needs to be pushed back against some of the lunacy. Also, by the way, there has been so much more scrutiny. I mean, OK, right or wrong, there's been so much more scrutiny about this unnamed person on the BBC with a set of allegations which aren't even from, as it were the horse's mouth, but are in effect secondhand, emblazoned across a national newspaper by comparison to all of those things that John, you were just talking about, which sometimes occupy page three, page four, page five, which are substantiated allegations and cases. So honestly, in terms of an MP talking about the BBC or the media and whatever in perverts and so on, the level of scrutiny that this person is receiving is through the roof, who isn't an elected person at the end of the day. It is through the roof by comparison to the egregious cases that often take place within the House of Commons. So look, where are we now with this story? Just to bring us back to where we are. We don't know if the sun has the evidence to name the person. We still haven't seen, as we were hearing yesterday, any bank statements or any categorical proof that money changed hands. We know that at this moment, the police do not think there's enough to open a criminal investigation. And we have a dispute at the centre between the parents, step-parents and the child stroke 20-year-old, which is confusing the narrative in terms of who actually came

to the BBC. It may be, and I think these words were used about the Phillips-Gofield case, that there is behaviour that has been, let's say, unwise but not illegal. And yet we are now in this sort of suspended, I guess, abeyance where we might not hear any more about this until the BBC finishes its investigation.

That's absolutely right. Look, it is true, undoubtedly true, that there have been claim and counterclaim. But I think it is slightly lazy to characterise this as claim and counterclaim. What we have had from the Sun newspaper is a series of assertions. We have had the youngster involved through the lawyer saying it's rubbish. Surely the onus has to be on the Sun now. Well, you know, put up or shut up. Show us what you've got. Because at the moment, all we had in the Sun last night, after the youngster had made this statement through the lawyer, was the parents saying, well, we stick by our story.

And Tim Davy, the director-general, loathed to criticise the Sun. I think that was interesting. He does not think that that's his job or his duty. You ask the questions to them, I'll just carry on. Surely the Sun has to come up and say, OK, here are the bank statements. Here is the proof. This is why we are absolutely confident of our ground that we stand on. If you were in any newsroom, the first thing your editor is, when you go to with a story, he said, have you stood this up? And to go back to what we've basically spent the last 15 minutes discussing is how little we know about this story and how many questions, more questions, each day delivers. Now, as a piece of journalism, rule number one of journalism is it is meant to inform, it is meant to shed more lights than it takes away. The thing about this- Which he told us that the stars.

I know. Well, that's the idea anyway, whether we always meet it. But this is a piece of journalism clearly completely fails on that in a sense that we have, and it's amazing the situation we're in. We've spent three days now, four days, basically this story, which is at best half formed, dominating our national discourse and their headlines and every newsroom and every newspaper. And every day, we seem to know less. And if you compare it to- Emily, you just mentioned the Scofield thing. Actually, you know, in some ways you might say there are sort of parallels with this stuff. But if you compare the two stories, it's like night and day, because the truth is, is with Scofield, the Scofield story, there was clearly an attempt at that time by Scofield to shut the story down. The mail was confident in the story that it had, and it printed it anyway. And because it was substantiated, you may have not liked the story or you may have not thought the focus on it was justified, but the fundamentals of the story were there. And that is the difference as pieces of journalism between that and this. This is an attempt. I mean, it felt like for days that this has been an attempt by the sun who didn't have the story there to have their cake and eat it too.

Last night, there was one tweet by John Soaple. The sun has made the most serious allegations about a BBC presenter. Now it needs to provide evidence or potentially face the mother of all libel actions. On current views, it's got 17,000 likes. And I think it starts a whole new host of questions about how close the sun came to libeling this person, even though it never said his name. So we thought we would speak to a lawyer, Steve Kuncivic, who specializes in media, social media and privacy law. And Steve, I guess it felt like the whole story just turned upside down last night. And there are so many new questions, not least, where did this lawyer come from and how would he have found the client?

As you rightly say, this is a story that's distinguished by the fact that there's so much that we still don't know. If money has changed hands, then that would make sense in that the person involved now has money to fund a lawyer. But you can imagine if you find yourself in the crosshairs of this kind of story, if you're involved in it in any way, shape or form, then you may feel the need to get yourself some legal representation. Everybody involved that's around this metaphorical table already probably has done. How they found each other remains to be seen. It could well be that they're active on social media and that's how they found each other. But certainly, as the more twists and turns we see to this story, they're a very interesting addition to the conversation.

Can I ask you about something else, which is that the whole rationale for why we haven't yet heard the name of the presenter? And we tell, well, it's all because of privacy law and everything has changed. Philip Schofield a few weeks ago, there was no such reticence. Not to get too far into the weeds about it, but there was a case involving Bloomberg last year, where the courts made it very clear that if you are the subject of a potential criminal investigation, then you have a reasonable expectation of privacy on the basis that if this information were to get out into the wider world before you charge, then your reputation is pretty much destroyed. And that's obviously what we're looking at an analogy of here. I think it's worth noting that the Met have said they don't have enough information yet to make a decision as to whether or not they want to investigate. The line that came out an awful lot around Philip Schofield was that this was a relationship that was unwise but not unlawful. And we may find ourselves in similar territory here. Once they're charged, then the issues change slightly. It's not as much of a defamation and privacy concern as a contempt of court issue. And the proceedings will be at some point to arrest them charged. So it's two opposing forces. We have the outrage economy on one side of the argument and then an information vacuum on the other. And in between, there's an awful lot of detail still to be felt then.

How far has the sun gone in terms of crossing a potential defamation or libel line? Well, John made the point yesterday in a tweet that we could be approaching that line. What they will say, their defence, this would always be, certainly when they're talking about the story being a mass republic interest, is that they haven't named the presenter. Of course, however, think about the context of it. You don't necessarily need to name someone. If in the context of the wider story, if someone could look at this and know that this refers to a specific individual, then that can get around that potential problem. Not naming them is the first line of defence, but that doesn't mean that it's going to hold all the way through here. And as the sun works to get this story kind of stood upon all fours, they've done a lot of work in the background. They've said that the parents have given them sworn affidavits, for example, to say that all this information is true. The more information that comes out to try and substantiate what they're saying, I think the greater the risk is that the person becomes even more easily identifiable. You know, there's a suggestion that one in six social media users has an idea of who this might be this morning anyway. So I think the line will probably hold for a while yet, and certainly it's been reported incredibly carefully.

Just to clarify, if people have identified this person, this man, without his name ever being in the public domain, then he could technically sue if it all turns out to be non-criminal

or wrong.

Potentially, but I've been thinking of who you would sue. There's certainly enough to work quite hard to be able to sue because, as I say, they haven't named him specifically. That wouldn't, of course, stop him from suing any number of other people on social media who've connected him to these allegations. We saw this with Lord McAlpine about 10 years ago. He wasn't named specifically, but people could put two and two together and get six in that case in all the wrong ways. I think what happened then was that Lord McAlpine's lawyers made the very wise decision of looking at users with a certain number of followers and only going after them, because obviously the number of people that read these allegations would increase the damages awards that you'd be able to recover from them.

And I think that's probably what we're going to see here. It's going to take a bit longer for a case to be able to be put together against the sun, potentially, but I think it's an awful lot shorter with a digital time capsule evidence, if you like, to go after some of the more prominent social media users.

Knowing the law as you do, knowing how newspapers work as you do, are you surprised that the story

came out when it did? Because we've had the assertions. We've had the allegations.

What we haven't yet seen are things that back the allegations up, i.e. bank statements showing that money was transferred from A to B.

Well, again, can they release that kind of information without getting closer to identifying who's behind it? And I think that's the real tension. The sun at the minute, I think, are in the middle of a very quite dangerous high wire act in trying to reinforce their own credibility to show that they've done what they need to do, their proper due diligence to make sure this story, you know, that they can stand behind it in the way the parents are stood behind it and recovering some of their credibility after the person involved's lawyer came out.

Nadine Doris tweeted, the public pay for the BBC, they have a right to know who this is, what happened, and action taken. I'm presuming she doesn't speak as a lawyer, but is she on any kind of safe ground with that request or demand?

I think the really interesting inflection point we might reach with this whole story is the operation of parliamentary privilege and that it may be that somebody names this person within the House of Commons. It wouldn't be the first time I've disagreed with Nadine Doris's view. I don't think that comment was particularly helpful.

Steve, let me ask you about something else which relates to the kind of wild speculation that we have seen on social media since the Sun newspaper dropped on Saturday morning about it could be this one, it could be that one, and various people have talked about the pain of, you know, finding themselves being slapped around by Twitter, as Jeremy Vine put it, when he was obviously ruling himself out as the potential presenter.

Pre-Elon Musk would Twitter have intervened more to say, hang on, we're going to mediate this, we can't allow the naming of various people like this because it is defamatory and libelous.

So at the background of all of this, we have the impending online safety bill, which is designed to impose a duty of care on social media platforms to force them to ensure that users don't encounter harmful content. That played a real role in Elon Musk's original reluctance, I think, to step in and buy Twitter because we are going to be the first country in the world that's going to try and regulate this kind of behaviour. Twitter certainly has become

a bit of a different place, I think, since Elon Musk stepped in. As a result of that, Threads, she's met as new competitor, has, I think, now 100 million users over the course of the first week or so. Twitter's stance on this kind of thing, at least until further recently, has been that the tweets must flow, that they want to be seen as the marketplace of ideas where opinions can be shared without fear of favour and without too much intervention. And ultimately, a lot of the social platforms will say, well, this is the users doing this and not us. And I think we've seen a really interesting trend over the course of the last few years, coming out of things like January 6th, for example, coming out of things like election interference, where the platforms are coming up against the whims of government, the whims of third parties who are trying to stop them talking about this kind of thing, and saying, well, we're not publishers, we're just a, you know, we're a public square in which people can say this kind of thing. Twitter certainly is taking absolutely no steps to rein this in. Hashtag BBC presenter has been trending for a few days now. I don't think that's particularly helpful, but equally, I don't see them stepping in for a specific case, because then the worry is that they cross the Rubicon, and they have to start to be seen stepping in on others as well. The move around regulation is much more around deterring harm to users in general, as opposed to a specific person. And that's the issue here, is that if there's going to be a remedy for all this, it's going to come from the specific person, or whoever it might be, to whom the social media users are referring. Steve, thank you. Thanks so much. In a moment, we're going to give you the bits of news that you might have missed in all the hurly-burly of yesterday. Two extraordinary speeches, one in the Lords and one in the Commons, which show our parliamentarians at their best. This is The News Agents.

Welcome back, and this is the show and tell bit of the podcast, because when we were having our meeting this morning about what should we do, Emily said there was this really brilliant speech in the House of Lords, and I said, well, there's this really brilliant speech in the House of Commons. And so we've each brought something in for the nature table, which is two clips of speeches. No acorn. I like to think of mine as being a lady bird. Exactly. A mine is a really nice twig. Of a birch. Well, that's all we've got time for, folks. Thanks very much. Okay, so I'm going to start. The speech that I wanted to talk about today was that by Alph Dubs, Lord Dubs, who has probably done more than any other parliamentarian, to bring to our attention the often incredibly difficult circumstances of child refugees, children, lone children without their parents trying to seek refuge and asylum in this country, and indeed our own response to them, which, to be frank, has not always been generous. And he was talking about something that happened last week, which I'm going to say was one of the most vile and cowardly and egregious political acts I think I've ever actually witnessed. And that was a move by Robert Jenrick, who's an immigration minister, who decided that a Mickey Mouse mural should be painted over in the housing of the refugee centres that accommodates Wellcome's children. He thought the whole idea of a Mickey Mouse welcome was going to be an incentive to these, I mean, toddlers who presumably were not deciding off their own bat to try and come to the shores. And so you will now see murals painted over to make them look less encouraging to youngsters. So the first image you get when you come here as a child is somebody who has gone out of their way and indeed spent money and time making them feel unwelcome. And this was Lord Dubbs' response to that act in The Lords Yesterday. To the rival centre in Dover, which had cartoons and welcoming signs for children and which were

ordered to be removed by the Home Office Minister because it might make the children feel too welcome. Isn't that a disgrace? Isn't it time that Government backbenchers felt as embarrassed as we are that this is happening in our country? The murals that the noble Lord refers to were provided by our detention contractors and were not commissioned or approved by the Home Office. And it's clearly the correct decision that these facilities have the requisite decoration befitting their purpose. I tell you what, if there is anything that makes Lord Dubbs' point more powerful, with more moral force, it is the response that, well, the painting of the mural was not commissioned by the Home Office, it was done by the contractors. I mean, screw you. You know that they're onto a losing bloody wicket, don't you?

Yeah. So well done, Lord Dubbs, who's got a fantastic history. I mean, he was also centrally involved, I seem to remember, in the setting up of Oxfam and had played a big role in, you know, when a child refugee himself. The other speech I want to make is by a Conservative MP, Laura Farris, who is the MP for Newbury, who briefly sat on the Privileges Committee. And it is that committee which produced the report into whether Boris Johnson lied to Parliament and it found that he did. And Harriet Harman was the chair of that committee. And Harriet Harman, as you well know, has taken a whole load of flak from some of the Boris Acolytes who say, how could you trust Harriet Harman to be an impartial witness on this? She was doing a stitch up for the Labour Party and she was party pre and couldn't be trusted. This is Laura Farris' response speaking as a Tory from the Conservative backbenches. A member for Campbell and Peckham had already announced her

intention to retire from Parliament at the next election. A parliamentary career that has spanned five decades and has been defined probably more than any other person who's ever sat in this house by her commitment to the advancement of women's rights. Fourteen weeks before she took up that appointment, her husband of 40 years, Jack, had died. Against this background, I invite members of the House to consider what is more likely, that she agreed to chair the committee as a final act of service to this house or that she did so because she was interested in pursuing a personal vendetta against Boris Johnson. It's just worth saying that Harriet Harman, while that speech was being made at the very end of it, she was actually in tears.

No doubt partly obviously because of the mention of her beloved husband Jack Dromey, the MP for Birmingham, who had died as Laura Farris was saying not long before this whole process had started. Probably also as well a combination of that and just the sort of relief and almost joy of hearing an opposition member so eloquently stand up and defend her reputation and her integrity as one of the most longest standing parliamentarians. And you know what listening to that, you know, good on her, good on Laura Farris because that is what parliamentary democracy relies upon. It relies upon parliamentarians, yeah, they've all got their party interest, yeah, of course they're all parties and to be elected as an MP by definition means that, but to keep the cogs of democracy turning, it relies on people caring more ultimately about the integrity of the system, the narrow party advantage. And as long as there are MPs like that, our democracy will not go down the way of American democracy, where you see, you know, member of Congress after member of Congress or Senator after Senator simply being afraid to put the interest of the system first and putting party advantage first instead.

Yeah, I don't think you can underestimate what it means to have somebody from another party and an opposition, a rival party supporting you in that way for exactly those reasons because it's kind of built in that, you know, in the Westminster system, you get the braying and the

cheering from behind you from your own side, literally. And once you've got something that feels cross-party, that's when the work gets done. Without it, nothing ever gets achieved.

I guess I suppose maybe this is old fart syndrome that I suffer from, I fully acknowledge.

I thought you had to see a doctor about that.

Yeah, no, there's no cure. The thing is that what she said was sort of unremarkable.

And it's just how toxic things have become in the past few years that you see an act of generosity and decency and dare I say normality, and you think, oh my god, it takes your breath away.

But actually, that is representative of the fact that again, to use the American counter example as well, the Conservative Party has had a lot of faults in recent years. The way it's dealt with politics can be critiqued in all sorts of ways. We do hear a lot from the noisiest people, particularly on the right of the party, many of whom have their own television shows as we've been even talking about today. It's worth remembering that there is a bulk mainstay of Conservative MPs. Okay, you might argue about how they dealt with Boris Johnson. In the end, they got rid of him. And in the end, most of them have backed this report.

And we'll be back in a moment. We heard Rishi Sunak earlier in the podcast arriving at NATO and being asked about BBC scandals, where we're actually going to talk a bit about NATO and who its newest member is going to be. This is the news agents.

Welcome back. While as we've already said, Rishi Sunak, a prime minister, is on his way. By the time you're listening to this, we'll be arrived in Vilnius in Lithuania for the latest NATO summit. And the big news from it so far, even though most of the prime ministers and presidents haven't even

arrived yet, is that President Erdogan of Turkey appears to have finally relented in allowing Sweden to join the bloc. And that is historic for a number of reasons. I mean, first of all, there has been a sort of enmity between Sweden and Turkey for various political reasons, and their supposed backing of a Turkish political group that Erdogan doesn't much like. But also, obviously, Sweden has been in effect neutral, essentially, since the Napoleonic Wars. And although it has worked with NATO, joining NATO now is a massive moment for the bloc and for Sweden

as well. I mean, it's so ironic, isn't it? If you think back to the reasons that Putin gave for his invasion of Ukraine, it was this sense that NATO was becoming all-powerful. And actually, within the last 18 months, what he's done has created this incredible unity. He's brought people into the fold. You know, already, we're seeing Finland is going to have access. Sweden will be the latest. And of course, Ukraine is the ultimate one. So if he wanted to create division, then everything about that war has actually solidified the 39 members of NATO. And I think in terms of the military commitment that Sweden brings is helpful. It's right on the edge of, you know, as it were, the war zone. They've got 300 ships. They've got 24,000 troops. They've got another 35,000

in reserves. And they, I guess, become the front line into telling Putin that he cannot pick off individual non-members who might have thought they would be next.

But the wrestling with Erdogan, I'd love to know what the deal was, what the inducements might have been to get him over the line. Apparently, the Americans had no part in the negotiations, which I find hard to believe, seeing as what Erdogan wanted more than anything was American F-16s.

A membership to the EU. A membership to the EU. But the other thing that, of course, that Erdogan did, which really pissed off NATO, was he bought a Russian air defense system. And he's, they're saying, well, hang on. What you want to have Russian air defenses, whilst you're flying American jets, because Russia might be able to put two and two together about how the F-16 works even more than they already know. And so getting Erdogan on side has been tricky, particularly as he's so suspicious of the fact that Sweden has been a safe haven for some of the people who organized the coup attempt against Erdogan a few years back. But the other story that's going to dominate the summit is what Zelensky is saying today, which is he has absolutely lambasted the group for saying that, partly at Biden's instigation, for not providing a timeline for accession and eventual membership of NATO. And he said that it's completely absurd, that NATO initially indicated that Ukraine would be able to join as far back or at least start the process as far back as 2008. And, you know, he's essentially saying, as you've got the block of NATO, it's bigger than it has ever been before, all except for one country, which is the country on the front line itself. Now, NATO, Ukraine clearly couldn't join while it's at war with Russia, because that would pull the entire block into the war. But his anger is about the fact that even a timeline for joining whenever that war is over is apparently not on the table, partly at Biden's instigation. Suneck and the British government, among others, wanted to start that conversation. Biden doesn't. You've just mentioned Joe Biden, and this is a convenient way for us to remind you that we will have an episode of news agents USA in your feed. Seamless. Worthy of a soap or segway. No, or a soap box. Anyway, we're going to do the news agents USA and we will be concentrating on what Biden's getting up to at the NATO summit, as well as the latest dates for the Trump court appearance and a whole load of other stuff. We'll see you then. Bye-bye. Bye. Bye-bye.