

## [Transcript] The News Agents / The Titan submersible: when is tourism too extreme?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

In consultation with experts from within the unified command, the debris is consistent with the catastrophic loss of the pressure chamber.

That was Rear Admiral John Morgan from the US Coast Guard, breaking the news that there was not going to be a miracle after all.

There was not going to be a discovery that a pocket of oxygen had kept the five people alive and that they were bringing this submersible to the surface.

But how many people really in their hearts thought that was possible?

Even though the world watched horrified, fascinated, fixated, hopeful, as the families grieve, there are some questions that need to be asked.

And that's what we're going to try and do on the news agents today.

The news agents.

When the news came through last night that the submersible had imploded and that the five people on board had died more or less instantly, it got me thinking that frankly, the Titanic claims more victims.

It was the Daily Mail front page headline this morning.

This is, of course, though, about much more than the Titanic, but I get the obsession.

There's a five-storey red brick building in Southampton called Southwestern House.

Now a block of flats, actually.

But in the 1980s, when I was starting my journalistic career, it was home to BBC Radio Solent. There was a sort of faded grandeur about the place, marble entrance hall but broken windows and pigeons had sort of set up nests inside that hall and there was lots of peeling stucco. Its heyday was the first half of the 20th century when it was then the Southwestern Hotel.

And it's where the rich and the well-heeled went to stay before they boarded their ocean liner on voyages around the world.

There were steam trains that would come up to the entrance of the hotel.

And in the 1980s, when I was there, the platforms were the car park.

And they would disgorge the well-to-do with their trunks and there'd be porters who'd carry the trunks into the hotel ahead of that crossing.

And so it was on April the 9th, 1912, that the owners of the White Star Line and first-class passengers spent the night at the Southwestern Hotel before boarding RMS Titanic the next day to set sail.

So spool forward 70 years and young John Soaple is trying to make it as a reporter.

And there were still survivors of the Titanic around that you could interview.

And it was always a story that captivated the imagination.

But looking back on it, there was always something hubristic about the Titanic as well.

There was as though Donald Trump had been called up to be the chief marketing officer.

It was full of hyperbole.

It would be the fastest ever, the most luxurious, the safest, the most unsinkable liner in history.

But with hubris, of course, came nemesis in the shape of that iceberg.

And there's something I feel of that today, the idea that you can go as a tourist, a tourist to see the wreckage of this vessel at the foot of the Atlantic Ocean.

And it's 12,500 feet down, 3,800 meters below the surface of the ocean, at water pressure

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of 4,000 atmospheres.

But it's all dependent on whether you had a checkbook flexible enough to buy a ticket to go there.

The iceberg in 1912 read catastrophic implosion of pressure chamber in 2023.

The human story, I guess, is all about our attempts to show who's the boss when it comes to nature.

We can conquer it.

We can fly.

We weren't ever given wings.

We can dive to the bottom of the ocean, but we don't have gills.

That's what we do.

And there's an explorer spirit that makes us curious about the world we live in.

That's all fine.

But there isn't that much of the planet left to explore.

If you've got the money, you don't just ski.

You heliski and you get yourself a chopper up a mountainside in either Norway or Canada or wherever it happens to be to find that patch of virgin snow.

It's also about bragging rights.

And extreme tourism is the perfect answer to that.

There's not much cache anymore to have a photo of yourself beside the Eiffel Tower in France or the Colosseum in Rome or the Acropolis in Athens.

You need something more than that.

It's a new generation.

I don't know.

They went to Machu Picchu in Peru or Angkor Wat in Cambodia or the Rift Valley in Africa.

Better still, you need to go to the South Pole, the North Pole, into space or the ocean floor further higher deeper.

And deeper is something that James Cameron knows something about as a very experienced deep sea diver.

Oh, and he just also happens to be the director of that multi Oscar winning film, Titanic.

And he's deeply troubled by many aspects of this.

Many people in the community were very concerned about this sub and a number of, you know, of the top players in the deep submergence engineering community even wrote letters to the company saying that what they were doing was too experimental to carry passengers and that needed to be certified.

And Monday morning when I first found out about the incident, got on a whole bunch calls and emails.

It's a small community within an hour and a half.

I had the following information.

They were on descent.

They were at 3,500 feet.

They lost columns and tracking the last one being the critical one because the transponder that's used to track a sub during descent on the bottom is a fully autonomous system.

It's in its own pressure housing and it has its own battery power.

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So for them to lose comms and tracking at the same time, sub was gone.

There was no question in my mind.

For days, I tried to run other scenarios that could account for it.

I could come up with nothing.

We talked earlier this week on the news agents about how some newsrooms had countdown clocks on how much oxygen the five people had left and when it would run out.

Did we also become the worst sort of more kish thrill seeker death watchers as we watched that clock tick down and wondered what the hell it would be like inside that capsule.

Of course, we now know that the five died instantly as a result of that explosive decompression.

And it seems now that everyone else sort of knew from the get go, which raises another question, the rescue operation itself.

One of my favorite TV presenters when I was living in the States was Stephanie Rool.

She used to be on at 10 o'clock in the morning on MSNBC.

And she got to question a former submarine commander, David Marquet.

I do want to ask you something before we go that I'm sure some will find insensitive.

This is a massive rescue effort that is going to be enormously expensive.

And this mission was private citizens who knew it was super risky.

Who should be paying for it?

Yeah, I think this is a debate that we need to have because the Coast Guard is incurring a lot of costs and all these ships, they're not coming there for free.

They're going to send the bill most likely to the government.

So let's say, what are you going to pay \$10 million to save five people?

That's \$2 million a person.

How much how many lives could you say doing fresh water, buying mosquito netting, giving people vaccinations and things like that.

And I think it is a debate that that we need to have.

Of course, there should have been a rescue attempt.

It's the laws of the sea that if you're in trouble, you go to the aid of your fellow human being.

But had the size and scale of it, and this is another question that has been troubling me, been determined by the feeding frenzy that was going on in the media, I'm not sure.

And it's arguable when you have extreme tourism like this, that an awful lot more lives get put at risk by the rescue effort because of the nature of what these people have set out to do.

I'm not arguing that we should stay at home and just stay under the duvet and never cross the road.

I completely get the desire to test yourself against the elements.

I totally got why Spencer Matthews, who was with us earlier in the week, had gone to Everest.

You know, we were at base camp for four and a half weeks, which is it's quite a long time.

I quite like the discomfort because you know that it's temporary and some of the endurance events that I've done in the last few years are pretty humbling.

You know, it's and you come home, of course, to hot bath, running water, a working toilet, a coffee machine, just things that you might take for granted.

So it's almost that it makes you love normality again, is it?

There's that, but also the feeling of pain and understanding where your limits can be.

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Look, I've been reflecting on my own career.

There have been places that I've gone to which are hugely dangerous, war zones, where the foreign office advice to Britons is just get out of there and I'm flying in.

But is there also an element that I'm doing this for a bit of adrenaline as well?

I mean, possibly.

I'm not there just for adrenaline.

I'm there to do a job of work and to tell the rest of the world what is going on.

But it is conceivable that I'm thinking, well, I'm there.

It's quite fun, although I then feel a flood of relief when I get the hell out.

My heart goes out to the families who've lost loved ones in the titan,

but may it be a source of comfort to them as they grieve that their sons and husbands die doing something that they wanted to do with their eyes wide open about the extreme dangers.

Not everyone lost at sea in recent days or weeks can say the same.

We'll be back after this.

This is the news agents.

Welcome back.

You've probably worked out by now that Lewis isn't here and it's me sitting in front of a microphone.

But Lewis being Lewis has found time to interview the shadow Northern Ireland secretary, Peter Kyle.

Today's the seventh anniversary of the Brexit vote, when Britain voted to leave the European Union.

So what better time than for us to hear from a man whose brief is inextricably linked to the ramifications of that Brexit vote?

But Lewis starts off by talking to Peter Kyle about what brought him into politics.

So our latest guest on my political makeup is Peter Kyle.

MP, MP for Hove, no less.

You said MP as if it's still a surprise that I could make it into Parliament.

You said it.

And he's of course the shadow Northern Ireland secretary as well.

So Peter, you came into Parliament in 2015.

You wanted the few Labour gains of that election.

What are your reflections on politics in that time?

And was Parliament and politics everything that you hoped, feared, thought that it would be?

Well, I had trained to come into Parliament for want of a better expression.

It had been suggested to me sometime earlier.

I mean, I was 43 when I was selected as a candidate.

I was 45 when I got elected in 2015.

And I was special adviser in my mid 30s.

And it was the first job I'd ever had in government.

And it was 2006.

So it was the last two years of the Blair government.

And their team that I joined was this seamless, bonded team through all the challenges.

That was the best apprenticeship that I could ever, ever have.

And I think they invested more in me than I probably contributed to that team.

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In what way?

My apprenticeship in what way?

What did you learn about politics?

I remember the first time I met Tony Blair as Prime Minister was we'd been working on a piece of social policy, quite tricky social policy.

And I went in with Hillary, my boss, to the cabinet room.

And Tony Blair was as Prime Minister sitting one side in his normal seat.

We were sitting directly opposite him.

Hillary was.

And they were having a to and fro about this very tricky bit of social policy.

Tony then looked at me and just said,

so which one of these options do you think will work the best?

And I just said the one that the Daily Mail will hate the most.

And he then said, look, that's very Tony.

Look, I know what you would have heard about our team.

But first, second, third is always what works.

The bit about media handling comes at the end of the line.

That is not this meeting.

So with those piercing blue eyes, the first time I've been in the room with the Prime Minister, I'd effectively been kind of taught this sort of quite brutal lesson.

And of course, sitting around the Prime Minister is always lots of people at the back of the room with notepads.

And I sort of came out thinking, God, I just completely screwed up.

But every day was a lesson like that.

And of course, you get up to speed very, very quickly.

And has there been a political event which inspired you,

or a political event which has spurred you on, or maybe still does?

I quite rapidly became an aid worker in my late teens, like 19.

So it was the experience of seeing foreign policy absolutely in the front line, because we were working in the refugee crisis in Albania, in Kosovo, on the war, around the period of conflict, and in places like Bosnia,

that really got me very interested in foreign policy, and also in the party political aspects.

I was a member of the Labour Party, but in the party political aspects of foreign policy.

And then when Labour started to get really interested in the 90s and international development, that gave me a real grounding in why political parties from a position of government have the opportunity to do something that I deeply cared about.

But in terms of what politicised me and gave me a political mission in life,

I left school with no qualifications, grew up in Bognaregis, just down the road,

and was the body shop's head office. So when I left with nothing, I had a lot of energy.

I was a bit all over the place, didn't quite know why I wasn't succeeding very well in life,

and I went to all these job interviews, got offered loads of jobs,

and then on the first day being in the company, I used to walk out on them,

because it just wasn't for me. So I would start with the company.

Really? Good thing you didn't do that in parliament.

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The very first day I would just go up to the manager and say, thanks so much for this opportunity, but it's just not for me. So my mum just said, find a company you can work for that you want to work for. That's when I found the body shop. I was only 18 at the time. I loved the company. I found it inspiring as a company to work for and an organisation, and its political purpose, its campaigning purpose as well, as making a lot of money and being a successful business. When I got to the age of 25, Anita Roddick said to me, for the very first time anyone had said this in my life, you should think about going to university. I did think very deeply about it and I applied and got rejected. I applied again and was rejected. I went back to secondary school at the age of 25 and sat in a classroom with 16 year olds for a whole year. Then got the qualifications that the university had asked me for, and when I went back with my next application, that was rejected again. This is 1995-96. I was then accepted to university on my fourth or fifth application after potentially humiliating myself by going back to school as a 25 year old. Did you find it humiliating? I mean, a lot of people might have done. No. I knew precisely why I wanted to be there. I knew when I walked into the porter cabin where the schooling was happening, this is till mid-1990s, the classroom that I was taught in in the comprehensive school previously was closed because rain was flowing into it when it rained, and then there was a porter cabin out the back. So I walked into the porter cabin. The teacher hadn't arrived. Of course, everyone thought I was the supply teacher. So I just said to all of the students, I'm not the supply teacher. I'm here to learn with you. And then I decided to sit right in the middle and own this and be proud of what I was doing, not be ashamed of what I was doing. And I tell you, those other students were amazing to me. I took it very seriously. I didn't look down at anyone. I put the work in. I did it. Got the qualifications to get in. Now, so when I was at university, I came out six years later with a degree and a doctorate. I got the doctorate through. I was diagnosed with very severe dyslexia when I was there and got support as an undergraduate. But it is an objective fact that if a student can come in, get a degree and a doctorate in six years, it is an objective fact they were crazy to make it so difficult for me to get the education that I desperately wanted. And when I did get it, it opened up this whole world. I would never have dreamt of where my life would take me, the other side of university. So I can imagine how you might react then when you often do hear people say things like, oh, too many people go to university. Drives me crazy. Yeah. It drives me absolutely crazy because you look at the people who are saying it and it is usually people who went to university themselves. And their kids go to university. And it is usually people whose kids went to. Now, I heard a Tory say this in the chamber a couple of years ago, pre-COVID. I googled them and then I went over afterwards and I said, can I just ask, I said, which of your three kids do you not want to go to university? Turned out all three kids did go to university.

Calciopress.

Yeah. So when they say that the 50% target isn't right for their times, it literally goes straight to the heart of me. I know which 50% I would be in.

And the system was so clever at diverting me away from universities.

My dad left school at 14.

He was my dad grew up in Liverpool in pretty tough conditions, conditions that you wouldn't really see these days,

even though the nature of poverty has changed quite a lot.

He left school at 14 to become an apprentice stonemason, an apprentice stonemason to his own dad.

At 16, he went to the Navy.

Mid-20s came out of the Navy.

He then became a daughter or salesman for Pilgrim Glass.

And then he moved from the salesperson in his company to owning the company.

He was driven, he's not formally educated,

but we had a loving, driven family that was a great place to be part of.

Education wasn't really part of our language,

because it wasn't part of the experience in that way,

higher education and post-16 education in that sort of way.

I think that's a good grounding in terms of how you think about politics.

I said at the start that you were elected in 2015.

I mean, in some ways, your constituency is a great microcosm of the big electoral changes that have gotten in the Labour Party and in our electoral demography since then, right?

I mean, you were elected with a sort of, it was really marginal seat at that election.

Tories had won it in 2010.

And now you've got an enormous majority.

What do you attribute that to?

So quite a few things.

I mean, there's never one thing behind these sorts of things.

And I think politics actually, in general terms, is layers.

You know, when candidates come to see me and ask about that, you know, I think one of the challenges that we have in politics is that when people see you through all these different prisms, social media, speaking in the commons, media, podcasts now, meeting on the doorstep in the community, on the street, leaflets, they need to see the same person.

It's really important in politics that you really figure out who you are before you go into it.

And that's why in my 30s, when it was first suggested to me that I go into it, I knew in my heart I wasn't ready.

There were things in my life, there were skills I needed to get.

I needed to understand myself better in that school,

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comprehensive school in the 80s.

I was gay.

I didn't know it really at the time.

There's lots of things I decided to do.

It would have been tough at that time.

Well, section 28 was that we were on course to get section 28 onto the statue.

People forget that it wasn't just the moment that happened.

There was a drumbeat for it for years before.

I remember a teacher standing up in one of the lessons

and one of the books that we were reading

and studying had a same-sex relationship in it.

And she was compelled by law or they felt compelled

to make a statement at the beginning to say that the relationship

that was discussed in the book was not a natural one.

Because section 28 was a thatcherite piece of legislation

which said that instructed local authorities and schools and so on

not to give any education about gay relationships.

Yeah, and not to promote same-sex relationships in a positive light.

So that's why when the book did, they had to correct that

in the way that the book was framed.

I didn't really think about being gay.

I didn't, the term wasn't really there.

I didn't know anyone who was gay.

I didn't know anyone in the school that was gay.

But I felt myself blushing as the teacher read that statement out.

Just before we go on, is being gay still an important part of your politics?

Does it inform your politics in a significant way?

I would say that the experience of being gay coming out,

look, when people talk about equality,

you know, we don't have equality until straight people have to tell their parents they're straight.

You know, because every gay person will have that thing in common.

It's amazing when you're with someone and you're meeting them and they're gay

at some point in that first set of conversations you'll get around to.

How did you come out?

When did you come out?

How do people react?

It's something that we all have in common.

And it's something that's quite unique to gay people is that point at which

you have to do something which is really weird for straight people.

And that's actually discussed your sexuality,

something that's so innate to you, so personal.

Because part of being gay, part of your sexuality is the physical side of it.

So, you know, immediately you're talking about a very intimate part of yourself.

And parents, when you grow up as a child, you evolve into the person you are.

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But for gay people, you have to actually sit there and have that excruciating conversation with your parents and say, you know, this is what I want to do intimately with other people. When we saw some of the sort of what we might call the sort of turn to a more traditional conservatism that we saw at the National Conservatism Conference,

I mean, to be fair, they weren't talking explicitly about being anti-gay or anything like that. But did any of the tone, did it worry you in that regard?

Of course it does. In fact, some of it was, because one of the speeches was about the traditional family and it was explicitly, you know, said man and woman and children.

You know, so...

You think we might regress as a society?

Well, we are regressing because we're talking about these things in a way that we weren't before. People with certain personal characteristics are being exploited in public life in a way that weren't before.

You look in the United States and sadly, when it comes to political campaigning, we're often five, ten years behind the United States.

But you can see how sex education in schools is being regulated in a way it wasn't before.

You know, a version of Section 28 is making its way onto its statute in numerous states in America and Florida, an enormous state with hundreds of thousands of children that will be impacted by it.

You know, it was 1987 in our country we had this and now the state is going back through that same cycle. You know, there's a lot of lessons in this, but in particular, when you do make progress, when you do give more rights to people, you can't just put it on the shelf and...

But Ron DeSantis, of course, the governor of Florida is currently running to be president, so it could be something rolled out.

Precisely.

Yeah, and also the way that Trump talked about gay people and imitated gay people, used it as a slur. You know, these are things that are creeping back into public life and are being normalized again. So yeah, I do.

I just want to ask you about one thing. When we first met when I was at Sky News, that was in this sort of height of the Brexit wars and you were one of the principal proponents of a second referendum. Indeed, there was an amendment with your name on it that was trying to get the Theresa May government to do that. You were one of the key forces within the Labour Party arguing for that. Now, I know, as you know, that in politics, when you feel something that deeply, yes, you adjust to new realities, but what you feel about it doesn't just go away. Is there a world in your heart of hearts where you think you would like to see us rejoin the EU?

Well, I'm not a... People keep asking me if I'm a Remainer still.

Well, no, that's not the question.

I know it is, but it's... No, no, I know it's not. I have completely... The time when my emotional connection to that debate went, the time I grieved for what I believe we had lost, was that 2019 election result. It wasn't actually a couple of months later when we left the EU. It was actually the night we lost that election. I mean, I... Phil Wilson, Emma Reynolds, Anna Turley, you know, great, great parliamentarians and friends of mine lost their seats. That was an absolute tragedy. We also... Because I was trying to understand why I was just so deeply upset by the result. That was a time we lost the argument, we lost the ability to have any agency in how

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the future of our relationship with the EU unfolded. But it's a lot more complicated and there needs to be a period where people will go back to that period and understand truly what was happening rather than just the headlines. Because the People's Vote campaign and, you know, incidentally, what me and Phil Wilson came up with, the Kyle Wilson Amendment, which was about a confirmatory referendum, was ages after the People's Vote thing. This was a very specific way of getting through the... The MPASS. The People's Vote was nothing. I didn't support a second referendum or even trying to overturn the initial outcome of the Brexit debate until the checkers' deal was landed. You know, that was at the point. Boris Johnson was voting with me as much as anybody else was, you know, as much as my labour colleagues were. I have actually voted in that period for leaving the EU more than Boris Johnson and Jacob Reeds-Morgan. But the number of voters who think the UK was right to vote for Brexit has fallen to its lowest level, 31 percent, 56 percent, say leaving the EU was the wrong call, highest recorded so far. If numbers like that continue to aggregate and continue to characterize the polls, at some point, that's going to exert a political gravity, isn't it? At some point, politics will have to respond to that if that is what the public continues to think. So, just to say, I tried everything I could do to leave in a different way.

I know. I know. But now we are where we are.

I just want to be clear, because I don't want people to start saying that I'm trying to sell myself with some kind of born-again-Brexiteer, because I'm not. But I voted for leaving in different ways. I would have kept us in some of the, not necessarily the institutions, but found a way forward that could have kept our economy, our economy having the opportunities open to it that could have given us a softer landing. So, in terms of going forward, it's not my job to tell the public where and where we are and aren't going. They're the masters, not us. But I understand what you're trying to say. We are responding to that need to heal that relationship in the way that we believe is the only politically acceptable way to do so, and that is to rebuild it. We've got a lot of rebuilding to do after this election. We're going to have to rebuild our public services, because on the needs, we have to rebuild our reputation around the world, because our reputation is in tatters, even with Rishi Sunak and the Windsor framework. And we're going to have to rebuild our economy. But one of the other things that we're going to have to do is rebuild our relationship with the EU. And that means, as Keir said, building on the deal, exploring the opportunities. I've spoken to the EU, when I say the EU, some of the negotiators, many times simply because of my job of shadow Northern Ireland secretary to try and understand ways forward for Northern Ireland. But what we can't do is make the reverse mistake that Boris Johnson and the Brexiteers do, which is cakeism, because what we can't do and what the public can't do is say, okay, we want this, but we don't want that until the EU start discussing with the EU what is possible outside of the single market and elsewhere. We can't fully say what actually is possible. So the EU have said very, very clearly that they will have wide ranging conversations about trying to restore some of the opportunities for both territories by working together. But they will only do so if we are both on the same page. What we can't do is say, okay, we want all supply chains to be reinstated. However, we don't want any of anything from their side. I think the first steps in negotiation has got to be rebuilding trust. It's got to be forming relationships that they can bank on. You don't think we'll ever rejoin? I would never say never. I mean, look, we were in for 40 years. How on earth when you see what's happened in the last

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six months, let alone in the last five years, could you say what's going to happen in 40 years time? But what I can do is speak to what we're aspiring to do in the next parliament. We are aspiring to heal the diplomatic relationship with the EU. And we're aspiring to land a series of negotiations that will throw open opportunities, not just replace some of the opportunities that we lost with the EU, because time has moved on. And finally, what is your aspiration now in politics? What would you want to achieve? So you've heard a bit about my background and where I've

come from. As I said to you before, when at that point I was trying to get into university, I would never have imagined I would have been a special advisor at the other side of policy advisor working on policy in Downing Street at the other side of university. The idea that I could have been an MP was unimaginable to me. So what I've never done is cap where I want to go, because why would I when you hear where I've come from? But also, I look at the things that have delivered me success in life. And I think the thing that has given me most success in life is the ability to look at what I'm doing now and give it absolutely 100%. When I was going back to school when I was 25, I came out having smashed it. I screwed it up the first time, I smashed it the second time. And that opened up all these opportunities that I hadn't even considered. When I was at university doing an undergraduate, I absolutely smashed it. And then suddenly the university made me an offer to do a doctorate. I didn't know what doctorate was. I knew what the title was. I didn't know what it was. So now I'm in this job. I'm shadow Northern Ireland secretary. When Keir called to appoint me, I was slightly surprised because I didn't think that's where my talents lay. But he saw something in me that I didn't. And I've loved every single second in this because the learning curve is so steep. The rhetoric matters. There's very few jobs in opposition where rhetoric and words actually empower or disempower people and communities of people. They do in this job. And if I do as well as I possibly can in this, then I don't know what comes next, but I'm excited by what comes next. And that is in the hands of other people because now I've got to this level in politics. My career is entirely in other people's hands. So the only agency that I have is by doing absolutely the best I can in this one and hope that people see something in me that I might not have seen. And I look forward to exploring all of that into the future. Well, Peter, thank you for exercising your agency by coming on to the news agents today. Thanks for having me. We're very grateful. Thanks. Thanks, Lewis.

This is the news agents.

And that is us done for this week. Lewis, thank the Lord. We'll be back next week. So it'll save me having to be in front of a microphone again on a Friday. And so will Emily. We'll be here on Tuesday with the news agents USA available on Global Player and then the following day wherever you get your podcasts. If you're at Glastonbury this weekend, remember to use lots of suntan lotion. And when you get home, remember to wash. I hope you enjoy the Arctic Monkeys and Elton John. Thanks to our production team on the news agents, Gabriel Radis, Laura Fitzpatrick, Ellie Clifford, Georgia Foxwell at Glastonbury, Will Gibson-Smith, Alex Barnett and Rory Simon at Glastonbury. Our editor is Tom Hughes and our executive producer is Dino Sophos. It's presented by Emily Matles, Lewis Goodall and me, John Soaple. We'll see you bright and early on Monday. Have a lovely weekend. I'm off to put my feet up on a lounge in Mahe.