

This is a Global Player original podcast.

It was the last PMQs, Prime Minister's questions of the summer today, but the Zinger didn't come from the Prime Minister or from the Labour leader. It came from Stephen Flynn, who is the leader of the SNP in Westminster, and he tried to hit Labour where it hurts.

Mr Speaker, voters in Scotland are used to child poverty under the Tories. They almost expect it, but what they don't expect is child poverty support from the Labour Party.

And if we look very closely right now, there is a shiver running along the Labour front bench looking for a spike.

In some ways this hasn't been a bad week so far for Rishi Sunak. Good, relatively good news on inflation, on big international investment. Stammer having troubles within his own party about that two-child policy.

But we are in by-election eve. There are three by-elections coming tomorrow, and Rishi Sunak could be the first Prime Minister since Harold Wilson in 1968 to lose three by-elections on a single day. Today we'll be taking you through them and asking what impacts they're going to have on our politics as we head to the summer.

Welcome to the NewsAgeants.

It's Emily.

It's Lewis.

And John is, I think I'm right in saying, at the zoo.

Is he?

Yeah, that's what he does on a Wednesday.

Yeah, he does have that interesting line of being a zookeeper, doesn't he?

He likes to keep it quiet, but what can I say? It's a man who loves flamingos.

So Stephen Flynn, as I said, had a zinger of a line because he normally would aim his eye at Rishi Sunak, at the Prime Minister in what is, after all, Prime Minister's questions. And it gives you a sense of how he's now looking to the political future. This time, he was reminding Scottish voters that Labour is agreeing on a key core child benefit policy with the austerity Conservative Party that introduced it. We should say that up in Scotland, the S&P is not having quite such a good day because the police inquiry has widened after what they're calling potential embezzlement claims. This is the whole question into party finances and missing donated money that the police inquiry has now just widened. But here, I think very much now, we're looking at two halves of a week, arguably one that started badly for Keir Starmer, but could end technically a lot better if the by-elections go his way tomorrow, and a week that's actually been quite positive for Rishi Sunak, which could yet end in tears.

Yeah. So, I mean, look, the positive side of the ledger for Sunak this week has particularly come in the last 24 hours, which has been relatively good inflation news, and it is relatively, i.e., we've talked month after month on this show about inflation being stickier than anyone had thought, which is leading to higher interest rates, which is leading to higher mortgage costs for people. This was a month where inflation actually fell faster than people thought. It's about where the Bank of England thought it would be, but they haven't been exactly stellar in predicting this stuff. So, it's now just under 8%, which as I say, a bit lower than many analysts thought. That's already having a positive impact. It's already reducing the expectation of where most analysts think interest rates are going

to rise to. Stirling is falling, which might not sound like a good thing, but again, it's reflective of that expectation. Interest rates won't go as high. It'll probably already yield into a small reduction in government borrowing costs. So, that's a good thing. The flip side to that, of course, is that inflation is still just under 8%, which is still four times higher than target. And politically, although, of course, the government is saying, well, this is great because it's taking us closer to where one of the Prime Minister's principal targets, which is to get inflation to about 5%, about half of where it was at the start of the year. Of course, that still means that if you had your average shopping basket a year ago, and it cost £100, it now costs £108. And that is a big political problem. And not least actually, there's really interesting polling where it says that people, quite a lot of people, voters, when they hear that inflation has fallen to 8%, they think that prices have fallen by 8%. Of course, it doesn't mean that. It just means that the rate at which the price of the increases in prices happening has slowed.

I think you can't not put it in the context of other countries as well. And Joe Biden, who actually is incredibly unpopular on his own personal polling ratings at the moment, has had a real turnaround on inflation in the US, which is now down to 3%. So, in other words, just 1% above what is our target. And the eurozone countries are averaging about 5.5%. So, we are still an outlier in that. And 8%, as you said, is still four times what it should be. And we're only just down less than 1%, right?

They won't be cracking out the champagne just yet in number 10. But I suppose they've had so little, such meager good news over the last few months, particularly on the economic front, that they will, of course, welcome it. The other bit of positive news for Sunak today was this investment from Tata, this big, big company. They are going to, and they are the owners of Jaguar Land Rover. And they have announced that they are choosing Britain to be the site of this new mega battery plant, electronic battery plant, which is going to make Britain far more competitive in the production of batteries for electric vehicles. And it has been felt as what's been going on in America with the inflation reduction act, but also what's been happening in Europe as well with the production and construction of these new so-called gigafactories and infrastructure for electric vehicles. It's felt like Britain has really been left behind. So this is good news in the sense that they sell great thousands of jobs, not just at the plant, but also the supply chain be worth about \$4 billion to the economy. Obviously, this won't benefit Sunak's government for the next election, so it will take time. But obviously, it's good mood music. The interesting thing about this, though, is how much it's going to cost us taxpayers, i.e. the reason that the company has chosen to invest in Britain. Of course, it's part because Britain is a good investment destination. It remains. It chose this site over Spain. But it's also because the government has thrown a load of money at it, a load of subsidy, which we don't even know how much it's going to be yet. Well, we've got a good idea, because Tata, we know, asked for around £500 million of financial assistance. And when you say, oh, this good news arrived today for the Prime Minister, maybe we should be looking at it in a slightly different way, which is he might have had the news any time in the last few days, but the Wednesday before a by-elections is a pretty good day to announce it. But I think that is the core of this, if one company is asking for, you know, let's say it's not 100% accurate, but in the vicinity of £500 million for one bit of infrastructure, then what happens next time? Right? We don't

just need one company to be interested. We need to have a plurality of these factories. We need to have something that feels like they are investing in us. This is just one industry. It's one rather than us investing in them. And if we're really paying somebody £500 million to set up a factory, then what happens next time? Do we have to keep paying £500 million for the next person who comes along and say, oh, you know, I'd like to bring some workers here, but I'm not sure I can. And I think that's where labour will be at the moment, that if you're looking at a subsidy package that was required to secure this decision, then what happens for other car companies across the UK? Because we're going to run out of £500 million pretty quickly. I think it's actually really a big moment in our industrial policy in this country, and our economic policy more widely. Because obviously, for the last 40 years, certainly since Thatcher, since the end of the 1970s, British governments of every colour have preached the gospel that we don't pick winners anymore. We don't pick industries. We don't favour them. Yes, what government is about is about creating the overall economic conditions and infrastructure and so on to allow businesses to thrive on their own. This looks like and is a classic piece of economic interventionism of picking winners of governments doing that. And the thing is, the British government has not done this, especially willingly. This is a reflection of the wider economic trends in the world. Look, you wouldn't have to do this. If we were this beacon of economic hope right now, if growth was good and productivity was up, and the playing field was the right one to want people to invest, they wouldn't be asking for those kinds of sums. I mean, I don't know what is a normal sum to ask for, but 500 million seems, shall we say, on the steep side. You would be saying, yeah, we will do this deal because it works for us and it works for you. That's how deals are meant to work. Not please can we pay you to come to our country. Yeah, exactly. And the thing is, it is reflective of the fact that the British government is having to respond to global economic trends in a sense that they know, and everyone knows, they've seen what the United States is doing, and Biden's done with the Inflation Reduction Act, pouring hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, far more billions of dollars into green subsidy, trying to get companies to onshore and so on. The EU is going to be doing similar things. There has been a move from free market laissez-faire, which has dominated western economic thinking over the last 40 years or so, to more interventionism, to picking winners, to on-shoring and having more secure supply chains. So this is a reflective of the fact, I don't think the British government particularly wants to do this. I suspect Sunak in lots of ways isn't comfortable with it, but they can see where the economic winds are blowing, and they can see that Britain cannot afford to be left behind in the race for all of these new industries, which are going to dominate our politics and our economies, right up into the middle of this century. Yeah, and I mean, he's right. We do have to start pivoting to where the new jobs are going to be, and how we're going to create them. I guess the question is just how much comes out of our pocket to start doing that. But I suppose we should put this in the context of three by-elections. I mean, beautifully geographically spaced out. One, Selby and Easingwold in North Yorkshire, one right on our doorstep here in Uxbridge, and the other in Somerset, Somerset and Frome. And so they are, it's a real kind of- It's like Christmas. It's beautiful. Well, it is, I can say it sort of cuts through a whole slice of cake, where you can ask different questions. They're different electorates. They've all got their own, you know, specific local issues, and yet we might start to see a pattern emerge. Did you like my description of by-election Eve, as no one else has ever called it ever?

Well, this is by-election Eve. It's like Christmas Eve.

By-election Eve. Yeah, exactly.

You didn't look very impressed when I said that.

It does. It does. Just roll off the tongue. Now you keep drilling it into my brain like that.

Yeah, definitely.

Yeah. It's quite unusual to have so many by-elections as the same day. Back in the day, they must have had such fun, because in the 60s and 70s, when you had MPs dying all the time, not I want that to happen, but they often had like half a dozen or even 10 on the same day, which would have been nice.

Do you mean dying all the time?

Oh, MPs used to die all the time. Like you used, if you look back in the sort of 40s and 50s and the 60s even, so many MPs would die in the course of a parliament, usually Labour MPs, because they were all miners, you know, they all had a terrible lung disease and all sorts of things. So you would just have, the attrition rate was really high. MPs don't die very often.

Well, they get out now.

They get out exactly. They retire early.

Or they have to retire for not becoming lords.

Yeah, exactly.

Which is where we are with the Selbian-Ainstein Nigel Adler.

Yeah, or she's not one of the by-elections. We should say, Nadine might actually end up being the last MP standing in this whole parliament. But Selbian-Ainstein, interesting seat with a young man fighting it called Kier, who is, I think, 25 and...

The lesser Kier.

Well, we don't know if he's a lesser one, but he's definitely a younger one.

He's fighting it for Labour. So there's been a sort of, you know, a good story to write on that one.

A local guy, an Oxford graduate, who I think is trying to take the reins from this heavily conservative, big majority there, 20, is it? 20,000?

20,000, yeah.

You know, in a part of the world that is a safely Tory, safely blue.

Some certain from very much Lib Dems in play here.

Labour really don't do anything in the Southwest, apart from...

Couple of the Cornish seats and they could be competitive.

A bit, yeah.

Bristol.

Yeah, some certain from anyway, very much a race between the Tories and the Lib Dems.

And Uxbridge, of course, did a totemic Boris Johnson.

Yeah, so they are a beautifully arranged set of elections, not just geographically, because as Emily said, both in terms of the parties at play, but also the sorts of majorities they need to overturn.

So, I mean, Uxbridge is the one that obviously has received a lot of attention because it was Boris Johnson's seat. It's got a pretty small majority, five and a half thousand or so.

It's one of those out of London seats. It's been Conservative basically forever,

but it's a sort of seat like all the London seats really, or most of them,

has been trending towards Labour over time. The outer London seats, in particular, outer London boroughs have been changing demographically quite substantially.

I mean, just London as a whole is much harder for the Conservatives to win. Yeah. I mean, if you go back to the sort of late 70s or thatcher, you know, I mean, London was, people forget now, was a Conservative majority city. Most of the seats in London were Conservatives. So, you get into the mid 90s, early 90s, late 90s, that starts to change and now is dominated by the Labour Party. There is one slight fly in the ointment for Labour, which is this Ulez issue. This is the ultra low emission zone. It's something that's been introduced by Sadiq Khan, although, as he says, it's in some ways a central government requirement to try and cut air pollution. And the idea is it's already been introduced in the inner London boroughs. It introduces a charge on the most polluting vehicles in an effort to improve air quality. He is now expanding it to the outer London boroughs, which, of course, includes Uxbridge in the London borough of Hillingdon. And the Conservatives have basically been trying to make this a one issue campaign to send a signal to Sadiq Khan to stop the expansion. And Keir Starmer has actually tried to distance himself from this policy. It is very much the mayor of London's policy, not Keir Starmer's policies. He will keep reminding you. Yeah. He's been dancing a delicate dance. He's not condemned it or tried to, but he's certainly not been singing his praises from the rooftops of it. So look, Labour should still take it. I was talking to a Labour person the other day who was saying, I promise you, I'm not expectation management, but we're quite worried about Uxbridge. If they don't take it, they can sort of blame Ulez, but given where it is on the national polling, the majority they should win it with should be lower than they might otherwise expect. But nonetheless, given the size of the national polling, given the size of the Conservative majority being quite small, they should take it handily. Selby and Anstey is complete contrast, again, not just geographically, but in terms of the majority. The majority, as you're saying, Emily, is huge. It's 20,000. It's over 20,000. And actually, given Nigel Adams, the Conservative MP, basically just went off in a... There must be some bad blood, I would have thought, with the people of Selby and Anstey to see your MP, I'm going to say flounce off because he couldn't become a lord. Pissed off and flounced off. Yeah. I'm not sure that sets the tone for the next one to come in. No, it's not. So he basically decides not to finish his parliamentary term and trouble his constituents to have a by-election because he's just annoyed not to get a peerage. But the majority that's required there, that requires an 18-point swing from the Conservatives to Labour. That is beyond both the national 12-point swing the party needs for an overall majority of the next general election, which will, by the way, be an enormous swing, and the 16-point swing suggested by recent polls. So despite the fact that Labour is far ahead in the polls, very far ahead in the moment, that, on the basis of the current polling, would still not be enough to win the seat. So if they managed to win this seat, they are overperforming in the polls. It would be a seismic victory for the Labour Party. But this is your daily reminder that all by-elections are local and they involve local candidates and local issues, and we should not read across to the size of majority this would therefore yield Labour in this hypothetical election. Having said that, we introduce one of our favourite pollsters, Andrew Cooper. Lord Andrew Cooper. Do you think that there is anything this week that is shifting the sands, whether it's the Tata announcement on the car battery plant, whether it's the inflation figures? I can't think of anything the Lib Dems have sort of announced this week. I think they're keeping their heads down. Right. Is that the phrase we're

hoping for the best? Very few of these individual moments ever really cut through at all. And I think if you're a voter living in these constituencies, you will have been bombarded with campaigning. You will almost certainly have made up your mind. And I think you're making out your mind much more about the general vibe about the country and the vibe about the parties than you are about anything specific. Now, it's clearly inflation moving in a positive direction, the sense that at least one of the five promises that CDAC made might be on track to be met. That's clearly, and the fact that inflation is coming down. But that doesn't actually assuage people's feeling that the cost of your living crisis feels immensely debilitating and worrying for so many people. So I'd be very surprised if those events make any difference to what happens on Thursday and those constituencies. What's your thinking about the pattern of the results? I mean, on the basis, I mean, it's always very difficult to know and constituency polling is very difficult. And you'd probably have to say that as things stand, you'd imagine the Conservatives would lose at least two, possibly a third. What's your sense? I mean, if you look at the national polls, you would say that this government has got to a stage which some governments do when they're headed for heavy defeats, which is that basically there isn't a single seat in the country that they would hold in a by-election. Now, it's a bit different because there are three resources as a split. Obviously, there are some particular local issues at play, especially in Uxbridge and South Rhyslip. In a sense, I mean, you could say that's the seat which Labour should be able to bank because it's the most marginal. It's the one they would definitely, of the three, they wouldn't have expected to win, some of them for you anyway. Of the three, in a general election, they would have expected to win Uxbridge anyway, so not to win anything in a by-election. You could argue as a setback, but I think the particular circumstance, I would think, would make most Tories draw little comfort from it. Selby and Ainsley, I think, is the really totemic one. The history of by-elections in which MPs needlessly stand down for self-indulgent reasons or to get different jobs or whatever. Generally speaking, the incumbent parties get punished more in those kind of by-elections, which is the case here. The sitting Tory MP basically went off on a stop because he didn't get the peer, as you've been promised. Somebody who's shocked to discover that Boris Johnson doesn't live on his promises. Not a lot of sympathy there, but that's a seat where the Tory's got over 60% of the vote. If Selby and Ainsley goes, there are literally 250 Tory MPs with smaller majorities than that. So your fellow peer, Danny Finkelstein, was writing today or advising, in a way, Rishi Sunak, to go early to the polls because he says, it might not be a win, but it's a damage limitation exercise. It's very rational advice. I worked alongside with Danny, he referenced in that piece, 1997, and we all concluded in 1997, actually before the election, not just after it, that one of the few things you could have done, given the mood for changing that parliament, to limit the scale of the defeat, was to have had the election much, much earlier. And the strategy essentially became just McCorberism, and we'll just hang on for as long as we can. I hope that something turns up and it didn't. And then had an ultra-long campaign and it just got worse and worse. So it's very rational advice to say, and I think it's probably right, that the scale of the defeat will probably be rather less if you had an election sooner, but expecting a Prime Minister voluntarily to call an election they know they're going to lose, particularly when he's only been Prime Minister for eight or nine months. But that's the thing, isn't it, Andrew, is that it may well be rational advice, and this is sort of whispered about increasingly loudly, this idea of going to the country early to minimize the damage.

It may be rational advice for the party, but ultimately, as a Prime Minister, Sunak, who ultimately would much prefer to be Prime Minister for two years than for a year or for, you know, 16 months or whatever, he's the one who's got to decide it. And that instinct, which we saw play out with in 97 with Major, and also Brown leading up to 2010, it's a compelling one. It's a strong one, right? You just hope and hope, and particularly with how volatile politics is these days in particular, that you just hope that something turns up. There's always the chance, but what if? What if? It all breaks out. There's always a scenario. Also, I think Rishi Sunak is a shrewd guy. He will have factored into his decision to go for it in the first place. The fact that at the point that he was taking over from the Liz Truss catastrophe, it was pretty obvious at that stage the great likelihood is that we're going to lose the next election. So I'm probably only going to be Prime Minister for two or three years. Would I rather do that than not be Prime Minister? Yes, I would. Do you think you alluded to this idea that we're now at that stage, maybe where there basically isn't a seat that an incumbent government could win in a by-election? Do you think we're also potentially, well, not just potentially, do you think definitely that we are now at that stage, which, again, happened in the late 70s under Callaghan, happened in the late 90s under Major, happened with Brown after 2008, where it just feels as if there is nothing that can be done. In Westminster, we constantly obsess about narratives and who's up and who's down, and maybe there's a counterattack, but actually that public opinion has decisively moved in the sense that we now know the conservatives have not been ahead in a poll since 2021, and that is just the overwhelming structural factor of our polling and our politics right now. The poll number I would light on to draw that out is if you ask people, do you think it is time for a change from a conservative government? 79% say it is. That's very close to the numbers that you had in the late 70s and in the late 90s. When you ask the other question, which is do you think it's time for a change to a Labour government, it's a much lower number, and that's where I think you get the doubt about the potential scale of the majority and the softness or hardness of Labour's lead. But I think the country has made up its mind that it is time for a change for the conservatives, that they need a spelling opposition, they need to recharge their batteries, they need every government has a shelf life and they've reached it. I think it's the consensus for you, and it's very unlikely that will change. Do you know the psychology of people who work inside governments? Do you think that internally, Sunak, or maybe the people around them, do they ever accept that? Internally, do people actually think, well, this is probably it? Or is there just some hope against hope on the inside, as we were saying, something might happen? I think at a rational level, they do accept that they can see the evidence. These people aren't stupid, they're seeing the poll numbers, they're seeing the focus group reports, they're getting the feedback from their own constituents and their colleagues constituents. So I mean, they know that, but there's always the capacity in your head, you can construct a scenario, or just the hanging on, and in the hope that something happens that changes the dynamic. So if there's the certainty of defeat, perhaps arguably a less heavy defeat now, there's a bit of them that says, well, why run into certain defeat? Because something could have come up, and certainly, clearly, they feel the economy could turn around, he could hit some of these targets, he could give more of a sense of a government that's got his act together and is starting to deliver, they will obviously fight a very negative campaign trying to point out all the flaws in the Labour Party to dissuade people from voting Labour and drag that lead down,

and Labour, because they're starting so far back because of how disastrous 2019 was, they need to win a lot of seats to win a majority, and that's hard.

Andrew, just in case people are listening on Friday, I think we should be really mean and make you call what's going to happen tomorrow. I think the Royals will lose all three, I think they'll probably lose Axe Bridge by much less than they otherwise would have done, I think the Liberal Democrats will crush them in Somerton and Froome, and it looks like Labour will take Selby and Ainsley as well, so it's out of the three of them, I think one that really terrifies Tory MPs is that one. Thanks so much for coming in. A favourite pollster. We're going to talk about Life in Paradise next with Ken and Bobby.

We're going to give you five guesses to what film we're about to talk about next, and when I say film, well it is a film, but it is something of a cultural obsession, and I guess I'm going to admit to having a vested interest in Barbie. I did a documentary on Radio 4 about Barbie and Madonna some years back, but I was quite gratified that it was the boys in my family, my sons, who cannot wait to see this, and in fact they are doing Barbenheimer, the double bill, actually technically they're doing Oppenbee, which is Oppenheimer first,

and Barbie second, and what we are noticing is the way that Barbie has become everywhere, not just in a sort of film way or a promo way, but in a cultural way, in the sort of resurgence of pink in our fashion labels recently, in the tie-ins we're seeing, in the kind of artists and casting that have all been interested enough in the Barbie phenomenon to want to be part of Greta Gerwig's film, and we're going to talk to Simon Mayo and Mark Camode about why this is happening,

what is it about Barbie? You know, many of us grew up kind of playing with Barbie, dressing, undressing

Barbie, trying to make her feet sit on flat surfaces without her heels on, which was always particularly fun, sort of sliding her down the banisters and clipping her onto a horse and watching her sort of gallop away. I mean, we did all that stuff, and then it became really unfashionable because she sort of became the embodiment of everything that girls weren't meant to be, you know, this ridiculously over-idealized image of perfection, and it's worth, I suppose, saying as a little bit of background, which goes back to the doc, that Barbie started first as a cartoon character in a German newspaper build after the war, and then she actually got turned into, I'm going to say it, a sex doll. The first embodiment of Barbie was Bill Lily, and she was this sort of polystyrene doll, and she was handed around for stag parties. She became the embodiment of sort of male perfection in this sort of post-war Germany before Mattel copied the idea and put her onto the mass market in America. And so I guess Barbie has been through so many incarnations from a sex doll to a little kiddie's doll to this sort of anti-feminist version of the thing that none of our children should be playing with, to this absolutely megabucks film that all the coolest actors seem to want to be part of. Join us now, as promised, Simon Mayo, Mark Camode. They do Camode and Mayo's Take podcast on film. Are you surprised by the reaction that there's been?

I mean, I'm not surprised since this has been coming for quite a while, and the weird coincidence of Barbie and Oppenheimer opening on the same day has obviously helped lift the profile of it, so the whole Barbie-heimer thing has. But what surprises me is that in its current incarnation, it's taking Barbie in a very different way to the way that one might expect. I mean, Simon,

you interviewed Greta Gerwig. I think it's happening partly because of everything that Mark just said and the place that Barbie has had over the decades, but also because it's a Greta Gerwig film. And everyone saw the trailer. It's a shot-for-shot remake of 2001 Space Odyssey, and it's very, very funny. And I think people thought, oh, because there's a Barbie film that I don't want to see, and there's a Barbie film that I do want to see, and it's a Barbie film made by Greta Gerwig, which is a 12A certificate. And it's because of their attitude, I think, that it's reinforced all the cultural dominance that Mark was talking about, which means there is this buzz and expectation and so much pink everywhere. And she said that Mattel, who owned Barbie, we're going to have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable because the version of Mattel in this movie fronted by Will Ferrell and 10 blokes all deciding what women should look like. You know, at that point, you go, okay, I understand that they're comfortable with being uncomfortable. I mean, I've heard Greta Gerwig talk about this, and it sounds quite dark. I mean, you two have both seen it. I mean, dark with a lot of pink, obviously. But she talks about Genesis, and I'm imagining the Garden of Eden and the Fall from Grace and Paradise Lost and this sense of Barbie coming to an understanding of what the rest of the world is like. Does that actually carry through, you know, as an intellectual argument into sort of a cinematic success? It is a film about taking a, as I said, a cultural icon and then doing something interesting with it and doing something subversive with it. And I mean, how well you think it succeeds is, you know, that's for each person to decide themselves. But it is definitely a film that is made by Greta Gerwig. She's not going to make a movie which says, hey, Barbie's absolutely fabulous. It is worth saying that there is a moment in the film in which Barbie gets told, you set back the cause of feminism 50 years. So this is a sort of payback almost, is it? Because all the Barbies you meet are, you know, President Barbie and Lawyer Barbie. And from what

I've read, I haven't seen it yet, the male characters come across as the unenlightened characters in this, not the women. Is that right?

I think unenlightened is a kind word. It's not, I mean, it's not, it's not payback. The history of Barbie is conflicted. And again, Greta Gerwig talks about this in the interview with Simon, that on the one hand, you know, this ridiculous ideal that would be anatomically and physically impossible. On the other hand, what was the phrase Greta Gerwig is going to the moon before women were actually allowed to use credit cards. So it is a conflicted history.

The story of Ken and Alan is that at very, very best Ken and Alan are not the sharpest knives in the draw, but that's because they're toys who are appendages. They're like, what are Ken and Alan there for? Well, beach. Ryan Gosling is hilarious. And there's an extended sequence about beaches and the word beach, which is in the trailer and prompted a father writing to us saying, who is this film for? I was in this film, which was the Pixar film with my six year old daughter. And there was, they played a 12 a trailer, which had this beach series of jokes in it. And he thought, okay, well, it's not, it's not for her. I think it is worth saying that it is, it's a 12 a it's not for the six year olds who are playing with Barbie now, but it is for the 26 year olds who grew up playing with Barbie. So when you say it's not for people playing with Barbie now, it's because it's a dream cheshire for them. Is it Barbie revisited as a feminist icon? Or is it that it would kind of ruin your childhood? I don't think it's either of those things. I think it's a kind of, it's a right take on something that, you know, that we all know the problems with and we all know the history of. Simon and I slightly disagree about this, but

Simon thinks that Mattel come out of the movie, they don't come out of it great. I actually think they do because I think that what the film does is it makes Barbie acceptable all over again. I think, I think if I was a Mattel, you'd be thinking, well, result, but there is a moment. I mean, maybe it's best summed up. If you're trying to work out where to pitch the film, Emily, is that there is a moment where Margot Robbie says, by the way, you know, Ken hasn't got a penis and I haven't got a vagina. And there was kind of this intake of breath go, oh, okay, right. It's going to be that kind of Barbie film because I think there's a version of a Barbie movie which Greta Gerwig would not have been interested in. You know, this is not your U certificate film. It's very much a 12 a film, but you know, it does work. And you mentioned Barbenheimer. I've got a family of boys who are all doing the double bill on Wednesday. Do you think that is what is helping both of them now? I mean, do you think it has been the most brilliant marketing? Or do you think one is trading off the other? It's completely accidental. They've opened on the same day. Any cinema owner would tell you it's a shame that they're not spread out. However, that said, the idea that you're going to have these huge blockbusters in the bear in mind mission impossible is in cinemas now still doing brilliantly as well. Somebody did ask me if you were going to do both of them, which way round should you do it? I think you should definitely do Oppenheimer first, because I think it will be very hard to go from Barbie to Oppenheimer. And do you think that this is the sort of post COVID biggest thing that we've seen getting people back out to the cinema? I mean, you know, we work in Leicester Square, the queues around the block for Barbie at three in the morning for tickets, you know, and all the pink that goes with it were off the charts. It was like people want to join in. They want to be part of this. They don't just want to be audience members almost. It's got that slightly Eurovision feel to it. Well, yes, but don't forget that, you know, Steven Spielberg credited Tom Cruz with effectively saving cinema with what happened with Top Gun Maverick now, what's happening with Mission Impossible. And Spielberg wasn't, he wasn't being facetious when he said that. What he meant was you are making movies that people are going to see in the cinema. And as anyone who runs a cinema in the UK certainly knows, this has been a tough year and making films that people think, I don't want to wait till that comes on the streaming. I want to go and see that on a big IMAX screen. Of course, Christopher Nolan has been the great champion of IMAX and of theatrical projection. So it's part of a larger movement. And I think it is important to take into account that cinemas at the moment are full of people going to see the Mission Impossible movie because that's spectacular cinema in the same way as they were with Top Gun. Thank you both so much. Great to have you on. Thank you. Thank you. This is The News Agents. Of course, one of the things Barbie doesn't ever have to worry about is her voter ID, because everybody knows who Barbie is. Beautifully done. Thank you. Beautiful. But I think it is worth us talking about voter ID because if you are in any of those

by elections and we are, let Lewis fail to remind you on by election Eve, this is your News Agents reminder. You will need to take your voter ID. You will need to have a piece of photographic evidence to take to the polls with you, which was something that everyone was talking about over the May elections. And that has hardly been whispered since.

Yeah. No, I mean, there was such attention to it rightly for the first time that was introduced in May. There were some local pilots before that, but this will be the first time it's been done on a parliamentary level. So this is a sort of uncharted territory.

What they said actually in the sort of weeks afterwards was that a lot of people had been turned away. Yeah, that's true.

But they did come back. And I think that was the thing that was really interesting to hear, because we assume that voter apathy would be of the sort of making that, you know, go to vote once, I probably won't go back. But people did. Most people return with the right ID, which is I think a real kind of endorsement of democracy.

Well, and I think that would probably be the case at a local election. I expect it would be the case in a by election as well, because by definition, in those elections, which are always low turnout anyway, you are dealing with politically motivated people.

The question is whether that would be true at a general election where you may have what you might describe as sort of semi politically motivated people, they feel like they should vote.

But if it's going to be tremendously inconvenient, i.e. they've got one slot of the day to do it, then they might not come back. And we but the truth is, we will just not know that until the general election comes whenever it does.

Take your photo.

It's a public health warning. It is.

Primarily make this.

It is on that bombshell. Goodbye.

Bye. Bye.