

## [Transcript] The News Agents / We need to talk about GB News

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

We're past the watershed, so I can say this, show me a single, self-respecting man that would like to climb into bed with that woman ever, ever, who wasn't an incel.

He wasn't a cucked little incel.

That little woman has been fed, spoon-fed oppression, day after day after day after day, starting with the lie of the gender wage gap.

And she sat there, and I'm going, like, if I met you in a bar, and that was, like, sentence three, chances of me just walking away are just huge.

We need powerful, strong, amazing women who make great points for themselves.

We don't need these sort of feminist 4.0, they're pathetic and embarrassing.

Who'd want to shag that?

Oh, Lawrence, well, look, she...

Sorry, I'm just going to provide a touch of balance from her, because she's a woman and she did actually respond to this.

That was the attention seeker, Lawrence Fox, in a TV exchange with Dan Wooden, the GB News host.

It was a grim business, offensive, sexist, misogynist, attacking a young female journalist, Ava Evans, in a way that, by her own admission, appalled her.

As Fox spurts his bile, Wooden doesn't demur, doesn't stop him in his tracks.

He giggles, he smirks, he's probably not smirking now.

On Wednesday afternoon, he was suspended by GB News, following Fox's suspension earlier in the day.

It couldn't happen to nicer people.

It's not clear how long Wooden's suspension will last, while GB News bosses investigate what happened, an investigation given the entire exchange was on TV broadcast live on air on their own station that, in theory, probably ought not to take too long.

That news came after we'd recorded today's episode, but it doesn't matter, really, because we thought we'd take this moment to have a wider conversation between the three of us, because this bleak moment on GB News didn't come from nowhere.

It came from a station which in almost every way has been pushing every TV news norm and standard and rule again and again to their limits, quietly, without anyone seeming to notice becoming more powerful, threatening to fundamentally change our broadcasting landscape without anyone suggesting that that might be a good idea.

So on today's show, why we need to talk about GB News, welcome to the news agents.

The news agents.

It's John.

It's Lewis.

It's Emily.

And it was a moment.

GB News has caused controversy before, and it seems to me that this is a channel that was set up originally with the intention that it should be maybe five degrees right of centre because they believe that mainstream media, BBC, Sky or whatever, are five degrees to the left of centre.

I don't buy that.

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But what they found out is that being five degrees to the right of centre doesn't get you that many viewers, but if you go 20, 30, 40 degrees, be even more outrageous and say more controversial things and give air to all sorts of conspiracy theories, you do quite well.

But did last night, they go too far?

Well, clearly they did because Fox has been suspended and GB News apologised, and by the way, they don't apologise that often.

There have been plenty of skirmishes or difficulties they've got into before.

They've ridden it out.

I think, though, leaving aside the particulars of Wharton and Fox and both of whom are pretty obnoxious characters in all sorts of different ways.

It's a good opportunity to talk, as we're doing about GB News as an entity, because obviously when it arrived, it was widely mocked.

Production standards were terrible.

Very few people were watching, listening.

In fairness to them, production standards have got better in some ways, quite a few ways.

But also, lots of people are watching now.

It is really giving BBC News, Sky News, a run for its money.

I think we can talk about why that is.

But they are changing, I think, subtly what British broadcasting on television is like in a really substantial way, in a really quiet way, in a way that few people are willing to talk about.

And the reason for that is, is that you talk to people at BBC, Sky, whatever, they don't want to call it out.

They don't want to talk about it because they're afraid of looking anti-competition.

They don't want to be looking like they're trying to squish or squash the new guy on the block.

But for some time, GB News has been shifting the way broadcasting is done in terms of who can present new shows.

You've got cabinet ministers or former cabinet ministers presenting shows and interviewing other conservatory MPs or whatever, generally spreading conspiracies or misinformation, changing civility in the way that new shows are done, as we saw last night, and allowing people to present shows when there are serious allegations about particular presenters.

This is all new.

This hasn't really been done before.

And so it does need to be talked about.

But I also think that what needs to be discussed is the fact that GB News was last year the fastest growing news brand in the top 50.

It has actually made 545% year on year on its audience.

Now, admittedly, if something is a start-up, it comes from nothing, it's a very big leap.

But I think it still speaks to the fact that, and I'm saying in brackets, the Wotemogg won't like this one, will they?

But it speaks to the fact that it is clearly finding an audience.

And it is, at the moment, a niche audience, and we're not pretending that it's taking

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on its rivaling the BBC, which obviously has much greater domination across the country, all the rest of it.

But it is finding a niche for itself.

And I guess it's up to us to try and explore why that is.

Is it that it is doing well from making news more entertaining?

Is it that it's feeding people's need for conspiracy?

Is it that it's breaking down the traditional way that news is being done?

I guess in a way that we are trying to as well.

The news agents are sort of playing a little bit with traditional roles, traditional ways that interviews are being done.

We're sort of more free-thinking, we're a bit more vocal, and we're able to analyse stuff behind the curtain as well.

But I guess the difference is that GB News is still subject, as ITV, as Channel 4, as the BBC is, as CNN are, to Ofcom, to a regulator.

And what this is doing at the moment is testing the teeth of Ofcom.

Right?

Because this one, I would say, was very easy.

It was very easy for GB News.

It was very easy for Andrew Francis to say, the founder, to say, that has crossed the Rubicon.

You know, we will not have Laurence Fox on here.

We will not have this kind of thing.

But actually, if you look back at the history of some of the stuff that they've been putting out, this is not a break.

This is continuity, GB News.

Just let's play you a clip of, for example, Neil Oliver, who's one of their presenters, talking up the climate hoax and conspiracy.

So Neil, is this just another example of eco-terrorist perpetuating the most expensive and devastating

lie in history?

Hi, Dan.

I certainly do think the present way in which the weather and the climate is being described as a hoax and a scam, and I'm not afraid to be heard saying as much.

There's a very repetitive pattern developing in relation to everything.

The pandemic was all about terrifying everyone, every moment of the day.

And yet, the rules that were set in place by those in positions of power were flouted by those people in positions of power, because it became glaringly obvious that they knew that there was nothing to fear.

You see the saying, the war in Ukraine rapidly became about terrifying everyone about the possibility of nuclear armageddon.

Now the weather and the climate is the next thing to fear, and it's getting old and tired that all the powers that we can think to do is keep everyone frightened all the time.

So you get a flavour there of how it gives air to conspiracy theories, where the presenter is not challenging the view, the presenter is saying, God, isn't it awful?

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Just how bad are these climate change people who want us to change our lifestyles?  
And I think you said something interesting a moment ago, Emily, where you talked about this is the fastest growing news brand in the UK.  
And this is the challenge, the regulatory challenge for OFCOM.  
Is it a news brand?  
Or is it something else?  
Is it going to be judged like Sky News or the BBC News Channel or ITV News, which is very clear, have to have impartiality, or is it going to be a news magazine style programme where you can have cabinet ministers wanging on about whatever they want to do in whatever way they see fit.  
You've regularly got Jacob Rees-Mogg with his mogulogs, as they call it, him going off on whatever it happens to be.  
You're not hearing so much on the other side.  
Yeah, and that's the point, right, is that they're shtick, which is the established media, the broadcast media is dominated by kind of liberal elites and all this sort of stuff that are sort of permanent left of centre.  
Again, like you, John, I would reject that.  
But that's fine.  
If you're saying we're about having all views, fine, have all views.  
And it is true to say that within OFCOM, there is quite a lot of latitude to have opinionated presenters and to have people who have got views as long as it's balanced throughout the course of the day, if you're a news show.  
But let's just think about some of their presenters, right?  
They've got Jacob Rees-Mogg, former cabinet minister, as you say, John.  
They've got the current deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson.  
They've got Esther McVeigh and Philip Davis, who are a couple.  
They present a Saturday news show and they're both Conservative MPs.  
You've got Nigel Farage, who obviously the former leader of the Brexit Party.  
You've now got Richard Tice, who is the current leader of the Brexit Party, who is just coming over from talk TV.  
Despite what they might say, this is not a wide panoply of opinion.  
This is an opinion from the right of politics and actually from a particular hue of the right of politics as well.  
So for all of the talk about being broad based, this is not a channel for which actually you will hear a great deal of multiplicity of views or a great deal of richness of different views.  
Yes, they do invite people from the left and so on to kind of beat up occasionally.  
This is the thing about journalism, right?  
Which is it's supposed to be about challenging power, right?  
That is why I would say, for example, people might say, oh, well, we're tough on the government.  
Yeah, we are tough on the government because they've got all the power.  
And if there's a Labour government, we'll be tough on them as well, right?  
Fine.  
GB News thinks about power slightly differently, I think, and you see this in the wider right,

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which is that they're predicated on the idea that all of the power in Britain isn't really with the government as such.

It's with this sort of amorphous unelected group, unelected group that won't group the deep state, the liberal state, and that they control everything.

And that school of thought has become more and more powerful, not just within GB News, but within the right.

Overall, we saw Liz Truss articulating it just the other day for one Prime Minister no less. And so that is why they're sort of tough.

That's why they're obsessed with this idea of sort of woke stuff and liberal stuff because they think power sits somewhere differently.

Now, you can have a debate about that, but it's just a different way of conceiving power and conceiving journalism.

I also think that we haven't quite worked out the regulation around this.

Part of the problem is that GB News has done something very fast and very insurgent and often actually, I don't think it was ready for it.

And Lucy Fraser, who's the culture secretary, was asked about this this morning, and she defended the Tory MPs who host the shows.

She said that there is a broadcasting code which identifies the rule of broadcasting that does allow presenters who are MPs to take part in current affairs programs.

We know that.

It happens here at Global at LBC, but it bars politicians from acting as newsreaders, interviewers or reporters, unless exceptionally, it is editorially justified.

Now, that is very amorphous.

I mean, who's to say when it's exceptional, when it's editorially justified, who's to point out the difference between hosting a current affairs show and giving a monologue.

So I think there is a problem right at the heart of how this is regulated, how it's not regulated, which Ofcom, I'm not sure that they have fully sorted out whether these lines have been crossed yet.

What's so interesting is that, Lewis, you set out what are the kind of, you know, the ideological underpinnings of a lot of the people who are working at GB News.

It's also about monetization.

This is a business model.

This is a business model that they have brought in from America.

I saw every day that Fox News was on the right and you'd say 25, 30 degrees to the right and the big challenge it faced was not from the center or from the left.

The big challenge was from the further right, from one American news network, Newsmax and those are the places where the challenge is coming from.

And so I think that there is an imperative.

If you are in the bean counting division of GB News and you're trying to say, can we turn a profit here?

You're suddenly finding that there are more people viewing the more you give vent to these sort of views.

And that is the problem that you ended up with at Fox News where they end up with a bill for \$787 million for promoting a conspiracy theory about voting machines where they got

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sued and they lost.

Yeah.

And right now they're not making money because they've got an enormous presenter talent bill.

But I think it is, and you're right, John, at some point the investors, they're going to want to see a return on their investment, which has been considerable.

But I think if we look at some of the investors and the genesis of the station, we can see that this isn't just about making money.

There is a wider ideological agenda going on.

I mean, you know, last summer they secured an extra \$60 million in funding from the founding investors, Paul Marshall, who's an ex-liberal Democrat, who went on to be a very strong voice for Brexit, Legatum Ventures, the Dubai-based financial firm, which is behind the free market Legatum Institute think tank.

The people behind this and okay, it's perfectly legitimate, they're doing it fine.

But there is an agenda, which is to move the conversation to the right and not just the wider political conversation, but the conversation of the Conservative Party.

I don't think you can underestimate, unless Ofcom decided to change it in some way and at the moment, although they have judged against GB News on a few things, the sanctions are pretty small, no particular sign that they're going to do so.

I don't think you can underestimate potentially the influence of GB News on the Conservative Party in opposition.

And in a way, that will be the perfect place for them.

At the moment, they're in a slightly weird place, which is that technically, their guys are in government.

You know, the Conservative Party's in government, Rishi Sunak's playing a lot to their agenda in all sorts of different ways and they've been very influential.

Look at, Faraj took up the issue of small boats when not many people were talking about it on GB News.

But in opposition, if you have a Labour government, you have the energy of opposition, which you see, for example, when there is a Democrat administration with Fox News, and they will be perfectly placed to exercise a very strong influence on the politics of the Conservative Party and potentially our wider politics as well in the next parliament.

I just want to bring this back to some of the individuals before we kind of lose sight of what happened overnight, because after Lawrence Fox finished his sort of hate spiel, you heard Dan Wooden kind of, you know, laughing alongside.

So amusing.

And then he clearly panicked because he tweeted the journalist over Santina and said, I think you're brilliant.

Earlier tonight, I was attempting to find your tweets to read back from my iPad, couldn't locate them.

I apologise for what was said during the course of my show, should have done this immediately on air.

This is not what our channel was about.

This morning, he then went on to reiterate his regret over last night's exchange with

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Lawrence Fox, and then Lawrence Fox shared his own tweets, his sort of direct messages with Wooden.

And he said, making you giggle is my weekly joy.

And Wooden says, you can imagine them freaking out in the gallery.

And Lawrence says so much fun.

He's decided he's going to throw Dan Wooden under the bus.

And I think it is important because the only thing that we have seen Dan Wooden apologise for is letting Lawrence Fox make those comments on his show.

And Wooden, we just should remind you, is currently facing a series of very serious allegations after reporting by journalists at the Byline Times.

He's denying criminal wrongdoing.

And the GB chief executive, Andrews Franchopoulos, said last week that none of the allegations had been, his words, admitted or proved by an independent body.

But GB News was continuing to monitor the situation.

At what point does Dan Wooden start thinking that kind of apology is serving to keep any investigation a little bit further from my door?

Well, let me look at the simple point of what GB News has said today, which is that Lawrence Fox is suspended, but we're going to investigate last night's incident.

What is there to investigate?

You just play it back.

Listen to the introduction to this podcast.

You can hear it quite clearly.

We are laughing about some bloke saying, I wouldn't want to shag that.

What's good is that, of course, Dan Wooden has been very fair and judicious about the private behaviour of others in the past, so I'm sure he can expect the same.

Look, I think what we can say about last night is that it doesn't come from nowhere.

This is the point, right?

This happens in live broadcasting sometimes, right?

We all experience that.

Someone says something that's odd colour.

You suddenly say something really, really misogynist about something you don't want to shag.

Yeah, right.

No, no, I don't mean that.

But what I mean is, is that sometimes if you can get someone like Fox, we'll say something that's completely outrageous, completely off-colour, completely wrong, completely poorly.

Two things can then happen, right?

The presenter can say, stop it right now, there, and say that's appalling.

I think you owe that person an apology.

We're going to end that conversation right there.

Wooden did not do that, right?

But there's a wider point as well, which is that this didn't come from nowhere.

There is, and I think in first GB News, there is a bit of a split.

There's a split internally, and you can see with some of their output as well.

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Some of their output is just much more traditional.

It's much more traditional news style.

They do their bulletins, which are normal news bulletins, and there are people on it.

There's some really good journalists on it, actually.

They've recruited people like Mark White from Sky, Christopher Hope from Telegraph.

Someone like Chris is from a particular point of view, but he's a proper journalist and does a proper job.

There are other people who very much do not fit that description, and there is this internal dynamic or conversation within GB News about what direction they should go in.

But when you've got a station which is constantly peddling, or often peddling, conspiracy theories, when Rishi Sunak came to power, someone on the station described it as anti-democratic coup, that the Conservative Party had become in hot to a shadowy, globalist elite mass migration.

Would you hear what David Starkey said?

Maybe we'll just bring that here.

Yeah, mass migration is replacing British culture.

Net Zero is a suicide note, and then you have people like David Starkey, who has basically become persona non grata on normal mainstream traditional broadcasters, saying stuff like this.

One of the reasons that I think a lot has gone wrong, for example, why parliament has not been properly represented at the coronation of a parliamentary monarchy, is because the government isn't interested, is not interested in the constitution.

You have a prime minister, I think, a man of immense talent, of extraordinary skill, but really not fully grounded in our culture.

Not fully grounded in our culture, I wonder what it means.

He's brown, clothes, brackets.

I mean, it was so obvious.

Let's not forget as well.

The reason that he became, it's been a slow dissent with him, the reason he really became off limits across virtually every other broadcaster is he used the phrase in an interview, the damn blacks.

You know, this is a guy, that's what we're talking about here, and GB News has no problem inviting him on, despite what we heard him say on their own station just there, but they did have a problem when Guto Harri decided to take the knee, memorably on air, former advisor to Boris Johnson, take the knee on air, and that was a step too far.

They said it breached their standards.

Yes.

Now that's such an interesting question, because either you are the bastion of free speech and presumably free action, and you allow whatever your presenters or your commentators to do and to reap the sort of public feedback from it, or else you suddenly decide that you have standards which can be breached by somebody getting it from their seat and bending down.

So here's the sort of planting the flag in the ground question.

Have we reached a turning point?

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A station that hates cancel culture, canceled Gito Harry a few months ago.

A station that hates cancel culture has just canceled Lawrence Fox.

Do we think that these kind of number of degrees that they can go to the right, or that how far they can be provocative has been reached, and they're going to say, we've got to wind it back?

I quote the FT's Robert Shrimsley here, who says, it's an outrage factory.

And I think that's such a good description because you manufacture, and I think it's important to realize that half of this stuff, it's not accidental, it's manufactured outrage.

You gear up, you gear up, you gear up, and occasionally goes a little bit off course, so you pipe down for a week or two, and then it will start to ratchet up again and again because outrage, as we know, is how you monetize.

And I think it's like more disturbingly than that, right?

Is that, yes, it's an outrage factory, outrage machine, but in a sense, and I wouldn't include what happened last night about this because I was completely outrageous, but in a sense then we end up in the kind of American cycle, where actually, essentially you have a right-wing outrage machine, and to some extent, this kind of liberal left will then sort of feed off it and talk about it, and it all becomes, all of our political conversation, to some extent this whole show.

We should talk about that, you know, because we had a discussion editorially about whether we are, I guess, oxygenating something, or whether, you know, you get over yourself, you go, well, people are going to talk about this anyway, people are going to watch it anyway, everyone's sharing the clip, all the broadsheets, as well as the tabloids, are talking about Lawrence Fox this morning, so are we making things worse by going into a discussion about it, or do we just say, yeah?

I think the central question we are raising is that there has been an established view of what the broadcast ecosystem should look like in the UK with Ofcom acting as the referee of how it works, and we have now got a player that has changed our perceptions of how far you can go, and do we accept that that's okay?

And I think that is a very fair question to ask, because I think that GB News, very successful in a lot of ways, some very high production standards, some funny stuff as well, but they are entertaining sometimes.

They're entertaining.

You can see why they're getting an audience.

They're also pushing the envelope to the absolute limit of what you would consider to be impartial broadsheets.

Yeah, and I would say one thing, which is that the BBC and ITV and Channel 4 do not want to be looked into by Ofcom, that is not seen as a badge of honour particularly.

They want to toe the line.

I think GB News probably does enjoy it, it does enjoy the attention, yeah, they don't want to pay the fines.

Tweaking the tail.

Yeah.

Being dangerous, going out there.

Yeah, I think so, so actually if Ofcom's paying you attention, then you're rattling,

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you know, as I said at the beginning, slightly tongue-in-cheek, they won't like this one, will they?

There's a sense to which their viewers are delighted when the regulator gets cross. And look, I would say, like we said, I think some of the stuff they're doing can be entertaining, some of the stuff they're doing, some of the shows that they're doing, they're looking at you in a different way, that's to be applauded.

What is not to be applauded though is the hypocrisy, which is this, which is that they are constantly, constantly attacking other broadcasters, particularly the BBC, for their lack of impartiality, for not truly representing people, for not representing ordinary people. Hang on a minute, right?

There's only one station which is sometimes knowingly, I think, spreading misinformation. There is only one station, or BBC, traditional broadcasters, right?

Yeah, of course, people have views, of course they do, people have politics, of course they do, and of course, there is a great deal of introspection, I would argue, actually too much introspection, sometimes on behalf of the BBC, too much of an over-correction as a result of this criticism from quarters like GB News.

But as we all know, some of the BBC traditional broadcasters do strive to be impartial. I'm not sure there is that much striving to be that impartial at GB News, because like I say, it goes back to what we were saying before, they think that they are speaking truth to a wider power, which is kind of like liberal power, and established power within Britain, and it's just a completely different way of seeing things.

I think OFCOM have got to decide though, maybe it's okay to have a station which is coming at things in a slightly different way from the right, they've got to decide whether it's okay, and they're happy to have a station which is consistently coming at things from often the radical right, and spreading misinformation, that's what OFCOM has got to decide.

In a moment, we're going to bring you a story that you might have missed, it's about a referendum in Australia, which is kind of gearing up to be Australia's Brexit, more to come.

Welcome back, now as you know, I've just come back from Australia, and if you go to any sporting cultural event in Australia, even the Little Toddlers book club that I went to with my grandson Jack, it starts with a welcome to country, which reads, I begin today by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today, and paying my respects to their elders past and present, I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today, and then business can start.

And what's happening in Australia right now, is they're trying to introduce a referendum to enshrine the Aboriginal peoples, the first peoples, have rights and need to be consulted and need to have a voice in government.

It sounds really straightforward, and it really isn't.

Yeah, it's framing up to be possibly Australia's Brexit referendum, because on the 14th of October, voters are going to be asked to formally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and it's all about trying to create an Indigenous advisory group, what they're calling the voice, to help Parliament. Now, on the surface of things, you know, what's an advisory group?

How heated can you get about having an advisory group in Parliament?

But this has become incredibly contentious and incredibly contested.

Yeah, Emily, one of the really interesting things you talked about there was talking,

comparing it to the Brexit referendum. And I was really struck when I was out there and listening to this debate, which is raging now in the country, because we're, you know, three weeks away from the referendum itself, is the way the no campaign are playing it, which is exactly, in a sense, the referendum on Brexit should have been played, because the no campaign are very cleverly saying, we don't know what this is. We only know what this isn't. And so the no campaign are defining what it is. Will it mean that white people are going to have their land confiscated from them? Because Aboriginal... Is this the slippery slope? Is this the first step?

Just in the same way that we didn't ask in Britain enough, are we in the single market or out?

What are we going to do about that Northern Ireland trade thing if you have Brexit?

Except it's the other way round. Except it's the other way round.

So we probably, we should have been asking questions more clearly about what Brexit would look like. Exactly. And the no campaign, which is playing to a kind of social conservatism in Australia, right? Oh, definitely. And this is interesting as well. It kind of divides in Australia geographically. So Sydney, East Coast, South, much more sort of liberal, progressive, and the Northern Coast, traditionally. Queensland and Queensland. And Queensland.

Much more radical. And the West, much more right-wing, much more socially conservative. So the no

campaign have got a slogan, which is, if you don't know, vote no. And actually that appeals to a lot of people who are thinking, I don't know. I'm a bit skeptical. I'm not sure. I think I'll leave that aside. So we wondered whether this is going to create in Australia the kind of social, cultural, familial divisions that Brexit has caused here over the last seven years. And we're going to speak now to Bridget Brennan. And she is the ABC News Indigenous Affairs Editor. And thank you so much for being with us. This referendum, is it just simply about enshrining in the Constitution Aboriginal rights? And if it is as simple as that, why is it so controversial?

It is a pretty specific proposal that we're debating here in Australia, which is, yes, about Aboriginal rights, but about our right as a people to have a voice on the laws and the policies that affect our people here in Australia. Because people might not know, we have huge disparities when it comes to life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for Australia's first peoples, which is the oldest living culture in the world. And yet our elders are dying at least 10 years on average younger than the rest of Australia. We have our people living in deplorable conditions in urban, regional and remote settings in Australia. We have one of the highest incarceration

rates in the world in Australia. So the kinds of issues we're facing are urgent and extremely serious, and our country hasn't come to terms with how to deal with it. So Indigenous people are saying, we need more of a say on the issues that affect us, on all of these laws that are made, often with very little input from Indigenous people. So we've had a lot of debates over many decades about Indigenous rights when it comes to land rights, when it comes to a debate about the white Australia policy in Australia. This is quite a specific proposal about having an advisory body, really.

It does seem very simple, an advisory body advising the federal government, the Commonwealth, on the laws that are made to affect First Nations people.

So Bridget, why are people saying no to that? And we should explain perhaps that if you dig into the referendum, even the people leading the no campaign, you get Indigenous voices saying no.

This was a proposal that was put forward by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves about six years ago at Uluru, that really famous landmark in Australia,

and it's a very cultural and sacred place to the Ananu people, which is the First Nations community that lives there around Uluru. So a lot of Aboriginal people gathered there. There had been a lot of debate about how to fix the issues, the problems that we're dealing with in Australia for a long time. So Aboriginal people came together, Indigenous people came together, and they said, this is the idea that we have to change the constitution, to give us a permanent voice in our affairs. So that was the proposal put forward by Indigenous people back in 2017. Now, at the time, it was rejected by the federal government. They were like, you know what?

No, we don't think this is a really worthwhile proposal to put the Australian people because it's really costly. As you guys know, it's really costly, and referendums in Australia are not very successful. So it was put off for a long time. But then when we had a change of government last year, the Prime Minister said, no, we're going to do this. We're going to listen to Aboriginal people and we're going to put this forward. And I think a lot of people thought, well, it was a no-brainer. This is going to get up. It'll be pretty easy. The polls were showing that there was quite a lot of support for yes. But there has not been bipartisan support on this since the opposition here in Australia decided no, we're not going to support this. And so since then, it has become a very polarized debate. And as you say, Emily, there are Aboriginal and Indigenous people on the no side, leading the no side, who are saying, we don't want any more bureaucracy. And we don't really understand the detail of how this will work. That's their argument, that we need more information about how this advisory body would work. How would it be elected? What would it advise on? How much it would cost? That detail, they argue, hasn't been there. And so since it's become this really polarized debate with all these different voices, I think there are a lot of Australians who possibly were inclined to vote yes, and are now kind of like in the middle going, I'm confused. There are Aboriginal people saying yes. There are Aboriginal people saying no. There are politicians saying yes. There are politicians saying no. There's just a lot of noise now in Australia. And what we've seen in the past kind of six weeks is the polls are showing that this is not going to be successful, that a no vote is going to win out. Is it having the same culture war effects, the same divisive effect that the Brexit referendum had in Britain in 2016? Because I know you used to be based over here. And I just wonder whether you're seeing any kind of read across from what Britain went through and what Australia is now going through. The kind of effect this has on the social fabric, the effects it has on families, like we're hearing that families here in Australia, people don't want to talk about this at the dinner party. I mean, I'm sure it's still the case in Britain. Don't mention Brexit at the dinner table. Here, we're seeing that certainly play out that there's been a lot of abuse. There have been a lot of conspiracy theories online. There's been the kind of racism here that I certainly haven't seen since the 1990s. It's dredged up a lot of ugliness that I think a lot of Australians thought we had dealt with as a nation. There are debates about do aboriginals want to take our land back? I'm seeing online aboriginal people don't deserve this, that they can't get jobs, that they're drunks, really kind of awful, ugly racism. In some debate, I think, among Indigenous people about did we have to go through this? Did we have to be exposed to this? It's pretty ugly here, guys. Because the no campaign have kind of brought in a very clever slogan that they've used to buy into people's insecurity on this issue. Their slogan, I think, if you don't know, vote no. What happens if it is a no vote, as the polls might at this point

indicate? Because, as you've said, in Australia, there are lots of referendums. Very few of them get through because the threshold is so high, unlike the Brexit vote or the referendums we've had here. If it is a no vote, what kind of signal then does that send out? Do you think the country repairs? The threshold is really high because we have to get a majority of voters in Australia if you want to referendum to pass. So it's a very high bar for the yes case. They also have to get a majority of states and territories. It's called a double majority for our referender in Australia. So they haven't been very successful in the past. And it is a big ask to get these across the line because Australians typically are very conservative when it comes to changing our constitution. I think it's a really good question. I mean, where does it leave us if it's a no vote?

It leaves us in a position that Aboriginal leaders, I think, need to come together and find a new way forward for how we're going to close the gaps, how we're going to lift life expectancy for my people, how we're going to see elders living longer, how we're going to get our kids out of poverty and make sure that they have really the kinds of lives that they deserve to have. I mean, there's just a lot of sadness, I think, in our communities at the moment.

And I think there's a lot of pressure on our Prime Minister to, if this goes down, to explain the way forward. There is potential that the Parliament may legislate a new voice to Parliament. They could legislate an advisory body. But it leaves us with this kind of existential question on, we have this brilliant, wonderful country and we have so much to be proud of. And are we going to let our First Peoples languish in poverty? Are we going to let our kids end up in jails or in out-of-home care? There are a lot of questions for this country, and we are a rich, wonderful, vibrant society with a big unanswered question on why we haven't settled our history, why we can't be more proud and a more unified country.

Bridget Brennan, just fascinating, really, really helpful and really thoughtful for me. Thank you so much. Thanks for having me.

Just a parochial point on this referendum. I met when I was out in Australia, a former Australian Prime Minister who said, well, if this referendum goes down and he is supporting it and he thinks it will go down and go down in flames, he says, well, the Royal Family will breathe a little easier because the last thing that Tony Albanese, the Prime Minister, will do is dare to hold a referendum on the future of the monarchy and Australia becoming a republic if you've just had the rebuff of losing this voice referendum for the Aboriginal people. And it's worth saying that Australia feels as if it holds a lot of referendums. They do, in fact. I think the last big one was 1999, but only eight of them have ever got through because the bar for victory is so high.

You need to have a majority of voters in a majority of states, at least four out of six having to vote yes for a referendum to pass. And for all those questioning why there wasn't some kind of threshold set on either the Scottish referendum or later the Brexit referendum, I think that will really resonate because Australia kind of goes, yeah, we'll let you vote on that, but boy, we're not just going to flip over. It's not going to be easy. It's not going to be easy. Only 3% of the population are Aboriginal. And I think it's also worth saying that this is not about Aboriginal versus white. It's people, presumably younger people, your kids, you know. Where my son lives in Australia, I didn't see a single no-poster. Everywhere was yes. Because it's about recognising the inequalities of the past. So anyone who puts themselves on that side of the debate, recognising, I guess, you know, the rights of Indigenous people, will want to feel that they are somehow contributing to an improved country, right?

## [Transcript] The News Agents / We need to talk about GB News

Exactly so. And we'll be back in just a moment.

This is The News Agents.

Before we go, Maitland and I will be up very early tomorrow morning because it is the second Republican Party debate. Probably Emily will have run round Hyde Park before the debate starts at four in the morning because that's what she does.

She won't. I was going to say we're off to bed now and then I saw the time and it's quartered to two. So we're not quite off to bed, but we will be getting an early night.

I'm not sleeping here as well.

We are going to be watching the debate from California, which is a ridiculous eight, nine hours.

From the Ronald Reagan Library.

Behind.

Which has got...

Pub there.

Lots of books.

I went there for my 30th birthday, the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.

You do know how to live it up.

One of the debates in the 2016 election was held there, which I went to, which with Air Force One in the background, there is a hang-up at the Reagan Library with Air Force One. And there is an Irish pub with the Ronald Reagan, where they serve Guinness.

And there's also a sign saying, beware of the snakes in the grass.

Who would have thought it would be politicians?

There you go.

We'll see you tomorrow on News Agency USA.

Bye for now.