

[Transcript] The News Agents / What's up with Boris Johnson's WhatsApps?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

Leading Britain's Conversation, this is LDC.

From Global's newsroom at five o'clock, Boris Johnson says all material requested by the COVID-19 inquiry, including unredacted WhatsApp messages, has been handed over to the government in full.

In a statement, the ex-prime minister says the cabinet office has had access to the material for several months.

He's disclosed to the inquiry urgently.

Fasten yourself in, because the COVID inquiry something talked about for years is finally about to begin in just a couple of weeks time.

But already, before the work has even officially begun, before the first hearing has been held, Boris Johnson, of course, Prime Minister, during COVID, and a controversy about the documents that he had, his private notebooks, diaries, his WhatsApp messages, have already come to cause friction between Johnson, the government and the inquiry led by Baroness Hallett.

And we are now in the extraordinary position where the chair of a public inquiry who has been appointed by the government is now threatening the government with legal action unless it gets its hands on all the papers it wants to see as part of this public inquiry.

The fallout from COVID, from Partygate, from the way we were governed during that period continues.

Welcome to the newsagents.

It's John, it's Lewis, and we are in newsagents HQ, and a little bit later on, we're going to be talking to a just stop oil protester who is coming into the studio, and who knows if she glues herself to the seat, may well be here tomorrow for your episode then.

Well, let's see if we can get her to reply some of that glue to you.

You can do a full day's work for once.

Oh, right.

Well, we can't go full week on this show without mentioning Boris Johnson, one of our patron saints on this show, and inevitably he's been in the news again, although he's had a kind of rather meandering journey with this story.

This is a story about his communications, his private notebooks and diaries that he kept during the COVID pandemic.

And we are about to enter what I think is going to just be one of the big, big kind of permanent news features that we have over the coming months and years, which is the COVID inquiry, which is due to get underway in the next couple of weeks under Baroness Hallett.

And there has been over the last couple of weeks this weird sort of two and fro between Hallett and the COVID inquiry, and Boris Johnson, and Rishi Sunak's government and the Cabinet Office.

Baroness Hallett and the COVID inquiry have wanted unredacted versions of these documents, these diaries, these notebooks, and WhatsApp messages from Boris Johnson when he was Prime Minister.

They had thought that Boris Johnson didn't want to hand this stuff over, and the Cabinet

Office and Rishi Sunak's government definitely didn't want to hand it over.

They said that it's reasonable that ministers should be expected to be able to have private communications, that some stuff would be handed over, but it would be redacted, and so on. And then after that two and fro, Boris Johnson comes out yesterday and says, no, he's perfectly happy for all this stuff to be handed over, and indeed the Cabinet Office have had this access to this material for some time.

But there are two things going on at once here, and both of them fascinating.

The first thing that you've just talked about is the degree to which people should be able to have private communication and not expect that communication to be under the glare and under the microscope in a way that it would be at a public inquiry.

But make no mistake, what's also happening here is a fight.

It may be shadow boxing, but it's a fight between Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak.

Boris Johnson thinks he is being stitched up by Rishi Sunak, and this is what's kind of led to this reopening of a legal case possibly against Boris Johnson over lockdown parties at checkers or Downing Street or wherever it happened to be.

That is something which emerged in the past week or so.

And Boris Johnson firing back saying, I've got nothing to hide, Rishi, you dare come after me?

I'm very happy for everything to be laid out on the table.

So you've got this ongoing battle, this destabilising fight between Boris Johnson on one hand, disgruntled, disaffected, unhappy about the way he was forced out of office, and Rishi Sunak, who wants to marginalise Johnson as much as possible before the next election.

Yeah, Johnson and his allies basically think that if you connect all of the dots from so many of these stories in recent weeks, yeah, the cabinet office handing over his diaries and saying to the police that they should investigate some of Johnson's other activities during the pandemic, that there may have been further lockdown breaches, including checkers. They think there have been a series of stories designed over a long period, going all the way back to Ndezim Zahawi and his tax affairs, a series of stories that have emanated from government designed to discredit either Johnson or Johnson's allies.

And now he thinks that this story has been set up in such a way as to make him look shadier.

And as John says, that he's got something else to hide.

As always with these things, there is probably a kernel of truth in at least some of this stuff and make no mistake, there is definitely, I think, been an attempt to delegitimize Johnson and part of his government.

You can argue Johnson did a pretty good job of that himself, so he gave them plenty of material.

But yeah, look, there is an ongoing factional war within the Conservative Party and all of these stories shouldn't exclusively be seen through that prism, but it is an important prism through which to see them.

So there's the potential now that Lady Hallett, the chair of the public inquiry, could start legal proceedings against the cabinet office, and it was the cabinet office which announced that it was setting up, or the prime minister who announced that they were setting up a public inquiry, and what an exceptional turn of events that would be, that the head of a public inquiry.

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If you, in the select committee system, you have the right to call people and papers for investigation as part of the inquiry that is going on, and so it is, you've got legal powers as head of a public inquiry, and Lady Hallett is saying, I want everything unredacted, no compromises, no blacked out bits, and the cabinet office is saying you must be bloody joking.

Yeah, and I think in a way we had a little foretaste of the way that Johnson was going to try and approach this, and try and set himself up as actually being far more transparent than people thought that he was going to be.

Last week, or the end of last week, when he had been on his way back, I think, from an American tour, he'd been to see various people, including Donald Trump, we're told, and former president George W. Bush in Texas, and making a lot of money as well, speaking to various different groups and being paid very handsomely for it.

And James Matthews, who's a Washington correspondent for Sky News, found him at Washington Airport.

And Johnson, I don't know, these things sometimes can be, I don't think it was necessarily coordinated,

but Johnson, I think, saw an opportunity, and from the very beginning, he was had this shtick, which he doesn't always have, which is, this guy's from Sky News, he's got every right to ask me questions.

Let's just listen to a bit of that.

Yeah.

I've asked you.

It's okay.

It's okay, he's from Sky News, he's entitled to ask me questions, and I'm going to tell you.

I just think it's totally nonsensical and bizarre that there are tens of thousands of entries in the Prime Minister or Dari.

I've never seen these things before, because I looked through it.

None of them constitute a breach of the rules during COVID, during, they weren't during lockdown, they were during other periods of the restrictions.

None of them constitute a breach of the rules.

None of them involve socialising.

It is total nonsense, and I find it extraordinary, absolutely extraordinary, that these things are handed over by, I don't know quite what authority, the Cabinet Office or whoever, to the privileges committee and to the police, without any attempt to establish what these things actually mean or what they refer to, with me.

Fairness to Boris Johnson, actually that's probably the most celebrated incident at Dulles Airport since Wayne Rooney came off a plane incoherent and got himself into some legal trouble with the police at Dulles Airport.

Is that a football reference, John?

That is a football reference.

That's nice.

That is a football reference for that.

Thanks for that.

But look, I thought that actually fair play to Boris Johnson, he didn't try and find a fridge to hide in, as he did during the general election campaign when he was facing... There are many fridges at Dulles Airport in New York.

I don't think there are, and so his minders were all for giving the Sky Reporter a good old kicking and stopping him getting anywhere near Johnson, Johnson said, I'm happy to answer this.

As you say, Lewis, he saw an opportunity.

Yeah, I think so.

I mean, I think obviously we should think about the wider issues as well, because it's not just about the sort of Johnson-Soonak psychodrama.

I mean, this inquiry is really, really important.

We know hundreds of thousands of people died during the COVID pandemic.

It was the biggest crisis to afflict this country for decades.

During the pandemic, when people like us were asking ministers questions, the refrain often came back.

We saw it with Matt Hancock when he was in this very studio a couple of weeks ago.

The refrain often came back, wait for the inquiry, we're dealing with this now, but the inquiry will deal with these matters.

So there is a lot riding on this, not just in terms of true accountability for all the victims, for the whole public, in terms of what everybody endured, but also in terms of learning for the future, for when and if there is another pandemic.

And I think it is deeply, deeply unfortunate that the beginning of that inquiry, which needs to hold complete public legitimacy, should already be mired.

Whoever is in the right and whoever is in the wrong should already be mired in a battle between ministers, the government, and the inquiry, thus potentially undermining its legitimacy from the very beginning.

So I've got a certain amount of sympathy for the Cabinet Office, which will probably seem a weird thing to say as a journalist, because as a journalist, you want as much information as possible.

And of course, we like seeing sheets of paper where there are not thick black lines, where things have been redacted.

But I think what's happened, and particularly during COVID, we all went on WhatsApp groups.

And what used to be conversations face to face, we would have on WhatsApp groups.

And so they have become part of a semi-official record, which is what they were never intending to be.

And obviously, if you saw the newsagents group chat, you wouldn't want that to be subject to public scrutiny.

And I think the danger is that if civil servants think that everything that they have ever said on a WhatsApp group could be subject to public scrutiny, it is going to foster an environment in which the civil servant thinks, I'm going to go in for group thing.

I'm not going to say anything daring or controversial.

And so you will get civil servants who just only ever think the thinkable and not the unthinkable, and you suffer from group think as a result.

I think that's true.

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And there has to be a forum where policymakers can discuss things without fear.

But I think the problem is, I think there's two problems.

One is, is that WhatsApp, as you already alluded to, John, it has become such an important part of the way government functions.

It's become one of the lubricants of government, the way that the cogs keep turning.

So much business now is done via WhatsApp between Spad special advisers, ministers, civil servants.

And sometimes they do that precisely because they can put disappearing messages on.

They think it's easier to avoid a paper trail than it would be through official communications or emails.

Bear in mind, whenever a minister talks to somebody, another minister, for example, there was always a private secretary, a civil servant there, to take a record of everything that is said.

That is not the case through newer forms of communication like WhatsApp.

It is supposed to be archived and preserved.

And I think the other point about it is this, you know, government is not unused to the public inquiry process.

They happen all the time.

And whoever is appointed to head a public inquiry, in this case, Lady Hallet, is chosen because they are very well respected, that their judgment is, no one's judgment is ever totally beyond question, but is as good as anybody could hope to be.

They know how government works.

And the question that this story ultimately comes down to is, who gets to decide what is important?

Because the government's argument is, oh, a lot of this information is irrelevant.

It's superfluous.

It isn't important.

Surely that has to ultimately be for Lady Hallet to decide.

And then she can use her judgment and her discretion as to whether things have to be included or they don't have to be included or whether they're made public or they're not made public.

But as we saw from Matt Hancock's WhatsApps, there was a lot of stuff in there that I'm sure someone like he, to be fair, he's saying he's very happy for all to be handed over.

But someone like he, or a minister could say, that's irrelevant, that's not relevant, I'm not happy with that being handed over.

But as we saw, so much of the COVID decision making was happening in real time over stuff like WhatsApp, as we saw from those WhatsApp messages.

And surely it has got to be for the inquiry to ultimately decide what is Jermaine and what isn't.

Yes.

I simultaneously thought with Isabelle Oakshot, leaking the Matt Hancock WhatsApp exchanges in full, that it was a disgraceful breach of trust, but it was very important as well because you saw something about the way government worked and the way decision making was working and the considerations that we did not know about, which were very important

for the public to find out about.

And I think it would be a terrible look.

While I understand the concerns of the Cabinet Office, what a terrible look it will be if it ends up that the Cabinet Office is saying, yeah, you can have this public inquiry, but don't expect us to hand over everything you need to look at to form your judgments.

It will give a very bad stench to a report, and I think the government has got to think very, very carefully about the cost-benefit analysis of what it does next.

Completely, because it needs to come down public support.

And this is what I was saying before.

If people already believe or come to believe that the inquiry doesn't have full access to the information, then it undermines its legitimacy.

And I think, look, I also think, to be honest with this, the Cabinet Office is on a highway to nothing because as people who have been involved with public inquiries before have already said, someone like Lord Sumption was saying yesterday, look, the Cabinet Office can try and take this to court.

They can try and take it to judicial review, and they will almost certainly lose.

Because Baroness Hallock will just say, this is in the public interest.

It's necessary for me to have this information, and the judge will almost certainly agree with her in terms of the law as it's currently set out.

And you have someone like Lord Savile, who headed up the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, which went on for very, very many years, saying exactly the same thing, that ultimately it has to be for the chair of that inquiry to exercise their discretion and their judgment in order to command public confidence.

And I think the Cabinet Office can kick and stream all they like, but ultimately that is where we're going to end up.

We'll be back in a moment, and we'll be discussing protest.

What is legitimate?

What is illegitimate?

Is it fair enough to block the King's highway in support of your cause?

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

And we're going to talk about protest, and it's not the first time we've discussed this issue on the podcast, because of course, Sauella Braverman kind of introduced new laws about limiting what was legal protest just ahead of the coronation.

And we saw the appalling scenes, I thought, of protesters who wanted to say, not my King, and they all got arrested.

I thought that that was a kind of very, very counterproductive move.

And of course, we're going to talk about climate change, because as well, who doesn't think that climate change is a very serious problem that global leaders need to tackle and that populations need to tackle because of the effect of CO2 and global warming. But the protests are often alienating people who even might be considered the types of people who would want to rally to their cause.

This is a cyclist in London who was very unimpressed.

I'm a liberal, I'm always going to the liberal.

And you all feel better about yourself, but you're hurting the cause, and you feel better when you're hurting the cause.

But what is the right way to get that message across?

Yeah, and the way that increasingly this debate is going and the thing which punctuates this debate most at the moment, it seems, is of course these various groups, Extinction Rebellion, Just Up Oil, who have orchestrated at times civil disobedience, and not just protest, but also blocking roads, disrupting sporting events and so on.

And they are fascinating groups because they've emerged, most of them are very, very new. They've emerged only in recent years, often lots of young people involved.

And they are, in our experience anyway, they are so fervent in their belief of the justice of what they're doing.

And so we thought it might be quite interesting to get one of them in, to explore the principles involved about the civil disobedience they're orchestrating.

Well we're joining the studio now by Indigo Rambolo.

She's a spokesperson for Just Stop Oil.

What are you hoping to achieve with your protests?

Is it to win the support of the public?

We are demanding that the UK government stops issuing licenses for new fossil fuel projects in the UK.

I understand that's the policy though.

What are you hoping to achieve in terms of public opinion?

Well we're hoping to see this policy become legislation, and we're waiting for when that's going to happen.

And we know that the majority of the public do support our demand.

So the public opinion, very favourable towards you is 4%, somewhat favourable 12%, so that's 16%, and somewhat unfavourable, very unfavourable, don't know, haven't heard of you, is the rest of it.

When you say that majority of people support you, what's that based on?

Sorry, this is the trap that many people fall down when they're looking at social change movements and how change happens.

It's equating support for the group, with support for the group's demand.

Many people hated the suffragettes while they were taking action, but obviously the idea of women's suffrage was something that people want.

Many people really hate and dislike the fact that we've been disrupting sporting events, the oil moving around this country, and also roads, but by virtue of the fact that the issue is spoken about everywhere, all of the time, and people are forced to either defend their position.

But that was why my question was very specific to you.

Oh yes, sorry.

Which is what were you hoping to achieve in terms of public opinion?

Because you're just saying to me, no, no, no, you accept that people hate your tactics.

I'm accepting that people don't like our tactics, they don't like their days being disrupted, I'm also saying that independent research has shown that our actions are increasing support for climate action.

I mean, you mentioned the suffragettes.

Is it they that you compare yourself to?

Is there a sort of particular kind of group that you wish to emulate in that regard or there are others?

I wish there was a moment in history I could look back on and say that the issue that we are campaigning on, just try and stop climate catastrophe, was a parallel issue and there just isn't.

We're in a completely unprecedented moment in time.

So that's interesting.

So you think that in a way, the moral legitimacy of what you're doing and the political legitimacy of what you're doing is precisely because there is no parallel or there is no precedence that can be drawn upon.

That's what gives you the moral imperative and legitimacy to do what you do.

Yes, I think that's right.

I think that to break the law you have to have a very good reason.

Most of the people in just stop oil, there's vicars, teachers, doctors, you know.

They would say that on the whole, people want to obey the law.

The thing is that the public order at the moment is threatening the common good.

The way things in which we're going is going to undermine everything.

Yeah, that's so interesting what you just said.

And they're stopping people on roads who may be on zero hours contracts from getting paid because you've blocked them into wherever and you're playing gold on whether people get to hospital appointments or can get to funerals or the like.

The sporting event is one thing.

What you did at the snooker.

I don't know what that was for.

It was a visually compelling protest that I've seen it done it cricket matches over the decades, you know, anti-apartheid groups were doing it in the 60s and 70s.

I think it's blocking the roads.

There was an incident on the old Kent road where someone says, I've got to get to a hospital appointment and the just stop oil protest says, I don't believe you.

You're not having a hospital appointment again.

You're going to have a hospital appointment again.

Yes, I don't believe that's the case.

Would you defend that?

I wouldn't defend that.

No, we have a blue lights policy as an organisation, which means that if we see blue lights, we open up the flow of traffic.

No, no, no.

This was someone who was a private person going to a hospital appointment and one of the just stop oil protesters said, I do not believe you're going to a hospital appointment.

So we're disrupting ordinary people's lives.

I accept that and I accept that.

Having to do that.

It was your mum who couldn't get to a hospital appointment for something quite urgent because just stop oil protesters were blocking the road.

How would you feel?

I personally would understand even if it was my mum and that's because what we're talking about coming down the line within my lifetime by 2030 is billions of people living outside of livable temperatures.

I'm not arguing with the science or the threat posed.

I'm arguing with the tactics, which I believe are alienating people.

And I quoted you those numbers in the opinion poll, which seem to suggest that only 16% of the British public have either a very favourable or somewhat favourable view of what you do the rest either don't know or are very unfavourable.

I think it's key that people have to pick a side.

Lewis, what do you think?

Do you think we need to end the oil and gas?

What I'd say is this, do you understand that when you say, in a way I admire your principle and the consistency of your belief, it's very admirable.

When you say that to answer John's question, you would understand, even if your mother was afflicted or affected by someone blocking the road, do you understand though that for many people, they will find that incomprehensible, that that does make you sound, if anything, rather frenzied, because it's just so completely alien to the way most people would think.

Most people would think, God, if my mom were being put in mortal danger by someone's political action, that they would abhor it.

It's a moral choice that we all have to make here.

And we have to decide whether we're going to stand up against a Tory government, which is pursuing new oil and gas in the middle of the climate crisis, despite the warnings that this is going to kill billions of people, or if we're going to sit by and just pretend that we have no power, we can't do anything about it, and we're just going to watch this very, very pivotal moment in history just pass us by.

I understand.

I'm interested in what you said about the thing about moral imperative, that you feel that because this is an unprecedented situation of such moral and political urgency that it justifies what you're doing, can you see that there may be many other people who think exactly the same thing.

So, for example, if you are anti-abortion, you may feel, and indeed they do feel, may just agree with it or agree with it, but they feel that this is a matter of the utmost moral importance.

It's murder.

It's murder.

That's what they think.

It's murder.

They believe that millions and millions of children are being killed every year across the world.

So, they could be sat in your chair right now and saying exactly the same thing, that this is of an unparalleled moral situation, and therefore justify you're doing exactly what

you're doing.
It's subjective.
That's the problem, isn't it?
Do you think the climate crisis is subjective?
No, no, no.
I'm just making the point.
We're just making the point that these people believe it is murder.
I do.
I can see the other point.
So, just to be specific.
Because we live in free speech.
No, no.
Let me get the question.
The specific question is, would you support the right of anti-abortion protesters to block the roads because they believe, in their hearts, it is murder?
Yes, I do support that, yeah.
That's what the article 10 and 11 hat is that we have.
That's our right to free speech, our right to assembly, our right to protest.
That's what our democracy is built upon.
So, we could have a situation where no one can go anywhere because people have taken it upon themselves to say, I can block the King's Highway because I believe this.
I can block the King's Highway because I believe that.
It's mayhem.
Have you come round now and you've seen that blocking the highway does work?
And that's why people would want to do it.
No, I think you are turning people off the course.
I think that.
I don't disagree with you about the profound importance of the issues that you are raising.
That's not the issue.
The issue is that you are alienating support.
Why did you stop the M25 protests?
We're not alienating support.
As you can see, many banks are pulling out of fossil fuel funding, insurers are getting cold feet on supporting fossil fuel projects.
But do you believe that is down to you?
The Labour Party is now pushing this as one of their five key policies.
And yes, I don't think it is a coincidence that after one year of...
You're finding a causal relationship between the decisions of these fifth corporations.
Of the fact that we have been in many, many media studios talking like this, talking about the need to end your oil and gas.
Two of my friends has currently sat in prison for cumulatively over six years.
Many people have blocked oil tankers.
They spent time in police custody.
They've disrupted supporting matches.

And we have ceded this issue onto the public agenda.

And I do believe that it's not just just upward.

It's the hard work of the climate movement and of journalists who are prepared to actually talk about this issue.

That's how we create change.

That's what I really do believe.

Is there a danger, though?

I mean, look, the polling suggests that the public agree with you.

I mean, we can all agree.

The climate crisis is an existential threat.

And it is a huge problem that needs policymakers agree with that, politicians agree with that.

The public agree with that.

It's not a danger that that argument has essentially been won and that by continuing, particularly the action in terms of disrupting people's lives, not so much the stuff that we've talked about in the snooker halls and sporting events and so on, but stuff like John was saying, closing the M25 and so on, that that actually just in the end puts off and deters and irritates and alienates a group of people who already agree with you or who already agree with you. There's just absolutely no data to show that the data is showing the opposite, that radical action is increasing support for more moderate climate groups.

That's polling that's done just before and after at the blocking of the M25 and just before and after us blocking the oil depots.

Now, I'm looking at the people who are in power and I'm asking them to create change.

It's not happening.

Instead, they've trashed our economy, they've pumped sewage into the rivers, they've pushed for new airports.

Do you understand that we do have a democratic process?

One second, sorry.

I just want to put this point.

We do have a democratic process.

We've got political parties, you can stand for election, you can stand as a just-stop oil party, you can stand as the net zero party, you're trying to circumvent that process instead of putting pressure on politicians by you can join a Labour Party, you can join the Green Party.

Surely you know that protest is a key part of our flourishing democracy.

Of course, and I completely, we can all agree again, completely support the right to protest.

There is a difference though, a political difference between protest going on a march which you're, you know, look at what trade unions do.

They notify the authorities what they're doing, they either go on a march, they go on a strike, we've seen that this week, we all know it's coming.

And what sometimes you do, which is unnotified action to block infrastructure that affects people's lives, there is a difference between protest and that.

No, that's not what the law says, it says that these are acts of protest, that they should be, yeah.

I mean, I'm listening to you and you're saying I know best and that the just stop oil protesters

know best and screw the rest of you.

No, I'm saying I've even stood up in the High Court where they've said that the actions of blocking the M25 and of blocking oil depots are acts of protest.

But you are saying we know that we can disrupt people's lives, anyone could disrupt people's lives, you can go out and do what you like, block a road and causes mayhem for people, just trying to go about their everyday lives.

It is that you know best that this is the only way where we have protest, we have elections, you can make your representations.

It's not just me who's saying this, that's why thousands of people are flocking to our website to have their donations doubled by energy founder Dale Vintz and that you can see that support for the campaign and for the demand is growing.

Pindu is right about one thing though isn't she John, which is that, I mean, she's here, there across all the radio studios and television studios and probably if they just went on a normal protest, they probably wouldn't be, right?

That is correct.

But I think we can debate effective protest, I mean I thought that the best thing that happened for the anti-monarchy protesters was the disgraceful arrest of them on that day.

On that day.

Yes, I was held for 16 hours in police custody.

What were you trying to do, what prompted your arrest?

So I was stood at the barrier waiting for the procession to come past and I was going to show a small sort of tea towel sized banner, just that said, just stop oil.

But while I was stood there just in my plain clothes with this in my pocket, I was surrounded by police and handcuffed behind my back and marched up to Tarran Cross police station.

What's the end game field group?

What's next?

What's the future?

More of the same?

So as soon as that demand becomes legislation, that's the end of just stop oil.

So the Tory government could stop the actions tomorrow, if they...

Keir Starmer's pledge to not have any new oil extraction in the North Sea, all that seems to be what Labour's policy is going to be.

So if Labour did that...

It's a real victory for civil disobedience and if Labour makes that law, we'll end the campaign but we know that the only thing that's going to make them actually make this law rather than being another pledge that they just row back on is a real and strong street movement holding them to account and that's why everybody listening today should consider jumping on the just stop oil website and signing up to join us on the streets.

Well, here we go.

Pleasure meeting you.

Thank you very much for coming in.

Thank you.

Thank you.

All right.

I like people who have very strongly held political beliefs.

You know, there's someone who loves politics and is interested in politics.

I'm attracted to that.

I like that and I admire principle and dedication to it but I do think that we saw in that interview the disconnect potentially with a lot of the public and I do think on two things.

One on that point around her saying and actually I believe her when she said that even if blocking a road affected potentially the sort of mortal health of her own mother, she would understand.

As we pointed out, I think most people would find that baffling and completely alienating actually because it is just not how the vast, vast majority of people think it is so ideological.

That it is quite off-putting and then I think the other thing is and I think this is more of a kind of I expected to say when I put the question about abortion, I expected to say no, that's different because it's not about systemic risk because earlier in the interview she said this is a situation without parallel but she basically conceded that there are analogous situations that basically is up to the individual group to sort of determine for themselves how deeply they feel about it and how subjectively bigger thing they think it is and although obviously there isn't anything subjective about the climate crisis, it is still subjective as to whether or not you think it warrants the action that they are taking and I think as you correctly pointed out John, that road could potentially lead you to just consistent chaos because ultimately any group could take the law into its own hands if it feels strongly enough and that's the point of living in a rule of law civilized society is that you can't do that because that way lies mayhem and anarchy.

And I think clearly there are examples throughout history where civil disobedience is clearly justified because one particular group is being discriminated against within the confines of the law, i.e. the law itself is unjust so if we think about what happened in apartheid South Africa or segregation in America or the civil rights situation in Northern Ireland in the 1960s and so on, we can clearly see examples where civil disobedience, violence necessarily but certainly civil disobedience can be justified. Obviously with this it isn't that any group is being targeted or justified, what they're actually saying is that this is a totalizing thing, we're all being affected, it affects the whole world, the whole world is at risk and in those circumstances I think it's harder to see the path through which significant civil disobedience which is significantly disruptive and it is harder to justify, it might not be impossible but it basically comes down to that subjective point that we feel, we demand that it must be done.

I think the thing that sticks with me is her poor mum, that they would be prepared to sacrifice the life of somebody, stop them getting to hospital because the cause is so important and yet they say they're a non-violent organization. I think there are some contradictions, I think that some of their protests are highly effective and as I said in the interview I think a lot of it is very, very counterproductive.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back, we have reported on the podcast before how Donald Trump, presidential hopeful, likes to call his potential presidential rival Ron DeSantis, Ron DeSantimonius, which is a good name and Donald Trump is brilliant at giving people fun names to undermine who they are like Little Marco Rubio or Lion Ted Cruz, Crooked Hillary etc.

Trouble is for Ron DeSantis, is that he doesn't seem sure himself how to pronounce his surname, is it DeSantis or DeSantis?

I'm Ron DeSantis, hello this is Governor Ron DeSantis wishing everyone a Merry Christmas

I am Ron DeSantis, hi this is Governor Ron DeSantis and I want to wish you a happy Thanksgiving so let's just hear that again I'm Ron DeSantis, hello this is Governor Ron DeSantis wishing everyone a Merry Christmas I am Ron DeSantis, hi this is Governor Ron DeSantis and I want to wish you a happy Thanksgiving. Now look when Donald Trump is trying to paint you as a phony and you can't even pronounce your own surname consistently I think it is sort of problematic for him.

Dumb as a rack, dumb as a rack Ron, can't even say his own name, pathetic.

But you can imagine the ammunition this is given and so the people are now sort of kind of examining what is the correct pronunciation and if you're flip-flopping over how to pronounce your own surname well Ron DeSantis slash Ron DeSantis you've got a problem.

Anyone ever mispronounce your surname John? The number of times I have said hi it's John Soaple here and they say oh thank you Mr. Simple and that is really quite upsetting and so I go it is John Soaple. Occasionally American people say Goudal, Goudal, Lewis Goudal, Gouday Goudal, you could go to Australia Gouday Goudal, that would be the title of your show don't give me idea well I just need to speak to you don't I you're the one with all the Australian media contacts it's Gouday Goudal here my mum for some reason has gone into her head the Emily's surname

is Mathis so she calls her Emily Mathis like Johnny Mathis the singer of from when a child is born to try and tell her that they're actually not related well don't be nice if they were right you've got disappointment for your mum having you this week she's constantly disappointed we'll see you soon bye bye bye this has been a global player original podcast and a Persephoneka production