

## [Transcript] The News Agents / Why has everyone sat on their arses instead of thanking Gillian Keegan?

This is a Global Player Original Podcast.

The former Permanent Secretary of Spam for Education has said this morning that when they wanted to put more money into repairing schools, you as Chancellor didn't allow that to go ahead and, in fact, cut that budget.

Are you to blame for what's happening now and do you want to apologise to parents and pupils?

I think that is completely and utterly wrong.

Actually, one of the first things I did as Chancellor at my first spending review in 2020 was to announce a new 10-year school rebuilding programme for 500 schools.

Now that equates to a...

Utterly wrong to blame me, says Rishi Sunak, which tells you two things about the present crisis.

One, a recognition of just how serious this is for the government, but two, how much Rishi Sunak is aware that this has now got his fingerprints on it after the claim that he halved the school's rebuilding budget when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer. We're talking about the concrete in schools and it is literally a school gate issue. In other words, it's the kind of thing that people, parents, voters really, really care about.

And when you hear Sunak with that techy voice, utterly wrong, completely wrong, he says to the interviewer, you get a sense of just how concerned he is that this will all come back to bite his government right now.

Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents.

It's Lewis.

And it's Emily.

And I'm back.

No.

Yeah.

Well, we know you're back because there's been a bloody avalanche of stories ever since you have come back.

We've been scratching around in an arid desert and you have turned this into the Burning Man Festival with a deluge that has absolutely saturated the soil with so many stories.

Could you just spare me a little bit of sympathy?

It's quite difficult to come back from a month's holiday and I don't think you're treating me with the respect I deserve.

I've been barefoot, I've been running around in an apron and a bikini and now I'm suddenly faced with the trauma of real news.

Seeing us.

No, excuse me.

When we won, you have brought potentially Ukraine selling us the Russia of Hytnato Territory.

That was me, yes.

You've brought a heatwave.

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We've had the worst summer ever.

You've brought a heatwave.

Thank you very much.

The school estate, the ceilings are literally collapsing and we've got a labour reshuffle and we've only got one show.

You've been back one day.

Oh, and I think a little bit of bullying as well.

Oh, yes.

And Sir Gavin.

Yes, Sir Gavin and the bullying.

We'll get to that.

No, I think we should start with that.

Let's get Gavin out of the way now.

Sir Gavin.

We can tie in.

He was a former education secretary and he has very, very trenchant views on bullying or anti-bullying.

Have a listen.

This week, anti-bullying week has a chance to thank schools and teachers for everything they do to make the classroom a safe place for every child to thrive.

Bullying is never acceptable.

Every school must have anti-bullying policies in place so that no pupil fears coming to school or working online.

Sir Gavin reminded us that bullying is never acceptable.

Quite right.

Or so he thought at one point.

But today, I think he was found accused of bullying a former chief whip, Wendy Morton.

Turns out bullying is actually always unacceptable unless you're not being allowed to go to the Queen's funeral, in which case you are very much allowed to bully the chief whip.

I, for one, am on his side.

I mean, you know, it doesn't seem petty, pathetic, ridiculous, or completely, or at least somewhat small-minded to me in any way at all.

They're played to me.

Except for sometimes.

Anyway, it's going to be a joy to listen to his apology to the Commons, which he is going to have to make.

He's having to go on some training.

Yeah, that's the other bit of training.

I know.

I just want to be on the training course where Gavin Williamson is behaviour.

It's going to be like...

Do you think it'd be like Suella is online?

Could I just do it on my own, online, in my own bedroom?

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The point is, I suppose, that there will be some people saying, great, he's going on a training course, and there will be other people saying, hang on, why isn't there an actual bi-election?

Why isn't there an actual move to get him removed from his seat as an MP, or at least to petition voters to ask if they still want him as an MP?

But no, it's an online apology.

Make this, if we have any more bi-elections, it will feel like a general election.

There are so many bi-elections in the pipeline.

A bi-bi-election.

A bi-bi-election.

Very good.

She's back.

You can say she's been on holiday, can't you?

Yeah, she's back.

Oh, I think that's the end of my wit now, for at least another 11 months.

Well, that's good.

We've been building it up.

Right.

I think we ought to sort concrete.

Rack.

Don't just rack.

Just spell it out the first time.

You'd do that if you were still in your old job.

You'd know off by heart.

R-A-C.

Go on.

Don't bully him.

No, I am.

Yes, she is.

Go on then.

Make this, you do it.

Real?

Oh.

Go on.

What is rack?

There it is.

First day back at term is supposed to be the serious day.

That's supposed to be the serious day.

No, everyone's a bit high jinx because they haven't seen each other for six weeks.

You're back at school.

High jinx.

As long as your ceiling's still there.

And ours just about still is.

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Now, this is a story which has, in a way, come out of nowhere, but in a way, actually been around for a very, very long time.

And it says something about where the government is in the political cycle, that it is potentially actually deeply politically lethal for them, never mind potentially lethal to actual children across the country, which is that this is a form of concrete, of aerated concrete, which has been used across the school at the state for many decades, since the 1960s, and not just the schools at the state either, but all across public realm and in private buildings as well, to greater or lesser extent.

And literally on the week before, not the month before or at the end of the previous school term, but on the week before the new school term is due to begin in England, already back in Scotland, of course, there is a directive which goes out from the Education Secretary Julian Keegan, which says that we are now concerned as a result of several incidents which have taken place over the summer, where there has been either a partial or full collapse of ceilings, some on the school estate, some not on the school estate.

We are now concerned that this poses a risk to life to children.

And as a result, several dozen schools have been closed right at the point that they were due to return for the school year.

And obviously, deeply distressing to parents, once their kids back at school, lots of kids of this cohort have already missed out on a huge amount of education as a result of COVID.

And obviously, the question simply becomes, straight away, if you've known about this for so long, A, why didn't you do something about it in the short term, I do something about it before the week before the school term resumes, but also, why didn't you do something about it years ago, because you've been in office for the 13 years now?

Well that has got added pecan sea, if you can put it like that, with the intervention this morning of the former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, which was amazing, because it was such a guided missile.

Just as Simon McDonald had done when he was the former Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, did for Boris Johnson, when he said, yet Boris Johnson knew all about pincher's behaviour.

So, the former Permanent Secretary at Education, Jonathan Slater, went on the Today programme and said, not only was the budget cut, but the budget was cut by the former Chancellor, Rishi Sunak.

To be clear, we know what's needed, three to four hundred, there's only so much capacity in the construction industry, there's disruption if you close schools and rebuild them, so the actual ask in the spending review in 2021 was to double the 100 to 200, that's what we thought was going to be practical at the first instance, I thought we'd get it, but the actual decision that the Chancellor took in 21 was to halve the size of the programme.

The Chancellor of course was at the time?

So, just to spell out a little bit what Jonathan Slater is saying there, that after that first roof collapsed in 2018, officials in the Department of Education, civil servants concluded they needed to start rebuilding in the region of 300 to 400 every year, and the Treasury, i.e. the Chancellor Rishi Sunak, said, no, no, you get to rebuild 100, not the three to 400, so already they are on a rebuilding programme which is a quarter of what they need, and now

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he's telling you, oh no, I didn't get that wrong, we've actually been investing in a new ten year school building programme which did increase capital spending from the ten year low, but it was only around 50 schools a year, and I guess what you're hearing, possibly what you're hearing in the tone of that official from the Department of Education is a little bit of the pushback after years in which particularly those in the civil service of education were called the blob, this big bureaucratic bungling mass that just got in the way of people trying to do real education for real kids, and what you're hearing now is them saying it would have been really great if people could have actually listened to what we were talking about at the time, which is trying to save the lives of children who might very well be in dangerously built schools, so yeah, if you like, this is the return of the blob fighting back and pointing out just how stupid a decision that was, and if you look at some of the tables, and I'm going to mention John Burns Murdoch here from the FT, you see the amount of spending through the Building for Schools programme of the Labour years, right up until 2010, and it's an actual triangle, the red line of labour spending goes up, and then the blue line of Tory spending actually goes down, it forms the triangle of the amount of GDP that is being spent on these projects, and that's pretty simply why this stuff is happening. And it's why it matters so much, and I think that this is a really important moment for this Conservative government, where you've got a new Prime Minister, relatively speaking, he's been there for a year, and this is an absolute guided missile that has hit him with this whole issue of schools. You said it's a school gate issue, exactly right, and that is why it is like the poll tax was for Thatcher, everyone got it, people were affected by it, it's like cash for questions with major, when you just sense this government had been in power for too long, there was an element of sleaze about everything to do with it, and therefore had to go, it's like party gate was for Boris Johnson. You have got these 100, 150 schools, who knows how many, it may be hundreds, and no one to blame

but themselves, because if you've been in power for 13 years, you can't say, well it was all Labour's fault, Labour were doing a lot of spending on all of them. Or it's like Grenfell and Theresa May, indeed it is connected to that in a very real sense, which is the issues around building safety, I might have done loads of work on this one, I was at Newsnight, issues around building safety have obviously been at the forefront of our politics now, since Grenfell, and to get to a position where, six years on from Grenfell Tower, to still be in a position where there are surprise questions about something as fundamental as the schools' estate, obviously poses enormous questions

to all the governments that have been in office since then, and indeed to this one, and the government

is definitely going to need a better line than the one it's been taking this morning, I mean Emily, you've talked about Sunak's tone, again we've talked many times before about how brittle he can sound when he's being scrutinised about something, he seems to take it quite personally, but the line that they were taking, which in a sense is right, I get it, which is to say 95%, we think this is a problem that affects 5% of schools, no no no, the line is one school is one too many, and we're dealing

with it, because for anyone, I mean if you're a parent and you hear, oh you're not going to go, oh it's fine, it's just 5%, it's fine, there's only a 5% chance that my kid is going to have the

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ceiling collapse in them when they're doing double maths, like it doesn't work that way.

I think to go back to the Grenfell analogy which is spot on, what was so traumatic about that was we did not know the level of unsafety, and it was all about obviously not just Grenfell, but the kind of particular use of cladding in buildings of that nature, so suddenly, and I remember at the time, we were asking how many other high-rise buildings, how many other people, how many other parts of

London, how many other parts of the UK are people living in buildings with unsafe cladding, and it might just be that there are very few schools that are actually about to collapse, there are very few buildings actually about to collapse, but once you know there is a risk, that risk is on your shoulders, and interestingly we were chatting with a RAAC removal project manager who's been in to look at the removal of aerated concrete, he has this fantastic analogy very close to my heart, confectionary, which he says, you know, you think of it like an aero, as an aero chocolate bar, but it's more like a crunchy, in other words, one bit of impact, and the whole thing snaps, it buckles, it cracks, and he's saying it takes four to five years since the initial survey, right? So imagine, we've just found this out in these school holidays, and we're four to five years away from what we can actually do to fix it, and this again goes back to the cladding into Grenfell. Risk assessment, project managers, security builders, water cabins, toilets, keeping water and electricity going, finding asbestos perhaps, which takes time, cost for removal and safety issues. Sorry, when did we last look around and go, oh, there's just too many people who work in this industry who aren't employed, what can we do with them? It's going to be almost impossible to get in the number of experts needed to ensure that each school that they worry about is safe. But meanwhile, there's a story in The Sun today, page 13 of The Sun, which I think is buried, seeing as what a good story it is.

Just, it's one of those things where politically it's so damaging, that it turns out that Gillian Keegan has approved spending 34 million pounds revamping her offices, and the construction agents

who were involved say there would be a focus on sensory, cognitive, physical, or developmental needs, along with improved lighting, and a muted colour palette. So that's all right then. So they've got a muted colour palette. That's lovely. I'm sure everyone will love that. But she's also done an interview today. She did the round of interviews today. To ITV, she said something which I thought was pretty extraordinary. It is not the job of the Department of Education, but we chose to do that because we wanted to make sure that we had that information centrally. On top of that, let's go on that side. A school collapsed, and it took you four years to send out questionnaires to find out how many schools had racked. No, we sent a warning out to the people responsible. But you're saying that the government is not responsible, ultimately, for the safety of children in schools? The school building's responsibility is with local authorities and multi-academy trusts. Do you believe the government did everything in its power? But we've taken further now. Do you believe the government did everything in its power, as in everything in its power, to make sure that children aren't being taught in schools that could collapse without warning? Absolutely, because the responsible bodies have that duty. What we have done since is we have basically said we want to have more information centrally. Well, I mean, they should be congratulated on that. I mean, there are literally children. I'm not looking to be congratulated. I'm just saying what we have done.

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There are literally children who've been going to school in buildings that could have collapsed. Children could have been seriously injured. Children could have died.

And only now are you assigning caseworkers and money to solve this.

No, the responsible bodies have always been responsible for making sure they have surveyors.

Look, I think that is pretty disingenuous, to say the least. I mean, it is true that technically,

in statutory terms, the local authorities and multi-academy trust chains, i.e. schools,

which are not run by local authorities, it is their responsibility to make sure

that buildings are safe. That is true. But come on, the Department for Education

has oversight over all of this. The Department for Education and the government centrally

is the one who sets capital budgets. And it is capital budgets allocated by the Department

for Education, which basically determines whether or not your school is going to be rebuilt and

what repairs there are going to be. And we should just talk about this. I mean, this is a story

slightly more widely. It was interesting to me for quite a long time. The state of the school's

estate is so much more than just this issue around concrete. Generally speaking, and you

talk to any head teacher about this or any teacher, there has just been a gradual decline in the school

estate over the last five to ten years or so. And we know that because it is inevitable, because as

soon as you start substantially cutting back on capital budgets, and the government say, well,

we've restored it to some extent, okay, to some extent. But go and look at any local paper over

the last few years. And you will find story after story of schools needing boilers replacing. It's

not happening. Schools needing roofs replacing. It's not happening. I remember speaking to a

head teacher not long ago, who every time it rains, they have to bring the saucepans out.

And the buckets out. And they're doing their own fundraising just to mend their own roofs.

And this is crazy. I mean, it's absolutely, it's not just crazy. It is a national disgrace. I mean,

at the end of the day, sometimes we haven't heard a minister say this yet. And let's hope they don't

say it, not least for their own PR. But it has occasionally been the case over the years that

you hear ministers say things like, well, you don't need great school buildings to have a great

education. Well, last time I checked the Eatons, the Harrows, the Westminster's Rishi Sunak of this

world, I think their school building is in such a bad state. And it sends a message to kids, you

know, we're expecting kids to go into school every day and learn and we're telling them that it's

important. And then they go around and they see a school building, which is in a terrible condition,

or they've got holes in their roofs. That sends a message to kids that, you know what, the state,

the community is at large, doesn't really care about you very much. Or worse, that they're not

able to go into those schools and they're considering what it's like to be back at home, to not see

your mates, to be having to revisit online learning and all the dislocation and all the loneliness

and all the crazy upset to education that involved. Because right now we just don't know. I mean,

I was speaking to someone who used to work at the Department for Education nowadays today,

and they were saying, you know, whenever this school's repairs list used to come across their desk

and the Secretary of State's desk, it used to just make their eyes water, because they could see year

after year after year, this was cumulative. Obviously, each repair or set of repairs that

you don't do, and whatever it is, not just on concrete, but on all sorts of manner of things,

every year you don't do it, every year you defer it, is a year that it gets worse and more costly

over the long term, and that they would batter down the door of the Treasury under different

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chancellors to say, we want this money, and it wouldn't be forthcoming. And that is the frustration that we heard from Jonathan Slater. And in particular, it was much easier, and this was something else the DFA still is frustrated about, used to be frustrated about, that it was much easier to get money from number 10 and number 11 for free schools, for new schools, because that's sexy. That is something that's a government priority. We're opening 40 new free schools, we're opening 50 new free schools. That's where the money's going, much less sexy, much less interesting to say. It's repairs. We've repaired that school boiler or repaired that school roof or whatever it is. But it is so absolutely vital, and there is a direct link between sometimes opening unnecessary schools, new schools, and not just repairing the estate of what you've got. And the other thing that I think makes this politically toxic, and it's something else we've spoken about on the podcast before, is that I'm sure at the Merty, Sunak, Quantitative and Computing Lab at Claremont McKenna University, where the Sunaks gave \$3 million towards its foundation, they don't have a problem with the roof. There was one other question, talking to a government source earlier today, that they were saying that there is actually quite a bit of disquiet within government about the way Keegan has handled this, that it took other parts of government by surprise that she announced that what she was going to be doing in terms of the closures and blindsided other relevant agencies. And the way this person put it to me is like, well, either one of these things is true, either the Department for Education is overreacted and made this into a bigger story than it needed to be, or the DFE have got it spot on, and the rest of the country, not just including schools, because this is used in lots of other buildings, like I say, hospitals, for example, that other big parts of the public realm could be facing disaster, either in a short or medium term.

I mean, I think that's really relevant, because from what we understand, from what you understand, this came about after a private warehouse roof collapsed. Now, I do have some sympathy for the person who's in that position now who says, do I say, or do I not say, right? And it's not just schools, it's hospitals, it's care homes, it's factories, it's offices. Again, like the cladding, once you start looking at it, it is so immense that your preferred option is just to run away. So in a sense, the fact that she said, actually, we've got to start looking at this, even if you have blindsided somebody, because the alternative is completely unthinkable.

I think it's fascinating, though, if she has blindsided Rishi Sunak on this, and number 10 didn't know what she was going to announce, because it is now embroiled and ensnared Rishi Sunak in this whole thing because of what the former permanent secretary said on the Today programme this morning. And they all sound techy. That tone is somebody who's just been taken by surprise. And of course, the trouble is, the job of Chancellor is in direct conflict, if you like, with the job of Prime Minister, that as the Treasury gatekeeper, you want to stop money being spent. That is what your role is. You want to be fiscally responsible and stop wasting money being spent. As Prime Minister, you want to feel that that money has been spent on the people that you hope are going to go to the polls for you come the next election.

But this is very family with Rishi Sunak at the moment. We'll be back after the break with the Labour reshuffle of the top table, who, if Labour wins the next election, would be making these sort of decisions.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back. Or as I now understand, we are saying, we're not saying welcome back, so not



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welcome back. We're still here. We're still here. And that's sort of got an existential quality to it, I think. We're still here. It sounds fairly threatening. We're after your lunch money. We're not going to leave until we've shaken you upside down and hung you on a peg by your blazer. God, your school days are obviously been coming back to you. It's a Gavin scandal.

Oh, where is he when you need him? Always there.

Say the reshuffle. I mean, arguably, a weird day to choose to have the spotlight on you, as the opposition party, when all you need to do is sit back and let them sort of fight each other out on the government benches. But it has been, I think, more comprehensive

than we thought. I think it suggests certain priorities now, which is, I'm going to say, Pat McFadden moving to Cabinet Office, which is something that was mooted to me about a year ago.

And there is a sense from colleagues around Keir Starmer now that it means he understands the needs of government. So I think what we're seeing is not just a shuffling of the roles, but a shuffling of the priorities. What is going to happen in government? It's preparing for government. It's preparing for an election. It's preparing for a campaign.

And it's preparing for a future, I think, which looks very different to how government has been run for the last 30 years. Of course, it is day one of Sue Gray in the new job. Not just a new term for kids at school with dodgy roofs. It's a new start for Sue Gray as Keir Starmer's chief of staff and the former kind of rat catcher general in the civil service. So I think it's very significant as well that she started because this is about preparation for government. Just Pat McFadden, if you don't know him, I mean, he's been around since the Blair years. He's also got as well as that national campaign coordinator as part of his job. So presumably, he is going to be,

have a pretty pivotal role in planning for the next general election and working out what the campaign strategy should be for it. I mean, they've deferred this many times because they were waiting for Sunak to do his probably penultimate reshuffle before the election. But given that Sunak just keeps putting it and putting it off, I think the feeling in the Labour leader's office is, well, you've got to do it before conference because there's no point having people who you don't intend to be doing those jobs, having those crucial sort of conference speeches at that crucial conference, probably the last one before the election. Shall we just run through some of the names? So Angela Rayner obviously can't be moved because she is deputy leader, but she will replace

Lisa Nandi as shadow levelling up secretary. And there is quite a strong feeling that Lisa Nandi has now been demoted. In fact, I think she said as much to Keir Starmer. This doesn't, this doesn't sound like a move up. She's moved to international development and Keir Starmer didn't say anything. And she kind of understood that it was a demotion and has treated out that she's a team player. It's just worth it. I mean, Nandi, I mean, it really is an emotion when you think about the sort of slightly longer view of it. She was shadow foreign secretary not so long ago. And now she's going to be not even shadowing a full cabinet job, but basically being the number two to David Lavin. She did stand against Keir Starmer and was a very strong rival at some point to Keir Starmer. I don't know whether that sort of has left its mark. Jim McMahon has stepped down as environment secretary. That was, I think we understand for personal reasons and health reasons.

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Shabana Mahmood is now shadow justice secretary. Ironically, she did spend her summer doing jury service. I think she did two weeks of jury service. That's what you need now.

And Rosina Ankarne is no longer in the cabinet. It's sort of famously a working doctor also in the shadow cabinet in health, but she has now been, I guess, sidelined. I mean, what else can we say?

She's now on the back benches. And she was tweeting that it was no time to drop mental health from cabinet. And I was asking about this and the response I had was the role of mental health still exists in the health team, but it's no longer attending cabinet, which is part of the Corbyn legacy. And this person said, we couldn't answer the question, why does mental health attend

cabinet, but not social care and other important things? So this reshuffle shows how serious Keir is. I'm not sure it entirely answered the question. I'm going to go back to your original question when we welcome people back and didn't welcome people back, which is still here. Yeah, are we still here? We're still here. We're still here. Is this whole question of whether it over shadows? I don't think it does. I mean, I think that, you know, the newspapers, all the news TV shows, whatever are going to be full of what is happening in schools and concrete and buried somewhere belief is going to be the labor reshuffle. And because we're political obsessives, we're doing labor reshuffle as well. I also think you can argue, and I think labor strategists will be arguing that the next year cannot just be about sort of crowing or criticizing the government. It has to be this is our plan. Come and find us. This is our plan. And we are showing that we're not going to be pushed around by, you know, another scandal or another bit of chaos or another bit of confusion in government. This is our plan for government. And so, you know, I think they can get away with saying it's day one. This is what the next year ahead looks like. So I think there's three things about this. One is it shows this is so Keir Starmer's party now. Someone like Nandi, as you say, you know, was a strong leadership rival. Unimaginable that she wouldn't have been in a senior position, you know, two or three years ago when he first came in. His power is now extremely strong. He can do what he likes. Someone put this to me that this is the demise of the soft left. I mean, if we think about like Starmer's trajectory over the past, you know, three years, he has both in terms of his policies, his personnel in the shadow cabinet and the people around him increasingly drawn on the kind of, I think you can still just about call them this sort of Blair right wing of the party.

So which by soft left, who are you talking about?

So I'm talking about people like Lisa Nandi. I'm talking about people like Rosina.

I'm talking about people like this is the return of the centrists.

It's the return of the Blair. I mean, you know, you got Liz Kendall back in the shadow cabinet. Shabana Mahmood is now been promoted. Peter Kyle been promoted. These are Starmer's people, but they're also people clearly on. And again, you know, you can argue as to whether this is still a relevant term, but I think it is in some regards, which is a sort of Blair right wing of the party, not least when we consider how relevant increasingly Blair himself and so on is in policy formulation advice is giving to the Labour leader. And then thirdly, although you're right, John, all of the attention largely is going to be on concrete. This is still getting a lot of attention. It's getting more attention than you would expect. We would normally have a shadow cabinet reshuffle. And that is because for the obvious reasons we all know, there is a widespread

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expectation that within the next year, this won't be the shadow cabinet. This will be the cabinet making the decisions on all of our lives. Maybe not within the first, within the next year. Year or so. Yeah. We think that there will almost certainly be an election before October 2020. Yeah, within a year or so. So, you know, and that these people will be far more relevant than you would normally expect on a shuffling of the deck of the shadow cabinet. So in that sense, that's why it matters. I bet you the invitations are coming in thick and fast to those shadow cabinet people to meet up with industry leaders in the areas where they're shadowing or the policy. Just cast your mind back to when we were at the Labour conference, and this is why I think it's interesting, that the last year was so taken up with the oxygen of chaos in government. The 46 days of Liz Truss, the wrangle over the summer holidays as to who was going to be leader, the Boris Johnson and the Privilegeist Committee and all that stuff, that actually, if you cast your mind back, what Labour were telling us then was that they had never done more business with business,

and we saw it for ourselves at the conferences. And I think it'll be times 10 this time round. I was talking to someone at the weekend who is working on the Labour conference, and they were said to me that this is going to be their best attended conference that they've had, certainly over the last 10 years. Well, of course it is. We're all going. But also in terms of business, so the corporate interest has exactly as you would expect been through the roof, even by comparisons last year, because they're all, let's say, they're all expecting that these will be the secretaries of state in 14, 16 months. Well, we'll be back. You heard from Jillian Keegan, the Education Secretary, a little bit earlier in the show. You didn't hear what happened when she thought the cameras had stopped rolling.

This is The News Agents.

So, a hot Mike moment, which is what they call it in the States when politician is caught. This is the end of Jillian Keegan's interview.

This is the end of the interview with the Secretary of State for Education, where I don't think she's overly happy with the tone of questions that she was being asked by ITV and presumably other interviewers during the course of her morning. And just that sensitivity and prickliness is very much on show. But we will get a plan and every single one of them will be done. Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Does anyone ever say, you know what, you've done a good job because everyone else has sat on their and done nothing. No signs of that, no? Well, no. No one ever does say that really in an interview. Can you imagine if someone did say that to her? But we're very well done, Secretary of State, for not sitting on your arse while everybody else does nothing. Well, who does she mean? Who does she mean? Well, don't you think this is connected? Who has sat on their arses while she has done everything? I think that goes back to exactly what you were saying. She's been getting, I'm reading, this is my interpretation, she's been getting incoming fire for having been too pre-emptive. And she's thinking out loud about, well at least I did something. I did something and they did and they did. I've been talking to the Department for Education this morning and I put it to them about the idea that maybe the DfE is blindsided under government departments and they're like, no, no, no, that's not right. That's not right. Now, I kind of know it's right because I've seen communications which indicate that it's right, but they're saying it's not right. So we should, we should say that. But to me, as you say Emily,

## **[Transcript] The News Agents / Why has everyone sat on their arses instead of thanking Gillian Keegan?**

that is absolute further proof that that is the dynamic that's going on in government at the moment. She is annoyed and really irritated that she feels she's done something that probably should have been done a long time ago and she is now getting all the flak for it. I tell you what, pretty punchy of ITV to put out a clip after the interview has stopped of that nature. It would not happen with a brand new government. So I think there was a level of exhaustion possibly on everyone's side, which is like, oh, so do you, so do you. It feels like it's so many ways. It's like the end game, isn't it? Yeah. It's that, it's that point a government gets to no matter what they do, every day brings disaster. I mean, you remember when Brown, when he had the injection that never was, and then the next day they lost a tax disc, which was full of everybody's details, and the next day there was something else, and the next day there was something else. All I can say is that scandals, things that made scandals seem so small now. And that comment that Gillian Keegan's just made, I'm sure won't even touch the edges. I mean, nobody will be calling for her to go, right? I mean, maybe they will be calling for her to go. I can almost guarantee she won't go because of that last statement. Whereas sort of 10 years ago, I think that would have been more in the air. Well, on the other side of this glass, Tom Hughes, our editor, is calling for us to go. I can't see him. So. Got to resign. I can't see him. He just thinks that they've got to edit this podcast into something that's kind of vaguely. You think you're really interesting or not. We switched off. We've all gone home. We've checked out. We've gone for lunch. We need to stop recording before the next catastrophe comes. Yeah, it's always tomorrow. We'll be back tomorrow. See you then. Bye bye. Bye bye.