10112022 Council of Insurance Agents and Brokers Rt Hon Boris Johnson

**Council of Insurance Agents and Brokers**

**Rt Hon Boris Johnson**

**Introducer: Chris Swift**

**Moderator: John Plummer**

**Colorado Springs, CO**

**Tuesday, October 11, 2022**

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you very much. Well, thank you very much, Chris, thank you for that very generous introduction, and it’s great to be here at this juddering climax of what I gather has been a very successful conference so far, and I must confess though that when they told me the location of my first major public speaking engagement, after leaving offices as prime minister, I was totally bewildered, and I had to mask my disappointment because some of you may know that the Broadmoor in Crowthorne and Berkshire is the UK’s number one psychiatric hospital for the criminally insane, but I didn’t let it show. I didn’t ring up the agency or moan, "Stiff upper lip, Johnson."

I said I was sure I could think of a good sermon for the criminally insane, and you can imagine my joy, however, being told that I was speaking to the Council of Insurance Agents and Brokers at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, and the only reason you can’t escape from this paradise is it seems to be the size of Wales, this hotel. It took me about an hour to find all the light switches in my room, and I know that you’re all doing well to be here, by the way, because I know you had a huge night last night with Diana Ross and "Ain’t no Mountain High Enough." She said there ain’t no paracetamol big enough in my experience for the following day, after a night out, and then if you’ve had to reach out and touch someone you love, this morning, and found it’s the wrong person, welcome, welcome to this morning’s session.

And as the governor of the other Broadmoor might say at roll call, "It’s great to see so many of you here." Because I want you to know that every time I come to America, I’m filled with an electric surge of optimism and confidence, and my message today is that optimism and confidence is just about, even though things look grim in our world today, and we’ve just emerged—as Chris has just been saying—blinking from the worst pandemic for three hundred years, and to find our world convulsed by the biggest war in Europe since 1945. And the reason Putin is launching these barbaric attacks, these missile attacks on innocent civilians is that he’s becoming increasing desperate.

In seven months, the Russians have already suffered more casualties than they suffered in the whole 10-year catastrophe of the Invasion of Afghanistan, and if they go on at this rate, it won’t be too long before Putin will have cost more Russian lives than the whole of the American death toll in the 20-year Vietnam conflict. And with the Kremlin nakedly and irresponsibly talking about the use of nuclear weapons, for the first time in my lifetime, I want to talk to you all frankly about the risks ahead, because I believe that in one important sense, I’m among friends and colleagues because we’re all, after all, professional calculators of risk, and for the last 15 years I have been doing all sorts of jobs in UK politics, I’ve had to work out all kinds of risks.

When I was Mayor of London, they came to me and they said, "It might rain on the VIPs during the opening ceremony of the Olympics," because we saved money by only building a partial roof over the stadium. And I said, "Give me a break, because as a cyclist, I know that it is not raining in London 94% of the time," but some of my colleagues in central government panicked and they spend millions on – about $20 million on about 70,000 pointless plastic ponchos. And I was right. I was proved right because there was a bit of light drizzle. I accept that there was a bit of light drizzle on the opening ceremony, but nobody needed to use a poncho, and there’s now a plastic poncho mountain somewhere in London.

And then they came to me, and they said, "Look," and that I was being mad and reckless to encourage the take-up of cycling at a huge scale, you know, bicycling in London, and I was flooding the streets of our great capital with thousands and thousands of novice cyclists, wobbling around, talking on their mobile phones. And I said, "No, no, no, we’re going to keep going," because I knew, as I’m sure you all do, I hope, the massive cardiac benefits, the euphoria and the serotonin you get from gliding around, beneath the plane trees in our lovely capital city.

And the result was that we had so many people cycling, such vast Pelotons of happy cyclers in suits, that the risks actually went down, and cycling became not just relatively but absolutely safer, and there were fewer deaths overall. In eight years of cycling, every day around the streets of London, I only had one accident when I hit a tourist who was coming out of one of our excellent restaurants, more Michelin Stars than Paris, and he was looking the wrong way. He was French, and it was fine. We’d both had a good lunch, and we rapidly recovered.

Anyway, they then came to me, and they said it was reckless and dangerous for us to call for the UK to leave the European Union, and they said the economy would crash, and millions of people would be thrown out of work. Well, folks, as I speak to you today, whatever you may read, in the *New York Times* or any other publications, the UK has the lowest unemployment rates since 1974, which is before a lot of you were born by the look of you, and we are lengthening our lead as the number one destination for global investment especially in tech of all kinds, fintech, medtech, edtech, Greentech, nanotech, biotech, and it sounds like 15th century Mexico in London, and we’re getting more unicorns.

There’s a unicorn every two weeks in our countries than France, Germany, and Israel put together. We’re taking advantage of our new freedoms that Chris mentioned to get rid of onerous regulations such as MiFID and Solvency II. We’ve done a huge number of free trade deals, I think about 76, and okay, we haven’t yet done a free trade deal with the United States of America, and so I regret it, but we are selling you, I’m proud to say – whether you are buying it or not, I don’t know, but we are selling you British beef for the first time in decades.

And I have to ask you people here in Colorado Springs, how have you managed to get by without eating the roast beef of Old England? What have you been worried about, you brilliant calculators of risk. You’re the guys that you should know, what is the risk? What is the risk of contracting mad cow disease from eating British beef? What is it, would you say? One in ten billion? I mean it’s probably about the same as being decapitated by a Frisbee.

I tell you something, it is much, much lower. You know, you would have worked all this out, you guys, you’ll know the numbers, it is much, much lower than being blinded by champagne cork, or being locked in a disused fridge, which happens all the time, apparently. And so I was right about all those risks, and as soon as we got a vaccine for COVID, the AstraZeneca vaccine and others, the gloomadon-poppers came to me and they said, "Look, this thing could be dangerous." And I said, "Get me the numbers. What is the risk of dying of a thrombosis of the COVID vaccine? It’s far, far lower than the risk from COVID itself."

And so that was why the UK was the first country to put an approved COVID vaccine into anybody’s arm, anywhere in the world. That’s why we had the fastest vaccine rollout in Europe, and that’s why we were the fastest major economy to come out of lockdown, July 19th, of last year. And I know all this may sound a bit like bragging, but in my experience at this particular stage in my political career, if you didn’t say these things then nobody else is going to see them for you. And I want to use this involuntary hiatus in my political career to talk about these risks, and to talk about how we can protect ourselves and our collective economic future.

And it’s fantastic to talk some of you this morning and feel the positivity and I share that. Here in this great state of Colorado, I want to talk in particular about the role of the United States of America. And I speak by the way, as a proud native of this country. I was born in New York. It later turned out to be very expensive decision on the adoption of global taxation. I paid up. I paid up, even though I – I wanted to be close to my mother at the time, and there was not enough money for it, but it’s meant that I’ve always been a lifelong believer in the Transatlantic Alliance and the values incarnated, I think, by our two countries. And I mean those values of democracy and freedom. And I think that, in spite of all the difficulties that we face today, I think that freedom is going to win. Let me give you a couple of reasons for my optimism.

Hands up, anybody here who has been vaccinated against COVID. Okay, (inaudible), I think there. Hands up, anybody who’s been vaccinated with Sinopharm or Sinovac. (Inaudible), okay, that’s interesting. Hands up, if you’ve had Sputnik. Okay, that’s – all right, I don’t know what Sputnik is. I think it’s a delicious mixture of monkey glands and antifreeze or something, but do you remember all that stuff in the liberal media? All that stuff in the liberal media about the handling of COVID how China had put us all to shame in the way that they were running the pandemic, do you remember that? They were locking people up in filing cabinets and barricading them in broom cupboards and so on. And do you remember being told that the democracies were failing in the battle against the disease that our very love of freedom was itself the problem?

I say phooey to all that, because what was notable about the vaccines that actually worked, with all due respect to Sinopharm and Sinovac, I mean, the ones that actually stopped you getting COVID, was that they were made by Western pharmaceutical companies, and they were not made by the repressive former communist autocracies.

Now, I speak as a long-standing admirer of China’s culture, and civilization. I rang my father up not long ago, to find out that he was still locked in his hotel. This is a couple of weeks ago, locked in his hotel in Chengdu. And he’d actually watched *Godfather I*, *Godfather II* and *Godfather II*, and he said it was even better in Chinese. I’d watched *Meet the Fockers*, and he’d been there – I don’t know how that was in Chinese, but anyway, he told me, just as he thought he was going to get out of lockdown from his hotel, they put the whole of Chengdu into lockdown.

Well, folks, we haven’t had any restrictions in the UK, at all, since July the 19th of last year, and again, I hope I’m not bragging, but I’m just saying that, when people call "time" on the liberal democracies, and they say our model is no longer adequate for our times, I think they’re premature and they’re wrong. And they are wrong when they say that we’ll no longer have the will to protect ourselves and our values. Because when it comes to the greatest threat to global peace and prosperity today, the greatest risk to world order that we face, I mean, the war that’s going on, our two countries—the U.S. and the UK—are once again, standing side by side, and standing for democracy and freedom.

I remember towards the end of last year having this this surging sense of optimism that you remember things were looking as though they were turning around. We’d seen off COVID. It looked as though we were going to get rid of that. We had a great COP26 summit in Glasgow, the climate change summit, and we could see how we were going to get through that, powering past the dependence on coal, putting in zero-carbon vehicles everywhere, planting gazillions of trees. And you can see, just like with the vaccine, how mankind, humanity’s promethium technological optimism was going to fix the problem. And we’re going to create millions of high-waged/high-skilled jobs in those industries, in those green industries at the same time.

It was very exciting. I was full of optimism until February 24th of this year when a risk that we had all dismissed, a black swan, actually came true. I couldn’t believe that Putin would be so insane to invade a country of 45 million people, a country that had an army of 200,000 strong.

I couldn’t believe that he would take on the Ukrainians.

I’ll never forget it was the 10 million Soviet Ukrainian troops that helped route the Nazis into World War II. They are incredible fighters. And we were wrong. We have to admit it. Because it was Putin who miscalculated the risk. And I’m proud that the UK was amongst the first countries to give them those anti-tank weapons that have been so important in those early days of the conflict in February and March. But my message to you today is I know there was one country that really turned the dial and made the difference, and that is the USA. And I think that Americans have not gotten enough credit around the world for what you have done. And in my first chances to speak to an influential American audience, since leaving office, I just want to say thank you to America, because you are helping to keep a country free. You are helping to protect an entirely innocent people, giving them the help they need to defend their families and their homes against a vicious and entirely unprovoked attack

And my message to you, everybody you meet, spread it, stay strong. Stay the course. Don’t be spooked by the saber rattling and Putin’s nuclear blather. He’s like the fat boy in the Dickens. He wants to make your flesh creep. If you ask me about the risk that he will actually do it, I would say that risk is verging on zero. Because if he does that, if he uses nuclear weapons against the country that poses no threat to him or his people, if he becomes the first man to use nuclear weapons, since 1945, simply because he cannot accept the reality that he was wrong about Ukraine, because he can’t accept the insult to his ego, then he tenders the immediate resignation of Russia from the club of civilized nations. And he will turn his country into a moral leper colony and plunge his economy into a cryogenic paralysis in which it will not recover. And that’s after the immediate strategic countermeasures which the West would be obliged to take, and which it wouldn’t, of course, be sensible to discuss.

And if he does that, he forfeits any kind of sympathy among the swing voters and the countries that have so far given him far too much of a benefit of the doubt, in my view, and I’m thinking about countries in South Asia, Latin America and in Sub-Saharan Africa. And if he does that, I think he loses the patience of the Chinese, and I think if he uses nuclear weapons, then that simmering magma of domestic Russian anxiety about what is happening now in Ukraine will overflow. And that is fundamentally why I dismissed his talk, and I urge us all not to go down the psychological rabbit hole. Don’t let Putin frame this in the way that he wants as a standoff between a nuclear NATO and a nuclear Russia.

This is about an entirely legitimate campaign to help the Ukrainians to protect their country with the equipment they need, just as you would help your neighbor with a hose or a fire extinguisher if their home was on fire. The Ukrainians are going to win because Putin fatally misunderstood them and how much they love their country, how willingly and how heroically, they will fight. And it is not our job to provide him with an offramp or a face saver. He has plenty of ways of explaining what has happened to the Russian population, and to judge by the opinion polls, they will swallow just about anything.

And it’s not our job to worry about what happens in the Kremlin, any more than we should worry about what happens in Westminster. I worry about that a bit, obviously, but I don’t worry about what happens in the Kremlin. Our job is to help the Ukrainians to win. And so I say to you, folks, let’s double down on our support. Let’s give them the tanks and the fighter planes they need. Let’s give them more of what America has been doing so superbly. Give them the high-mile, long-range rocket systems, the multiple-launch rocket systems. And let’s help them take part at least every bit of their country that Putin has invaded since February the 24th.

And look, I know that in these tough times, there are plenty politicians in Europe and in the U.S. who say it’s not worth it. And they say the economic downside will be too bad. And I tell you why it is worth it. It’s worth it because with every week that goes by, Putin gets weaker and we get stronger, and with every windfarm that we greenlight, with every nuclear power station that we get going—and we’re doing one a year, rather than run every decade in the UK now—Europe is becoming less and less vulnerable to Putin’s energy blackmail.

And it’s worth backing the Ukrainians for this reason. If and when they win—and they will—it will send a message around the world that freedom matters. And I’m thinking about East Asia and the streets of Taiwan. And it will tell the planet that we do see a difference between a democracy and a tyranny. It will show that, after decades of retreat and passivity, that we are willing to stand up for our values. And if and when the Ukrainians win, it will show something of supreme value to us all, that aggression does not pay. The borders must be respected, and that you can’t just crush international law and the rights of free peoples.

And never forget that when, in 1942, America finally decided to do the right thing, having exhausted all the other available options, and came in on the side of freedom as you did, and to resist the tyrannical changing of borders in Europe by force, that great and humane intervention paved the way for decade after decade of peace and prosperity and stability under a new rules-based international order. And that is why sticking up for Ukraine is the right thing to do for the long-term stability of the world economy. And that’s why I think this is a pivotal moment in our post-war history.

And that’s why this is a chance to reduce the risks to our children and to our grandchildren. That’s why I want to thank you. I want to thank everybody here. I want to thank the people of America, this great country, for what you’ve done in the last eight months to help protect the people of Ukraine, and everything that you are continuing to do. And I want to thank you all for listening patiently to me today. Thank you all very much.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Thank you. That was fantastic, Mr. Johnson. Thank you very much for that. We will miss your oratory on a daily basis.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** And so –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ll be back all too soon.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** (Crosstalk) a little bit left for a chat.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, sure.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** And I feel a bit bad that you had to fly 9-1/2 hours to be interviewed by a Brit.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, I was absolutely thrilled. I was absolutely thrilled. It’s wonderful to be here, and what I’m so amazed by – I mean what I say about the air of positivity and the can-do spirit you get, just as soon as you arrive in America. The attitude is totally different. The European thing is –

**JOHN PLUMMER:** It’s so positive, right?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It is positive, and I’m delighted to see it.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** So we’ve got a few things to run through, and you’ve touched on lots of them, but I just wanted to mention to begin with that there’s a new TV series out in the UK, already, called *This England*, a miniseries featuring one of our great thespian actors, sir Kenneth Branagh, playing Mr. Boris Johnson.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I haven’t seen it. I haven’t seen it – I haven’t seen it. I heard – but I haven’t seen it.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I’ve seen 30 minutes of it, and it was enough. And he sort of makes a decent stab of it, and he gets some of the things right, but one thing that they and Netflix got wrong is they didn’t get the hair right.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Oh, really, well, I can’t – it’s a great honor to be played by a world-leading actor like that, but you know – what channel is it on?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I don’t know, it’s not worth following, you know? It’s not very good.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think we should steer our audience away from it, John.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Exactly, exactly.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think they look like they can survive without it.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** So, I mean, obviously, you spent a lot of time on Ukraine, and you were the first Western leader to visit Ukraine. Great images of you striding around surrounded by everybody in their flak jackets and military uniform, wearing your normal suit and tie, which was terrific. But do you think that the response from the European Union has been disappointing compared to how great America has been?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think the heroes of the of the Ukraine – can you hear me, everybody? The heroes have been the Ukrainian people who put up – I mean, the savagery that they have experienced is unbelievable. They’re getting their cities pulverized. Kindergartens blown up, you know, systematic use of rape. It’s absolutely appalling what Putin is doing, but their bravery is incredible.

I pay tribute to Volodymyr Zelensky, a quite unbelievable wartime leader. Who would have thought that this guy, you know, this TV actor – he’s proved absolutely – historic figure. I think things would have been very different without him. But also, as I said in my – and I mean, forgive me if I really give it both barrels on Ukraine, but it matters so much, and the consistency and the support from the United States is so, so crucial. I really want to pay tribute to the government of the U.S., and they – as so often with America, it took a while, but when they come in, they come in and they make a huge difference, and it’s been extraordinary.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** It’s definitely exposed the danger of the over reliance to an autocratic regime like Russia for oil and gas, and Europe was very exposed to that. Do you think that’s going to put a brake on the drive to net-zero as Germany is already re-firing up coal fire generating stations?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I mean, it’s a great It’s a great – net-zero has got a terrible name now, in my country, you know, where everybody moans about net-zero. What do you – hands up, who thinks that net-zero, that trying to reduce emissions overall to net-zero by 2050 is a sensible thing to do still, who thinks it’s a sensible thing to do? We’ve got some pretty tepid support here for net-zero. Who thinks basically that it should – you know, it’s too difficult, it’s too expensive, we need to give it up now and just, you know, drink deep of the rich poison of hydrocarbons? I’m sorry, I don’t want to load the question.

I think we need to recognize that you can do both. And yes, of course, you’re going to need hydrocarbons for the transition, and it’s difficult, but what Putin’s invasion has proven is that we were perhaps over optimistic. COP26 was a high watermark, you know, the big summit in Glasgow in the UK, where everybody agreed to move past using coal power stations. It was a very – countries made big, big commitments on reducing CO2, but maybe we tried to move too far, too fast.

And that’s why, as you have said, the Germans are having to use some coal power stations, and it will take a bit longer. And here in the U.S., you’re doing a lot of fracking and stuff, and I understand that, but the opportunity from green technology is massive. I mean, there are days in the UK when about half of our electricity comes from wind power. And I got to be honest with you, folks, you know, 20 years ago, I was writing blistering columns, maybe longer now, but in the pages of conservative publications, saying that wind power wouldn’t pull the skin off a rice pudding. And it was, it was crazy. Why would we be wasting our time on this primitive technology.

I was wrong. Wind power produces huge amounts of clean electricity. And it also produces lots of good jobs. And so my message would be, you’ve got to shade it, we’re going have to take a bit more time, but in the end, a net-zero program is the right thing to do.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Well, we definitely do better with wind than we do with solar in the UK.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, no, we’re – yeah. Well, as I said, it’s not raining 94% of the time in London, but it’s not necessarily sunny.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** True.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** But we have a surprising amount of solar energy, really.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I cycle every day too, so I’m one of those. I’m one of those. But do you think there’s a withdrawal now back into people looking much more nationally at their energy, at their food supplies? I think the Ukraine war has spooked a lot of people. In the long term, do you think that’s going to affect how we look at globalization? We see certain companies pulling back from Chinese manufacturing. Do you see that as a trend?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I do see that happening, and I do think, certainly, when it comes to food supplies, there is a big push for much more national self-reliance. And we in the UK, you know, we import huge quantities of our food which we could grow ourselves. But I’ve got to tell you, I think that, if the upshot of this whole thing is that we give up on the idea of free trade and comparative advantage, then you know, we’ll have taken a big step backwards. And I think that – I don’t think that we should be trying to produce some sort of autarkic system in which every major economy does everything for itself.

The only caveat I would enter is that when it comes to your critical national infrastructure, you probably want to make sure that you can run it and manage it yourself. And so, if you look at

where I think we went wrong in the UK, was we probably were too optimistic in deciding to do big partnerships on nuclear technology, on 5G telecommunications with the Chinese, and I think they understand that we need to find another way forward.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You touched on Brexit, very helpful in your speech around the AstraZeneca vaccine, and that’s a huge tick in the box for Brexit.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Who had AstraZeneca, by the way? You had Sinopharm and AstraZeneca. You’re a vaccine man, full of vaccines. That’s what I call insurance. That’s superb. Sinopharm has – which would you recommend?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Oh, really?

**PARTICIPANT:** (Off mic.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Oh, really. Funny. That’s interesting. I had Astra. I had a lot of Astra. Mind you, I had COVID.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You had very bad COVID.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I did. It knocked me out, completely. Did you have it?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Recently, but pretty mild. You were hospitalized and you were pretty ill.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah, no, it was terribly pathetic. It was, it was terrible. Yeah, no, I agree.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** So look, this whole Brexit situation is a simmering boil, really, in political discourse.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’d say it’s a boil that’s been pretty effectively lanced. I would say it’s a boil that’d voided it’s toxic matter into space some time ago, and that we need to proceed.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You don’t think that it’s sort of like the Japanese prisoners of war, the Remoaners, the Remainers are still there, plotting and planning and never giving up?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t think so, really, no. Look, I think the onus is on people like me who championed it to make it work and to deliver the benefits. That’s what people want to see.

So yeah, I can point out, which I think is a reasonable point, that because we had our own independent medical health regulatory agency, MHRA, and we weren’t part of the European system anymore, we were able to go faster. And that did produce the most extraordinary situation in which, because of the NHS, because of the way the rollout captured public imagination – everybody wanted to get vaccinated – we started to do it very, very fast.

And I’ve got to tell you, the European countries were not too chuffed by this, and they particularly disliked it when I started saying that it was partly because of Brexit. Then that really cheesed them off, big time. (Laughter.) And I’m sorry if I’ve caused irritation, but I suppose I mean to. (Laughter.)

I mean, this was a very grim time, if you remember, when populations were facing real economic difficulties. We’re still living with the consequences. All the trouble we’re having now was caused by those decisions we had to take during COVID. And I won’t hide it from you, but maybe I’ll tell the full story one day soon, but they took active steps to stop us getting some of the vaccines we needed at the moment that we needed them. There was a protracted row about a particular consignment of Astra that was stranded in Holland.

Anyway, this is the subject so miserable and so sensitive it perhaps should be reserved for a future date, but it was not a happy period. And I think what the UK needs to do is show that Brexit doesn’t have to be a zero sum for our European friends. I think it can be something that works for them.

Never forget, the UK was always the back marker. We were in those conversations around the table in Brussels. We were always the ones who were saying, “No, no, no, no, we don’t want to do this. We don’t want a single currency. We don’t want a single European diplomatic policy. We don’t want a single European army, or whatever. We don’t believe in all this.”

And so, it kind of felt like we were holding them up. And I think that outside, we can be massively supportive, as we are, but we can help to lead in a different way.

I think when you look at things like Ukraine, we were integrally involved with our European partners in all the thinking and all the discussion, but we had the freedom to chart our own way. And I think that that was creatively more useful to the Europeans. And so, on things like regulation and legislation on MiFID and solvency, too, all these things where we’re going to be doing things differently, I think that will be the grit in the oyster for the Europeans. And they’ll think, well, we’ve got this big economy offshore. Do we really want to be fettering ourselves with one brand of a regulation when they’re doing something differently?

So, I’m positive about it, but I’m positive about the benefits of Brexit for Europe as well, for the other European countries.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I mean, the problem that I see with it is most swathes of the media are still very anti-Brexit. There’s not a lot of positive reporting going on. And I mean, I just wonder, because you bore the brunt of some pretty vicious media campaigns over your time in office. And I wonder how much of that goes back to their dislike of Brexit and the fact that you got Brexit done, as you mentioned a couple of times. Do you think it goes back to that?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, I think probably, but the thing about the media is politics, you’ve just got to take it. Has anybody read a play called *Measure for Measure*? Yeah, you’ve read *Measure for Measure* by a famous English author called William Shakespeare. And I just read it, I read it the other day, and it’s absolutely brilliant because this guy, the Duke, he cannot stand the criticism. He cannot stand being blamed for the way things are going wrong in Vienna. Everybody’s got the plague, you remember, and they got venereal diseases they haven’t (inaudible). And he just freaks out, and he leaves the – and now I’m telling you all this. Anyway, he leaves the government of Vienna to somebody else, and it’s pathetic. He should have stuck with it.

I mean, what I’m saying is politics is a tough old game. And the media, of course, it’s their job to make life difficult for politicians. And, frankly, here’s a thought, if Vladimir Putin had a free media, if Vladimir Putin had a proper opposition, he wouldn’t have done something so catastrophically stupid as invade Ukraine. So, there’s a merit to our system.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** But do you think that the media, as well, helps promote this? What we’ve seen over the last five years is a much more bitter and toxic discourse from left to right, both in the U.S. and very much in the UK. I mean, we hear some of the comments from your opposition parties that, 10 years ago, I don’t think we would have been hearing those sorts of things.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Let me give you a reason why I think this is the case, okay, and it’s about Brexit and about why we won the argument for Brexit. In the end, the media couldn’t beat us on the facts. They couldn’t beat us on the arguments. They couldn’t find convincing reasons why the UK had to be part of this system and why the UK had to be bound, which is an ancient democracy, had to be bound into the EU structures in the way that it was. And yet they felt emotionally very strongly that that was the way they wanted things to be, because that’s what the liberal elites wanted in the UK.

And when they found that they couldn’t win the arguments, they decided to play the man, not the ball. And I don’t know whether you had that expression. Do you know what I mean by play – you know, going hard and low? (Laughter.) Is that what the Denver Broncos do?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** It’s a rugby term. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Actually, you’re meant to do that in rugby. You’re meant to go in hard and low.

Anyway, they decided they had to discredit the messengers rather than the message, because they couldn’t win on the arguments. They couldn’t defeat the logic, and that was probably what was going on. And that still is a large chunk of it.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** And do you think, though, that, again, going back to try to sort of draw you out with, former President Trump was a very divisive figure? I think because of Brexit, you have been as well. And let’s start the debate.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think, happy though my relations have been with all U.S. presidents that I have met, I sometimes feel there’s a sort of slightly unfair illusion between me and other people. Look, I think Donald had a lot of good ideas, and I certainly enjoyed my conversations with him. But I would resist glib analogy.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I wasn’t trying to link you two together in any way. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** He would probably resist it, too, actually. He wouldn’t want to be associated with me.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I wouldn’t think he’s read *Measure for Measure*, either. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** He might, would’ve done. He wouldn’t be like the Duke; he’d be a lot better than the Duke in *Measure for Measure*.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Yeah.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I mean, what the Duke in *Measure for Measure* needs to do is get on Twitter and give his leftwing critics hell. That’s what he should have done, anyway.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** All right, let’s move on –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Trump, that’s what he should’ve done.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** With happier times. Your amazing general election victory, biggest vote share, 80-seat majority, and you’d barely got your feet under the desk, and then COVID came along. And I just wonder how much of your agenda was stolen by having to commit so much resource, so much of your time to the pandemic?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was incredibly frustrating, I’ve got to admit, because so much government energy was absorbed by this massive project of trying to protect the public. And I think overall, we did a pretty good job, if you look at the numbers. Not every decision was easy, and I’m sure people will go over it and quarrel with a lot of it. But yeah, it sucked up a huge amount of time, but we still did get a lot of stuff done.

And I will just point out to you that in the last three years, the UK, in spite of COVID, in spite of everything, Brexit, whatever, we’ve delivered the biggest infrastructure program probably for 100 years – I mean, three new highspeed rail lines we’re building, which is a lot for a country as heavily populated as the UK. The amount of gigabit broadband that we have, when I became the Prime Minister, I think 7% of UK households had gigabit broadband. Gigabit broadband is very, very good. You can watch as many movies as you like at the same time; you can do anything you want. It’s now 70%, and that was a huge, huge rollout.

We got crime down by a lot, not just because we locked down the population, though that was very useful. (Laughter.) Even after COVID, neighborhood crime is down by about 38%. And we put a lot more police out on the streets who are doing serious, grown-up policing. And a lot of the big things, we’re building loads more hospitals. I’ve given you some of the numbers about investments in the UK.

A lot of the things are really very, very propitious. And so, I’m content with a lot of it, but clearly, it was a frustrating and difficult time.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** And I know you won’t be drawn on the current difficulties that the government are having, but do you see all roads leading back to COVID, that really is creating some of the difficulties that they’re having?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think everybody is. If you look around the world, everybody’s adjusting to post-COVID shocks and there’s pressure on interest rates as the dollar, the almighty dollar, as usual is doing what it will. And the rest of the world, and of course, the United States has to manage the consequences of that. But we’re going to come through; we’re going to come through.

And I just want to get back to my message, the thing I was saying about net zero. The opportunity for us to use technological progress, to transform the life chances of our children, grandchildren, and to fix global warming, it’s incredible. And I never believed it, but I’m really starting to think we can do it. And so, I’m basically optimistic about all that.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Well, we’ll miss your positivity, too, Mr. Johnson, going forward.

Let’s chat a little bit, a bit more internationally and about the G7. You were host of the G7, and there’s a couple of things there. First of all, this meeting here is the sort of pinnacle meeting for the senior leadership in the insurance industry, and is a logistical challenge, and huge amounts of organization goes into it, but you hosted the G7 in Cornwall.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Talking of logistical challenges.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was unbelievable.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You were obviously very lucky that the sun shone on you, but maybe you could touch a little bit on all of that organization and what came out of that G7 meeting.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** The G7 is a fantastic thing, and it’s a brilliant, brilliant institution because at its best, you really get the leaders of the most affluent, the rich and the powerful democracies, forced to address issues, mano a mano, and round the table. And that’s what we did.

And so, it was at the G7, I think in Carbis Bay in Cornwall, that Joe Biden and I first really talked about Afghanistan and what was going to happen there. And that was the first serious conversation that we’d had the chance to have about this nightmare situation, and how Joe felt about it. And that had huge implications for the world, actually, because when the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan, that had all sorts of knock-on implications. So that was a very important conversation, but it also get quite – and we talked about how we were going to help the world tackle climate change, and that sort of thing.

It gets quite sort of convivial. So my good friend, Emmanuel Macron, bought some fine French wine that he – I can’t remember, there was some political significance in this wine. And he gave it to Joe, who I don’t think drinks very much. And so, we had it – (laughter) – or rather, Angela Merkel and I had it. And we had a very long (eve?), and by the way, you discover things about people that you’d never believe. Angela Merkel is, in fact, extremely funny, and we had a riotous evening. And I can’t remember exactly what happened, but I do know what happened at the G7 in Cornwall. (Laughter.) You’re not filming this, are you? (Laughter.)

At the G7 in Cornwall, I’ll tell you what happened, is we came up – the Australian guy was there, Scott Morrison, and we came up with this brilliant idea. And given what’s happening in the Pacific and the need for everybody to share technology, we came up with this plan for an Australia/U.S./UK defense pact called AUKUS. And what we forgot, or which I forgot, was that unfortunately, there was a separate agreement that that Scott had done, or the Australians had done, I think, to be more accurate, with the French for the same submarines. And so, the thing didn’t go; that caused a certain amount of tension – (laughter) – but we sorted that out.

And the point about these events is that it gives you the chance to really to get to understand how other people think and what’s driving them. And the value of those personal relationships is enormous, because in the end, you need to be able to ring them up when push comes to shove and say, “Look, I really think this is a crucial thing.” And whether it’s Ukraine or whatever, it makes a huge (crosstalk/inaudible).

So, people on the outside, I think most members of the public, most Brits looking at the G7 in Cornwall thought, what a waste of time, all this summit hearing, but actually, I think they’re very, very valuable.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Yeah, they look very stage managed with all group photos and everything. It’s good to know that real things are discussed, and decisions are made behind the scenes, as well as some nice French wine.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah. It was called Lafayette, for some reason. I think it was – anyway, I can’t remember. It was a French wine that was produced by that French General who supported America in the War of Independence, I think. Anyway, it was drunk by British prime minister – (laughter) – which I’m sure was the intention. (Laughter.)

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Mr. Johnson, it’s obviously early days for you in this maybe slightly unexpected pause in your career. As you sort of reflect in these early times, what plans for the next few years?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah. Look, as I kind of tried to say earlier on, I’ve been doing big jobs in UK politics for 15 years now, and I haven’t really done anything else. And I’ve got a lot of things that I’m enjoying doing, and I’ve got quite small children – one’s two and one’s something like nine months, no, a bit more, a bit more – (laughter) – and it’s a lot of fun.

I’m obviously thinking about what else I can do to be of use, but I think for the time being, I’m going to do what I remember doing for many, many years, which is write books, write articles. As I say, I’m trying to rescue this unjustly neglected author, William Shakespeare, from obscurity. We’ll have another book on that. (Laughter.) I’ve got a lot of things I’m trying to do.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** What’s your sort of view, as you’re going to be writing about things, around the increasing woke agenda? Let’s know what your thoughts are around that, because there are –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Give me an example of woke.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You’re sort of limited by what you can and can’t say and what (crosstalk/inaudible) –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, no, no, I think I’m unleashed. (Laughter.) I think I’m unfettered, I am uncorked, I’m (traveled?), I’m lit, I’m whatever. (Laughter.)

**JOHN PLUMMER:** (Crosstalk/inaudible.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** (Laughter.) What would you say is a woke – give an example of a woke expression that you don’t like?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I’m not allowed to say it because it’s too woke. I’ll offend somebody if I say it.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Why don’t we ask the audience if they can think of a woke thing that they would like – that they feel nervous in saying nowadays? Is there any woke phrase?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Well, on climate change, for example, if you express cynicism or doubt about climate change, you run the risk of cancel culture and being closed down. That’s maybe an acceptable one.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Do you run the risk of being closed down?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I think there’s a lot of groupthink when it comes to that.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Okay, well, I’ve got to admit, I was in that camp 20 years ago. And I thought, where was the evidence? I thought it was quasi-religious. I thought that everybody was being kind of morally kind of dragooned into believing that the earth was going to sizzle up like a sausage. But actually, when I became prime minister, I’ve got to tell you, I got them in and I got them to go over it over and over and over again, the risks, the question of CO2 in the atmosphere, what happens when it goes above a certain number, and I read about it.

And in the end, I just find I couldn’t contradict them anymore. And it seemed to me that we’re all talking about risk, we’re talking about how to manage these things. It seems to me that the catastrophe, if they were right, was so great and the insurance policy that we could take out was so simple vis technology, that we had to take out the insurance policy. And so, I became a convert. But that doesn’t mean I think people should be crushed if they if they dissent, if they disagree. I mean, I think they just need to look at the science.

Are you actually a denier?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** I’m not a denier, no, but I think driving an electric car charged up by a diesel generator and things like that are maybe a little bit confusing.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Is anybody here a denier? I mean, it’s okay. This is a confessional; this is a fireside chat. No, you’re all off the record; nobody knows. (Laughter.) Who actually harbors a distinct skepticism about what you’re being told about climate change?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Not many.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s very difficult to say so, isn’t it? (Laughter.) I kind of think it’s true. I used not to, but I kind of think it is. I think we’ve got to fix it; I think we can fix it. I think it’s our job to fix it. And so, what else is woke?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** What else is woke? I really don’t want to – I shouldn’t have asked that question, because that’s – (laughter) –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** No, I’m really interested. I mean, come on.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** That is going to send me down a very dangerous path.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Why not? This is exactly what we should be doing with this time. The conference can’t go any better than it already has. You’re going to go out on a high. How can things go wrong? (Laughter.)

**JOHN PLUMMER:** It could go very badly wrong for me, so… (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Can you think of anything else woke?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Yeah, I can, but I don’t want to talk about it. (Laughter.) Let’s just touch a little bit on the state of the special relationship. Is that just an invention of the Brits, that we have a special relationship, or how robust do you think it really is?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I think it’s the gigantic fact of the last 100 years or more, isn’t it, that the United States has guaranteed our security in Europe and has come over and has basically set the world to rights, and that the relationship with the UK has been indispensable in making sure that that happens. And I think that it’s a very – look, if it didn’t exist, we’d have to invent it.

And I’m not saying it depends on sentiment. And obviously, I think that the people of the great republic of the United States of America don’t necessarily feel any particular attachment to this relationship for any reasons of history, or whatever. I think they just, they just see that it’s important for the world today.

I think we in the UK, we’ve got to understand that we’re not special. We want to we want to be as useful as we can possibly be, but there’s nothing special about the population of UK that should favor them with a relationship. I just think it’s the fact we’re democracies where we have a massive, massive, shared history. And, yeah, we’re divided by a common language and all the rest of it, but in the end, we do things together. And overwhelmingly, the world has been better for that. But that doesn’t mean it hasn’t been bumpy. It’s been very bumpy at times.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Thank you. The final question, really, or the final thing I think we’d like to hear your views about, of course, you knew the Queen very well. You had weekly audiences with her, with the late Queen, and you were one of the last people to meet her late Majesty in person. And I just think we’d all really liked you to reflect on, one, what she meant to you personally, and also, more broadly, and then the second part of that would be the outlook for the monarchy under King Charles.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. Look, John, I think it was one of the great, great privileges of being Prime Minister, is that you get to go and have audiences every week with Her Majesty, the Queen, as I did with Her late Majesty. And they were always extraordinary events. As Barack Obama actually said, when he was asked about which was the most amazing states person he’d ever met, for some reason, he pulled out Her Majesty the Queen. And she just had seen so much and known so much. She’d met everybody.

And I can’t tell you because of our convention, anything she said to me, but she knew what was going on in politics. She often knew things before I did. It was sort of embarrassing. I would go in, and one time – and I can tell you this – one time, I went in, and one of our planes, one of our very expensive ones, an F35, someone had left a kind of air intake cover on the top of the engine, and it had fallen into the seam. It was about 135 million bucks worth, probably, we’d lost. And she knew all about it before I did. And she often knew political gossip as well, because she had the Privy Council.

I would say the thing about our late queen was that she brilliantly constructed the modern constitutional monarchy. We have, in our country, in the UK, a system whereby an entirely different institution represents the history, the continuity, the values of the country, and it’s to that institution that public servants, the army, the armed services, pledge their loyalty. And it’s to that institution that people feel this undivided affinity. And that works because that institution, the monarchy, is totally separate from business or from party politics, or whatever. And she absolutely brilliantly understood how to do that. And she navigated this path for 70 years of British history, a time of extraordinary change, and left that institution in better repair than ever before.

And you could also say that in her time as Queen, as a monarch, you saw more improvement in the prosperity, the longevity, the opportunity of the British people than under any previous monarch. And she was quite, quite extraordinary figure.

And on your point about the future, I think it is her greatest legacy that the Constitution is guaranteed in the way that it is. And her own passing was greeted with a huge outpouring of love and affection. But also, what perhaps wasn’t quite so expected, the arrival of King Charles was also greeted with a huge infusion of love and support. And so, she not only helped to create the modern, constitutional monarchy, but handed it on in great shape. And I think she was also a wonderful person, and very, very funny.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Because people that don’t have a monarchy will wonder about the vanity of it, but it’s a huge amount of soft power, isn’t it?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s wonderful, and there was a long time when we lent our monarchy to the United States – (laughter) – but they decided they didn’t need it, as history shows. But the U.S. has its own system now, and look, I think everybody loves that system, too.

But what I would say is there’s an amazing – it was fascinating in Parliament on the day we all came in to pay tribute to Her Majesty, watching these hardened socialists, these people you would have thought would be Republican, absolutely committed to what she had done and to her legacy, and totally accepted the argument that the Constitution was right. And we don’t want a party-political figure as the head of state. We see the virtue in the way we do it.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** You’re confident and optimistic about our future monarchy.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, totally.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Yeah, yeah, me, too.

Well, Mr. Johnson, thank you very much for all of your insights. And there’s just sort of one final question for the locals. But apparently the Denver Broncos are playing Jacksonville at Wembley Stadium in London next month.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Really?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** We need to know who you’re rooting for.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I can say Jacksonville. I know the Jacksonville Jaguars because they were the – is it a chap with a big moustache?

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Yes.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Very nice guy.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** (Inaudible.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, and I met him when he came. I’m very proud to say that I set up the National Football League in London when I was mayor, I think, one of the many things I claim credit for. (Laughter.) I think we got them to play in Wembley in 2015. I think I have a vague memory of that. I think that’s when I met the Jacksonville Jaguars guy.

But on the Denver Broncos point, well, since I’m in Colorado, I’m clearly going to root for the Denver Broncos. Are you a Denver Broncos fan? No. Are they good, the Denver Broncos? (Laughter.) Actually, I was watching FOX News last night and I saw they’ve had a bit of trouble with injuries. Is that right? And their coach seems to be under fire.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Very good local knowledge. (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** My advice to the Denver Broncos is don’t get rid of your coach immediately. (Laughter.) I would just hang on and see how things turn out. That’s what I would say, in a Delphic kind of way.

**JOHN PLUMMER:** Very, very good advice. Well, that sort of concludes our fireside chat, but we’d like to invite our chair, Nancy, to come up and say a few closing words.

(Applause.)

END