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**Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson**

**Introducer & Moderator: Tim Hudack, CEO at OREA**

**Toronto, Ontario**

**Tuesday, November 28, 2023**

(Applause.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Good afternoon, good afternoon. Good afternoon, thank you.

**TIM HUDACK:** That’s all right, eh?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you. I know, I’m not used to that. Thank you very much. Good afternoon, good afternoon.

**TIM HUDACK:** (Laughter.) Well, thank you very much, folks. Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Good afternoon. Very good to see you.

**TIM HUDACK:** That was very nice, eh?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s wonderful to be here. It’s fantastic to be here in Canada, in Ontario.

**TIM HUDACK:** Well, let me welcome back to Toronto, Ontario, Canada. You’ve spent this much time here in your various careers, whether in politics or outside, but we do have a realtor audience here, Prime Minister.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**TIM HUDACK:** I do need to ask you, if you were to buy in Canada, where would you buy?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I would know where to come to get some advice. (Laughter.) I think, look, if it’s not going to be in Ontario, where, I mean, I think values seem very, very high, I think I would probably want to go to British Columbia.

**TIM HUDACK:** Okay.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** There’s two reasons. First of all, my grandfather went down at the age of 14 when he was expelled from school for throwing a teacher down the stairs. (Laughter.) And he was a pig farmer, but so, I’ve got a historic connection with it with that area.

But more sentimentally, for me, 12 years ago, I would try and I would get a little camping site, because I took my family there 12 years ago. And we drove higher and higher up into the mountains, where the Rockies near a place called Jasper. Is that right? And then Lake Louise and all this kind of thing, and it was absolutely stunningly beautiful.

And we got higher and higher, further and further away from civilization – well, from mobile phone signal. And, unfortunately, this was the year 2011, as I was driving further and further away from the nearest airport, riots were breaking out in the city of London, which I was then mayor of, and it was an utter disaster, because it took me about a day to get back from. And I had to leave my wife, and four children, and a big RV, which she couldn’t drive – (laughter) – and hire a car and drive 400 miles at literally 100 miles an hour to Calgary airport. It was a disaster.

And so, the holiday was – I never got to see Lake Louise or anything. I mean, I just had to get back to London and get shouted at, quite properly. (Laughter.) But so, I hanker to go back there. That’s what I would do.

**TIM HUDACK:** (Laughter.) You deserve a do-over after all of that.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I do, I do. And it cost a fortune. I had to hire all sorts of things, new cars, and God knows what. Anyway, so if anybody can fix me up with a little camping site there, that’s what I want. (Laughter.)

**TIM HUDACK:** You are one of the most iconic political leaders of this generation.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, in a not very hotly contested field, it has to be said. (Laughter.) We’ve got to be honest about the political profession these days.

**TIM HUDACK:** All right, well, let me start. I mean, you were a member of parliament. You became the mayor of London, a member of parliament again, a minister, a bit of a rebel within the conservative caucus, minister, leader and a great list of accomplishments. We’ll talk about that momentarily.

But off the top, it’s just over a year ago that you walked into 10 Downing Street. Well, how’s life as a civilian?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, have you ever been skiing, anybody? (Laughter.) Well, okay, what’s the best thing about skiing? What is the best moment in skiing?

Taking the ski boots off, right? (Laughter.) A beautiful girl once told me that there were really only two things she really enjoyed in life, and one of them was taking her ski boots off. And I understood that totally. And it’s a bit like taking your ski boots off, getting out of a difficult job like that. (Laughter.)

But the thing is that after a while, you start to wish you were skiing again. That’s the terrible truth. I don’t think I’ve reached that point yet.

**TIM HUDACK:** Well, all right. Well, I mean, just a couple of weeks ago, and it was a bit of blockbuster news, British Prime Rishi Sunak brought back former Prime Minister David Cameron into cabinet.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, oh, it’s fantastic.

**TIM HUDACK:** He had left office after the unsuccessful referendum around Brexit. He was on leading the stay or the Remain Campaign. What’s your interpretation of bringing back a former prime minister into cabinet? And then will we see Boris Johnson coming back into the fray?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think it’s great news for retreads everywhere. (Laughter.) And I think that across the political landscape, the nails are pulling out of the coffin lids and the graves are yawing, and the sheeted dead are wandering, gibbering in the streets as has-been politicians think about reviving their careers. Tony Blair, I understand, is full of excitement about the possibility of a return. (Laughter.) And it’s great news, it’s great news.

And maybe, traditionally, British politics in the last couple of decades, certainly in my experience, has been pretty much, it’s like there aren’t many second acts in British Parliament. But maybe we’re going back to a kind of 19th century type thing with Gladstone and Disraeli, and Gladstone and Disraeli, bing, bing, bing, bing. And it could be that that’s the way it’s going to go. On the other hand, it might not be.

I think that one thing is obvious, which is I think somehow or other, we used to complain in the Western world about gerontocracies. Do you remember, we used to complain about gerontocracies in Russia and China, and so forth?

**TIM HUDACK:** Yes.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I look at the U.S., right? I think there comes a moment when, I mean, I don’t know, I think both candidates are absolutely wonderful. Both the current front runners are absolutely wonderful, but you do wonder whether a younger generation might not want to come forward in the U.S. (Applause.)

**TIM HUDACK:** All right. There in the U.S., there you go.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Just dimly. I mean, as you said, I’m in my late 50s now, in fact, the latest 50s you can possibly be. (Laughter.) But I think you do need fresh perspectives, and you do need new ideas and new energy. You really do.

**TIM HUDACK:** I’m going to talk in this interview, and again, we’re thrilled to have you here, about some of your accomplishments in public life. We’ll talk about the dream of homeownership and how that really drove you, as mayor of London, as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and then ask the prime minister about some of the major international challenges happening here in Canada and worldwide.

But I just want to start out with you were a journalist. Your original path was in journalism after graduating from Oxford. Actually, you were editor of *The Spectator* magazine, which I’m a big fan of and get to subscribe, even with your absence.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Thank you.

**TIM HUDACK:** And so, what was the lure of politics to get you to run?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’m delighted you’re a *Spectator* subscriber. That’s fantastic. It’s hardy and – what’s the word? – distinguished group around the world. There aren’t many of you, but it’s the oldest political party – it’s the oldest magazine in the world, actually.

**TIM HUDACK:** Really?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, it’s the oldest weekly magazine in the world, *The Spectator*. It’s a fantastic magazine.

I think if you’ve been a journalist for a long time, as I was, there are times, and I love journalism, I love journalists, any journalists here. I think it’s a great, great profession. It’s vitally important to hold powerful people to account, excuse me, to bring new facts into the public domain. Journalism is massively important.

But if you’re a journalist, you start to feel, after a while, just as a slight sense of embarrassment and guilt that you’re being quite so tough on these politicians, and not putting yourself or not daring to put yourself in their place.

And I remember, once I wrote a very caustic piece about John Major, former prime minister of the UK. There are a lot of us, by the way, now, former prime ministers of the UK. There’s a ready supply. (Laughter.)

But I read it, and I thought this is just – I’m just being so aggressive, and he can’t really answer back. And I felt there was something a little bit sort of cowardly about endlessly chucking rocks over the garden wall, and waiting for the tinkle from the greenhouse, and not really trying to do something positive yourself. And I suppose it was a kind of midlife crisis. And so, about the age of in my mid-30s, I had a go. And I enjoyed it, and I got stuck.

And I think I came to the conclusion that if you’re going to criticize, you’ve really got to try and do it yourself. And there’s some line from Theodore Roosevelt, isn’t it? I can’t quite remember, about it’s not the person sitting on the – you can probably remember this thing. It’s not the person sitting on the sidelines in the audience –

**TIM HUDACK:** Yeah, the man of the arena.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s the man in the arena smeared with blood, and all that jazz, and no one ever built a statue to a critic. And you’ve got to – I think.

**TIM HUDACK:** All right.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** We have the greatest respectable critics in this room. Maybe Ralph Waldo Emerson has a statue. He was a critic.

**TIM HUDACK:** There you go. (Laughter.) You take your first shot at it. You’re inspired. You want to stand up and actually make a difference. Your first shot was 1997 in Henley, but considering your success later in life, that was actually a defeat. We all learn in this room from adversary. We all learn from a loss and overcoming adversity. What lessons learned in that initial loss when you tried for Parliament?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You’re absolutely right, that was 1997. I fought Clwyd South in Wales, and Clwyd South fought back in a big way, and I was not successful. I did learn a lot of Welsh.

**TIM HUDACK:** Yeah?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, I made a huge effort to learn Welsh. I don’t know, does anybody speak Welsh here? No.

Well, it was quite hard work. I spent a lot of the summer lying on the beach in, I think it was (inaudible). And I had a Welsh language course that I was using, and I really tried hard. I learned the words for fish and chips, which is (foreign language), and town center, which is (foreign language), and what else? Lots of stuff, and it’s now seem to have gone out of my head. Anyway, (foreign language), the Welsh for “meat’ is (foreign language), for some reason. And, oh, I’ll have a pint of bitter, please, is a pint of (foreign language), which is a useful thing if you’re in Wales. And I really made an effort.

And I got back after several months of boning up on my Welsh, and I arrived in Clwyd South in (Llangollen?), which is one of the main towns in the constituency. And they shoved me out to make a speech, and I had a speech already to go in my head in Welsh. It was torrential speech, and at the end of it, this chap came up to me. He said, “I say, I wouldn’t bother doing that again. Nobody here speaks Welsh at all.” (Laughter.) It was a total disaster. But I did learn… I think I learned a lot about Wales, actually, which was very, very useful.

And over the years, I went there a lot. And actually, in 2019, we won a load of seats in Wales. And I could see the connections with my general agenda of leveling up, and what a lot of people in Wales wanted to see. And actually, in 2019, we won that seat, Clwyd South, that I’m in decades.

**TIM HUDACK:** There you go.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I got thrashed, but it turned around later.

**TIM HUDACK:** Then you had the opportunity, certainly in Parliament, you won two elections, sat in opposition. And then the Prime Minister chose to resign from Parliament to run for mayor of London. What drove you to dive into that position?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes. Well, that was in about 2008. And I mean, generally speaking, I ran for mayor of London, basically, because my party had exhausted all the available alternatives, which is which is generally why they come to me under any circumstances. (Laughter.) It’s probably why I became leader in 2019. They kind of needed somebody to carry the banner at a difficult time.

And I was very fortunate in the sense that the other guy really wasn’t making a very good fist of it. He’d been around for too long. And I love London, and I could see a huge opportunity to change things. And kind of I’d wanted to be mayor of London for a long time.

It really began when I was cycling along a street in Hoban, and a bus came past me on the lefthand side. And I’d tried to overtake this bus on my bike, and I pedaled faster and faster, and harder and harder. And the bus started to swing out, pushing me. It was a bendy bus, and it was about 90 feet long, and it was articulated, right? You know what these things are, monsters. And its hips, it started to push me out into the traffic. And I could see that all the – I thought I was going to die. And I could see all the people reading their papers. They’re looking down apathetically and seeing me about to get crushed, and then looking back at their papers. (Laughter.)

And I finally got off my bike on the curb by the railings, breathless. And I said to myself, who put that thing on the streets of London?

**TIM HUDACK:** Right.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s a monster. It shouldn’t be there, and I was going to do everything I could to remove him from office. And I made inquiries; I discovered it was Ken Livingstone, and that he loved these bendy – he loved any form of – he was a big socialist, right, and actually, a brilliant man, in many ways, to be fair. But he loved people traveling by modes of transport that he controlled, like buses, and tubes and trams. And he basically opposed any kind of individual mode of transport, like bicycles or cars.

He wasn’t opposed to bicycles, but he couldn’t ride a bike. (Laughter.) Not his fault, he just couldn’t ride a bike. Whereas I loved bicycles, and I thought that the motorist, particularly in outer London, huge suburban spaces, you couldn’t force people to get out of their cars everywhere.

And so, I kind of thought it was time for a change in London. I remember coming to Toronto once, and you had a different mayor in those days, called Rob Ford. And I remember speaking warmly of his policies to some audience and getting very much a bum’s rush from them about motorists. (Laughter.)

You’ve got to have a balance. You’ve got to invest in mass transit, but a lot of people still need their cars. And you’ve just got to be sensible about that.

**TIM HUDACK:** There you go. Well, I mean, transportation was a big part of your success, as mayor of London, reducing poverty –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It was, yeah.

**TIM HUDACK:** Fighting crime. You had a financial sector boom. People talk about the Boris bridge, the Boris buses, the Boris buildings. But I want to focus on what I found were really powerful words, when you, as mayor, launched your London housing design guide. And you said that, “The finest city in the world deserves the finest buildings.” And your goal was not only to deliver housing units, it was to provide beautiful and appropriate homes of the highest quality that respond to the complex design standards in this most dynamic city. I mean, that’s great advice for us in Toronto, GT, and the province of Ontario.

A lot of people say a big part of your success as mayor was Boris building. Tell us about that.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, look, I’m no architect, and I defer to people in this audience in all this, but I was very concerned about the quality of the buildings that we were putting up in London. And this is going to sound crazy, but I was concerned with the style and the quality of the building materials. And particularly, and this was become very important later on, after the tragedy of the of the Grenfell fire, though I didn’t realize the problem at the time, but there were too many buildings that were going up with substandard cladding of one kind or another, not very attractive looking.

And London’s a great city. And so, architecturally, it looked like a kind of ransom note. There were different styles everywhere. And so, we came up with this idea of the New London vernacular. And basically, it was brick, but it was a kind of modern homage to the old Georgian style of architecture with the portrait shaped windows. I don’t know, it would be 3x5, or something like that. And they looked great in a modern type of architecture, recessed, large windows, beautiful brick. It was done with efficient building materials, so that basically, the brick was preassembled, but it looked great.

And buildings went up across the city at a huge, huge rate. And people loved them, and they wanted to live in them. And they achieved very, very good values, and people wanted that, but it was a kind of fluke. I just got fed up with seeing so many really kind of dismaying, plasticky, plastic-clad buildings. And so, I don’t know whether the present mayor – excuse me.

**TIM HUDACK:** No problem.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I don’t know whether the present mayor has retained my approach, but that was what we did. And it was pretty effective. I would say that, frankly, for Londoners, the most important thing was fighting crime, and that is that is absolutely indispensable. You’ve got to bring your crime rates down. And I don’t know how things are now in Ontario, but in London, when I took over, we had a big problem with knife crime, and we had to fix that.

And what’s the crime like now? Is it all right? Is it bad?

**TIM HUDACK:** It’s getting worse, for sure.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, then, you just need to – the police need to crack down. I’m sorry to say this, but you’ve got to back the police, and you’ve got to do – if it’s to do with gang crime, and drugs, and things like that, you’ve got to find other things for the kids to do. But you’ve got to back the police to lock them up.

**TIM HUDACK:** I’ll ask another mayor question, and then I’ll get back to the housing side as your time as prime minister. It was interesting that Donna Matheson (ph) asked you a question earlier on, and I’ll share this conversation.

She asked the Prime Minister what he likes to do in his spare time, a bit on the personal side. And he talked about painting, and you’re also an author. While you’re running the city of London as mayor, you wrote a book on the Roman Empire. You wrote a biography on Winston Churchill. Was Churchill the greatest British prime minister? And I’ll ask you, who’s your candidate for the greatest Canadian prime minister?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Right. Well, look, I mean, you could definitely make a case for Churchill. And he was quite astonishing, because if it hadn’t been for him, at a very critical time in the history of the world, things might have gone far, far worse. And there genuinely was the moment in May 1940, when Britain might have done a deal with Hitler. And that would have meant, basically, the capitulation of Western Europe to a vile, racist, Nazi tyranny. I mean, there’s no question.

You look at what was at stake, because this was long before the United States came in, and Britain was very, very much on its own. And there were plenty of people in the city of London, across the whole of the UK political establishment, who said, come on, it was 22 years since they’d had the First World War, which so many young Canadians lost their lives. Were we really going to go, were we all going to go through that again, that horrific loss of life, just to try to sort things out in the European continent?

And I genuinely think, when you look at those debates, you look at those arguments in May 1940, if Churchill have not been there, and if he had not been the prime minister at that time, I really think things would have gone the other way. And I think the Halifax view, the kind of the Rab Butler view, I think it would have prevailed. And I think that would have been an absolute catastrophe for the world, and obviously, for Europe. And so, he was critical.

And so, just for that, he kind of gets my vote. Pitt the Younger, he was probably pretty good, too. You’d have to go back and look carefully at Pitt the Younger and compare him to Churchill. But I mean, also for sheer longevity of service, we’re talking about people coming back. I mean, that guy, it’s like 65 years in the House of Commons. He began his political career under Queen Victoria, and it was quite astonishing, what he did. He was born (inaudible). He was absolutely a phenomenal guy.

As for the greatest Canadian prime minister, I’m not certain. I’m sure there’s many to choose from. If you’re inviting me to comment on current personalities – (laughter) – all I would say is I had a really terrific relationship and still do with Justin. And Canada has been a fantastic partner, and an ally for us, and always will be, I hope. But the greatest ever, I mean, isn’t the conventional answer Mackenzie King for what he did?

**TIM HUDACK:** Test the audience. Mackenzie King?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Mackenzie King? (Applause.)

**TIM HUDACK:** Yeah.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I mean, because he was a liberal. He laid the foundations for a lot of the – Canada seems to be – far be it for me call it, but Canada seems to me to be a fantastic example of a mature, developed society, where there’s a second constitution, liberal values. And you look at what he did, it seems to be a lot of – he was on the right lines. And he also had a massive innings, right? I mean, he was prime minister three times?

**TIM HUDACK:** I think even longer, but you’re right, the longest serving prime minister in history by a longshot.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes, but how many times did he become prime minister?

**TIM HUDACK:** You got me.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Anybody know?

**TIM HUDACK:** Four?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Four? Three?

**TIM HUDACK:** We’re seeing some threes in the audience. All right, it’s been verified.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Four. Someone said four.

**TIM HUDACK:** I think it’s four.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Google. Where is our friend, Google? (Laughter.)

**TIM HUDACK:** Let’s now move on time for –

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Does the audience think it’s Mackenzie King, by the way?

**TIM HUDACK:** I’m a John A. Macdonald fan. (Applause.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Who?

**TIM HUDACK:** John A. Macdonald.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** John Macdonald, okay.

**TIM HUDACK:** Yeah.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Trudeau.

**TIM HUDACK:** Oh, Trudeau, the elder. We get a shout out for Trudeau, the elder.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** That’s okay.

**TIM HUDACK:** All right, a few nods on that one.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Okay.

**TIM HUDACK:** We’ll fast forward to time as Prime Minister. You helped lead the Brexit campaign to say yes to leave. You became leader of the Conservative Party, and you ran on an agenda of something called “levelling up.”

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**TIM HUDACK:** I don’t know how common that term here is in Canada. What is “levelling up”?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It’s very, very important, and “levelling up,” basically everything I did in London was about trying to extend opportunity for those parts of the city that people felt would never get there. And there was a lot of kind of fatalism about the inner core of London, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest, the Isle of Dogs, all those inner boroughs of London where there’d been a lot of urban decay. And it also applied to large parts of outer London. And there were places where productivity was much lower, where life expectancy was much lower.

When I became Mayor of London, it was said that you lost a year of life expectancy with every stop of the tube train on the way, the 10 stops from Westminster to Canning Town on the Jubilee line. And that wasn’t because it was a terrible tube ride. It was because people got progressively poorer and more disadvantaged. And it was insane, because the opportunities in London are massive.

And the job of mayor, this is where the profession of a realtor is so important. The job of a mayor, it seemed to me, was to put in all the indispensable things that the private sector needs to invest. And so, it was putting in mass transit, it was making the streets safe. It was addressing the skills and putting in the technology, broadband or whatever.

And what we saw in that period was not just bringing crime down, but you saw those areas change in the aspirations, and then their vision of themselves. And we were able – it was a conservative administration, but by using the power of our investments to trigger huge, private sector investments. And now, if you look at places like in East London, Waltham Forest, or, I mean, I’m sorry. I apologize if I’m describing areas that don’t mean much to this audience, but they were very, relatively poor. They saw huge increases in their property values. People moved in; people invested, and it started to change.

And I wanted and want to do the same thing throughout the UK economy. And the difference between the United Kingdom and France, Germany, Italy, Spain, all our big European friends, partners, competitors, is a Britain is massively, economically imbalanced. And the huge weight of the economy, the preponderance of the productivity is in London in the southeast. And that wasn’t always the case, right?

If you look at the history of the UK over the last 200 years, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, they actually used to outperform London in the southeast. But what happened was that, from the 1850s, 1860s onwards, London got a massive advantage in mass transit. We had the first tube system anywhere in the world. We built the suburban railways. We built the whole metro system, and it became this massive organism for economic growth.

And “levelling up” is about trying to ensure that all those areas that are relatively left behind get the care, and the attention and the love that London and the southeast got. It didn’t mean that you in any way disadvantaged London and the southeast, because they are the great powerhouse of the UK economy. But it meant that you thought about all the things you need to do to bring up the rest.

And what was happening in 2019, when I got elected as prime minister, was that that was all – you could really see it’s starting to happen. In all the suburban areas around Manchester, in the West Midlands, you could see people responding to those incentives. And it was a big, big change, but it needs to continue.

And I’ve got to be honest with you. I think we should we should be going ahead with big projects, like you probably don’t know what I’m talking about, but HS2 is a gigantic railway line that we should be building from London to Manchester, and then up to up to Scotland. You’ve got to do these things. You’ve got to put in mass transit, if you’re going to enable developers’ investment to come in.

And so, that was my philosophy. I mean, “levelling up” is based on the notion that human beings are pretty much the same everywhere, right? I think there’s genius and talent pretty much evenly distributed across the population, geographically, enthusiasm, energy, right? But opportunity isn’t. The job of the politician is to try to make sure that everybody at least has a fair suck of the source bottle, as they say in Australia. And that was what “levelling up” is about.

And it’s not about punishing the rich. It’s not about punishing London. It’s not about taxing bankers. It’s not about trying to have a politics of envy. On the contrary. I leave that to my socialist friends. “Levelling up” is about trying to extend opportunity everywhere. That’s what we were trying to do.

**TIM HUDACK:** And a part of that is an opportunity to own a home, and this was a big part of your “levelling up” agenda as well. Prime Minister, you had policies like moving renters to home ownership, £1.5 billion home building fund. You wanted to make the planning system simpler. Four years later, were those initiatives a success?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, I mean, we’ve got a problem, which is, I think, one that is shared by many Western countries, and by, I guess, here on Ontario, too, which is that, for my generation, it was actually relatively easy to get a home. I left university in 1987-88, I can’t remember exactly, and I used mortgage interest relief to get a mortgage. I got a flat in London.

For my kids in their 20s, that’s just impossible now. And there are all sorts of reasons for that, but one reason is, is shortage of supply. We need to build more. We need to help people with 95% mortgages. We need to help people to convert their rental payments into mortgage payments. We need to help people with staircasing system so that they buy (part?) rent schemes. And so, they’re able to own their homes that way.

But unless you unless you do it, I think there’s going to be a real, real problem. And the UK should be a great homeowning, property-owning democracy. But at the moment, I think I’m right in saying that for people under 40, we have had lower rates of owner occupation than France and Germany. And I think it’s now changing back again, partly because of some of the things we did, because I think in the last year I was prime minister, we did see a record number of first-time buyers, I think like 400,000 or something. It’s started to move back in the right direction, but it is vitally, vitally important.

And you can’t expect young people to be committed to a free market system or to capitalism in any shape or form, if they don’t have a chance of capital of their own. And it’s just got to be done. And it’s a single thing that people want most. They yearn; they’re so emotionally invested in the chance to own their own home.

And I don’t think that in the UK, we had been doing enough to make that possible. And if you think about the great conservative governments under McMillan or Thatcher, they got on and they built huge numbers of homes. And they allowed people to get the key to their own home, who didn’t think they were going to do it in their lifetime, that you change people’s lives.

**TIM HUDACK:** And this is what folks here in this room are all about. As realtors and realtor leaders are meeting with members of Provincial Parliament today and tomorrow to talk about exactly that, Prime Minister, helping people get the keys to a great place to call home.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** And we’re going to need realtors, whatever happens. You won’t be replaced by AI. (Laughter/applause.) Believe me, you’re going to be fine. There is no way a bot – is that the right word, a bot?

**TIM HUDACK:** It’s a bot.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** There’s no way a bot or a bot is going to be able to give somebody the keys. Somebody was just putting it beautifully in a discussion we were having. If you need to know where the septic tank is, or the dodgy ash tree that’s going to fall down, you’re not going to see it online. You need somebody to show you in. And there’s always going to be realtors or estate agents, as we call them. But I think there’s a slight difference. A realtor does slightly different things, right?

**TIM HUDACK:** Oh, absolutely.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Lots of different things, yeah.

**TIM HUDACK:** I mean, licensed, and there’s a code of ethics to follow, the regulator, education, strong advocates.

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

**TIM HUDACK:** And that’s a big part of what they’re doing here today, right, is advocating for clients and new homeowners. Here’s the question I want to ask you. A lot of policies, and this reads like a list of things we’d like to do in Ontario, as well as the things that prime minister did, converting commercial properties into residential, vacant properties, building on those, building up where buildings already exist. You had a First Homes Initiative.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yes.

**TIM HUDACK:** We often run, then, into the wall of NIMBYs just trying to stop anything. What advice would you have for us on how you get through that wall to get homes built?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You’ve got to take them on. I mean, not all these policies work as well as others. I mean, the converting offices into homes thing, some of them, I’ve got to be honest with you, some of those homes didn’t turn out to be so beautiful. (Laughter.) But you’ve got to try, right, when people need someone to live.

I mean, the other thing I thought I should have said on the home standards, we didn’t just address the exterior of the home. We had this Parker Morris plus 10. We had room sizes, so that people could see a cat in their flat, but they couldn’t before. I mean, the developers were building little rabbit hutches, and you need to take them on because they just weren’t big enough.

And when it comes to NIMBYs, the politicians have got to be brave. It’s always the politicians who are frightened of the wrath of their electorates, because they don’t building in their backyard. And they always say, I don’t mind the homes, it’s just there isn’t enough infrastructure. And it’ll be the noise and the disruption of the construction. That’s what they say, isn’t it? It’s the lorries. And you’ve got to take them on, because actually, once they’re there, people are generally totally reconciled to it.

And politically, I would say that actually, all the evidence is, and speaking as a conservative politician, all the evidence is that when you do encourage good new building, appropriate new building in the right place, actually, you’ll get voted back in. And it’s the right thing to do, not just economically and socially, but it’s the right thing to do politically, as well. You need to have the courage to go through that pain, and make the case to your constituents about the changes that they’re going to see.

And to get back to some of my earlier points about infrastructure, the way to get it done at scale is to put in the stuff that allows the developers to go ahead and build. I’ve way outbuilt my Labour predecessors, and built far more affordable housing, far more social housing, right, because I said, “Let’s get rid of the quotas.” And so, the developers had the confidence to go ahead, knowing that the sites would be viable. Plus, we put in things like new tube stations, and cross rails, and a massive rail project, so that the sites became viable. You’ve got to have the right tax framework, and you’ve got to have the right planning framework, and you’ve got to have the right infrastructure.

And there is space on the Brownfield sites. There really, really is. And you look around London, huge space in the east of the city. Again, it’s been left behind. Nobody’s invested in the infrastructure or turned it into a place of opportunity, and that’s what you got to do. Get the government to put in the infrastructure.

**TIM HUDACK:** Two last questions on your time as prime minister. Then I want to ask you some questions about some of the big issues in world affairs today and your perspective. Of course, you get Brexit done, your “levelling up” policy. You won the biggest majority government in 32 years in the UK. When you look back on your accomplishments, Prime Minister, in office as prime minister, what was the most rewarding moment?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I’ll come back in a minute. I just have one other brilliant idea I’ve got to tell you about, okay. (Laughter.) Sorry, I should have said, because it sounded like this is all funded by the state, right, all the infrastructure. But there’s a clever thing you can do, tax increment financing, if you want to build that extension of the tube.

Battersea, I don’t know if you know what I mean by Battersea Power Station, a total wreck. Hands up, who knows what Battersea looks like?

Okay, right. (Laughter.) Okay, it’s a gigantic, old power station that nobody wanted to live near. And we were able to build a new tube line to it on the strength of the future income from the council tax, and the property taxes, and the business rates that will be generated by the arrival of a new tube line. You see what I mean? Actually, the money was coming from the private sector, but we were able to – and now that we’ve done it, the income from those taxes has paid, already, in less than 10 years, for a huge new tube line, and two new tube stations. You’ve got to think creatively about how to finance it, and use the private sector income as well.

But you asked me about my time as prime minister. Tim, I think there were – what did you ask me about? (Laughter.) You asked what was the high point?

**TIM HUDACK:** Yeah, best moment.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, there were a lot of them. I think I was proud of a lot of things that we did. I think I one of the best things, actually, was that we had a great COP in the backend of ‘21, and Canada was massively supportive in this. We set fantastic targets for green power and moving past coal. And that was terrific; protecting world forests, that was great.

I was very proud in the earlier part of that year, when we were the first country in the world to put a licensed and effective COVID vaccine into anybody’s arms. That was a good moment, I mean, speaking entirely personally. That was a massive relief.

And by the way, you won’t hear this from the from the BBC or from a lot of the slightly gloomy media, but the reason we were able to do it, the reason we were able to put both Pfizer and AstraZeneca, and I think Moderna, as well, into people’s arms so quick was because of, guess what? Anybody know? Brexit. It was Brexit, because what we had done was we were able to come out. We were no longer part of the European Medicines Agency, but we were able to license it through our own medical health regulation agency.

And so, we were literally two and a half months, at a very critical time, ahead of our European friends. And so, by March 2021, we had vaccinated 45% of the UK in the entire UK population. And in the EU, sadly, they’d only done 10%. There were literally hundreds of thousands of elderly people who were protected against COVID, who would not otherwise have had that protection, thanks to Brexit.

Brexit, my friends, saved lives, and I was proud of having steered all that through.

I think there were things that we did that also helped to change and improve the UK for the better, but I think it’d be fair to say that we massively increased the amount of gigabit broadband, and all that, and did a huge amount of stuff on skills, on hospital building, on policing, and so on. But COVID was pretty dominant during my time.

**TIM HUDACK:** Last prime minister question, then we’ll use the last 10 minutes for some of the big international issues and your insight on them on your experience. Kathy Poland (ph), one of our board members, asked you a question that I think a lot of folks in the audience would love to hear. What’s it like having an audience with the queen?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Well, she was wonderful, and what it was like, it was like balm for the soul, right, because she’s heard it all before. And so, you kind of felt that you were in this confessional with this wonderful person, who knew it all and had seen it all. And there was nothing you could say that would really shock her.

And I poured my heart out to her, and she was always very encouraging. And I remember once telling her that I’d had a nightmare that I’d arrived late for a meeting with her and the Duke of Edinburgh. And she said, “Oh yes, were you naked?” she said. (Laughter.) And actually, I don’t think I was, in that dream. But it turns out that that’s what everybody normally – when people are feeling – they dream that they’re somehow naked with their sovereign.

**TIM HUDACK:** Really? (Laughter.)

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Yeah, they do. And so, she was wonderful like that. And she told me a very – I’ll pass on a very important tip. I don’t know, is anybody in Canada superstitious about magpies? (Laughter.)

**TIM HUDACK:** Not so much, no.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** You don’t worry about magpies. You don’t worry about seeing – you don’t do one for sorrow, two for joy, three for a girl, four for a boy? You don’t worry about magpies? Is that just a British thing?

Oh, well, I’m not going to bother with it. I’m not going to tell you, then. (Laughter.) I’m not going to tell you.

But listen, okay, in the UK, there’s a lot of people who have skin who are scared about seeing a solitary magpie. A solitary magpie is a bird of ill omen, okay, in the UK, and it freaks us out. It freaks me out, I’ll be honest with you. I didn’t like seeing a solitary magpie, and the queen had the same thing. And we used to talk; well, it came up once.

And she gave me a brilliant tip, which I pass on, not that you care about it, because you’re not scared about it. You’re sensible, rational Canadians. You don’t give a monkey’s about my magpies. But her tip was if you see a solitary magpie, in order to detoxify the situation or to protect yourself against, immunize yourself against the spell of the solitary magpie, you say, good morning or hello, depending on what time of day it is, probably, good morning, Mr. Magpie. It is the 28th – is it the 28th?

**TIM HUDACK:** It is.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** It is the 28th of November, 2023. Oh, it is two things. All you have to say is, good morning, Mr. Magpie. It is Tuesday, the 28th of November, 2023, and then, boom, magpie spell gone and you’re okay. I’m just telling you, not that you care. (Laughter.) But if there were anybody in this audience, and maybe there’s somebody who hasn’t been brave enough to admit it – (laughter) – maybe there’s somebody who labors under this superstition. But if there is anybody who, like me and her late Majesty, is worried about magpies, that is the solution. I can give it to you from the queen.

But what I will also say about what happened, I mean, it was awful when she died. And I think people were just hit sideways by it, even though logically, we knew it must happen. It was just a terrible thought.

But the king, I think, is doing a bang-up job. I mean, really, I think the transition has been absolutely fantastic, seamless. And what was so moving was to see the way in which the entire House of Commons, comprising many, many really quite hardened Republicans and leftwingers of all kinds, were unanimous in their support for the king. It was quite amazing.

And the British Constitution, and Canada is obviously part of the of the same realm, is visibly in good shape, visibly in good shape. And that’s one part of our political life we don’t have to worry about, in my view.

**TIM HUDACK:** In April 2022, you flew to Kyiv to meet with President Vladimir Zelensky. You were the first leader to do so. Prime Minister, why is it so important for us to stand with Ukraine, and is victory possible for the Ukrainians?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Victory is not only possible; I think it’s going to happen. (Applause.) But it may not happen this year, next year. It may not happen immediately. But what Putin has done by his criminal, illegal, brutal invasion of that sovereign, independent European country, he has created an absolutely passionate and, I think, invincible, patriotic feeling in the people of Ukraine. And they are going to go on until they set their country free.

And what has happened is that Putin has really started a war of independence, and wars of independence, historically, tend only to end one way. And what we have got to do is continue to be steadfast in our support for freedom and democracy in Ukraine.

And I want to say thank you to Canada, and I said this earlier to some of our friends. In the early days, it wasn’t entirely obvious which way we were all going to go. And it will be fair to say that the most important thing was for friends of Ukraine, supporters of Ukraine to prevail upon the United States of America, with all its power and might, to help. And I think Joe’s instincts were very much in the right place anyway, but it was massively supportive, and massively valuable to have Canada’s strong, strong support. And I think that made a huge difference.

To be frank, we’ve got to do more. We’ve got to give them the air cover that they need. There’s more stuff that they need, but the most important thing that Ukraine needs is strategic patience and continence from those of us who see the importance of Ukrainian success, because there will be continual pressure to try to find a deal. And there isn’t a deal that you can do with Putin.

I’ve got to tell this audience. There is no reasonable land-for-peace deal you can do with that guy, because if you try and do it, he’s made it obvious. He wants to extinguish Ukraine as a free, independent entity, and he is not to be trusted. And the Ukrainians won’t do that deal. I can tell you, they won’t. There’s not a Ukrainian politician who could do that deal.

The only, only way forward, and it’s sad, and it’s bitter, but it is to keep backing them and to give them what they need so that they eventually succeed. And they will, but it’s vital that they do because of the implications for our world. If Ukraine goes down, what does that say for other democracies around the world, which have neighbors that want to invade them? It would be a disaster. And apart from anything else, it would be a tragedy for the Ukrainian people.

Thank you, Canada, for what you’re doing. I can’t pretend to you that it’s going to be over soon, but it will be over, and the Ukrainians will win. (Applause.)

**TIM HUDACK:** Last question here, Prime Minister, and then I’ll have you do a wrap up comment. The other major tragedy, the Israel-Hamas conflict, rising antisemitism, rising anti-Muslim behavior in Europe, in North America. What’s your advice on the role that UK and Canada should play?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Look, I think that it’s an absolute tragedy. The only thing I would say is that it is important to maintain moral clarity, if we can, about what Hamas did on October the 7th, and what Israel is now trying to do to make sure that that type of terrorist attack can’t happen again.

And there is a difference, in my view, between the terroristic attacks of the Hamas militias, which were brutal, and the rape, the torture, the murders. I mean, these were indiscriminate attempts to cause the maximum human suffering, a degradation. There is a difference between that and what the IDF, the Israeli Defense Force, is trying to do to seek out Hamas and to prevent them from doing such a thing again.

And it’s been said many times, but it must be repeated. Hamas tried to maximize human suffering. I believe that the Israeli Defense Force is trained and is trying to minimize the loss of life by innocent civilians, where they can. I think there is a difference between the Palestinian prisoners, some criminals, many of them terrorists, who are being released now, and the Israeli hostages, often children, totally innocent civilians, who are being used by Hamas to buy the release of those prisoners. I think there is a difference in the moral status of those two types of captive. I really do, and I don’t think that difference is coming through very powerfully on the BBC at the moment, or on some of our media. I don’t wish to blame the BBC. They do an outstanding job, but I think sometimes we lose that sense of differentiation.

All that said, it’s clearly an absolute tragedy, what’s happening in Gaza. And if I had one thing I yearn for in my heart, as a supporter of Israel, and a longstanding, like we all are, opponents of antisemitism, it’s that we had some clearer idea of the future, from Israel’s point of view.

I would love to hear some of the – there’s some great Israeli politicians. I’d love to hear them articulate this solution, and it’s got to be a two-state solution. But I’d love to hear that properly articulated. And I think that would help people around the world, because I think people instinctively do want to oppose terrorism. And I think people do understand the distinctions I tried to make. But they also want to have a sense of where this is going to go, from Israel’s point of view, and what the answer is that we can all get behind.

Look, I mean, and as for the role of the British government, historically, 100 years ago, in helping to set up some of the problems, well, everybody knows that and no one in my position is going to try and evade responsibility. It’s our job to try and address it, and the only way we can do it is with a two-state solution. And I think that’s the best I can say.

**TIM HUDACK:** I appreciate that.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** But keep moral clarity. There really is a difference between Hamas and Israel, and I do worry about the way that’s been lost. And I look at some of these demonstrations in London around the world, and I see the sulfurous fumes of an ancient prejudice. And we have to guard against it. That’s what I think.

**TIM HUDACK:** Prime Minister, this has been an outstanding and delightful hour with you. I’m going to ask in final comments, some advice to our crowd. These are realtor leaders. They’re leaders in the profession, they’re leaders in the community, like you and your time in journalism, a number I think that may run for parliament, may run to be mayor, may run to be prime minister.

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** Fantastic.

**TIM HUDACK:** What’s your advice to those here today that want to take that kind of step?

**RT HON BORIS JOHNSON:** I really hope you do. One of the most common complaints I get these days from everybody is about the quality of our politicians, and what are we going to do to improve it. And I hope that people do get involved. And I think that being a realtor, what you’re doing is, as I say, incredibly important. You’re helping people to achieve their dreams. And it’s just about the single most socially, economically, emotionally important thing that you can do, help people to get the homes they need.

Thanks for what you’re doing. Thank you very much for having me along today, and hope to see you in London. (Applause.) That’s London, England. (Laughter.) Thank you, thank you.

(Applause.)

END