

Transcript: “The Big Interview” with Michael O’Leary

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Broadcast date: 1 April 2026, 21:00 Duration: approximately 44 minutes Interviewer: Colette Fitzpatrick (CF) Guest: Michael O’Leary (MOL), CEO, Ryanair Group Transcribed: WhisperX large-v3 model with speaker diarization, 2 April 2026 Corrections: see below

Whisper corrections applied

- “Ballybottle” / “Ballypohol” → “Ballyboughal” (village near Dublin Airport)
 - “audio automata” → “audiometers” (noise measurement devices)
 - “state markets” / “St. Margaret’s” → “St Margaret’s” (area near Dublin Airport)
 - “Southwestern Estates” → “Southwest Airlines” (US airline)
 - “Jiggins Town” → “Gigginstown” (O’Leary’s Westmeath farm)
 - “Reiner” → “Ryanair”
 - “pastures” → “passengers”
 - “loose” → “loo” (toilet)
 - “flights, not children, children’s rights, not flights” → O’Leary’s words as spoken. The organisation’s actual name is Children’s Rights Over Flights (CROF). O’Leary got the name wrong.
 - “snagging” → “slagging”
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Part 1: Airfares, Iran, and the passenger cap

1. CF: Well, good evening and welcome to The Big Interview. And our guest this evening is a man who needs little introduction. It’s Ryanair boss Michael O’Leary. Michael, you’re very welcome to the studio. Thanks very much for coming out to us here in Ballymount.
2. MOL: Thank you. It’s a pleasure to be here.
3. CF: Airfares, where are they going because of the war in Iran?
4. MOL: I mean, they’re probably going up this summer, but how much, we don’t yet know. The sooner the war ends, the sooner we will remove the uncertainty over fuel prices. But Ryanair is, we’ve hedged 80% of our fuel for the next 12 months to March 2027. We’re certainly going to insulate our passengers against egregious fuel price rises. But the 20% we haven’t hedged has doubled between March to the month of April. In March, our unhedged fuel, we’re paying about \$70 a barrel. In April, we’re paying about \$150 a barrel.
5. CF: So this is the jet fuel as opposed to regular oil.
6. MOL: And the longer the war goes on in Iran, if that goes on into May or June, we’re probably facing oil prices or jet fuel prices of anything up to \$200 a barrel.
7. CF: So globally then, airfares, are they going to go up by, what, 15%, 20% do you think? I’m not talking about the short haul, about Ryanair.

8. MOL: I mean, it is hard to know because, you know, it's not certain. If there's a recession, airfares will come down. If there's higher oil prices, certainly the legacy airlines, the high fares, will be trying to put on fuel surcharges. So the trend is certainly going to be up towards the remainder of this summer. That's why we would be encouraging people to book early and book now because I think fares will rise as we move through the summer.
9. CF: So have you seen a bounce, say, from the likes of people who would have wanted to go to Dubai in the past and they're now thinking, I'll go to Spain, I'll go to Portugal.
10. MOL: Certainly this Easter, I mean, there's been a dramatic switch. I think lots of families who would have been going either to the Middle East or flying over the Middle East to go to Asia have all rebooked and they're going to Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece. They're all certainly staying much closer to home over the Easter school holidays. It's a little bit early yet. People are not yet changing their summer holiday plans, but that's likely to happen if this war continues.
11. CF: So if you hadn't booked your flight for the summer, would you book it tonight? Would you wait a few weeks? Would you wait till the end of May?
12. MOL: I would book it tonight and I'd book it as soon as possible because I think the risk is that not only will airfares rise, but even if the war finishes, it's going to take the Middle Eastern carriers a long time to get back in the air. Kuwait or Qatar this week have grounded, sent about 20, 30 of their aircraft back to a kind of a desert facility where you close up airplanes. So they're not expected to get back in the air very quickly. So there will be constraints on capacity through the remainder of this year. And already, if you're going to Asia across with Lufthansa, Air France or KLM, they're dramatically increasing prices.
13. CF: So you famously had the 99 cents flights. What's your cheapest flight right now?
14. MOL: Today we can get flights on Ryanair at 19.99, so less than 20 quid. You can travel almost anywhere across Europe. Now, you won't do that on the Friday of the August bank holiday weekend. But if you're willing to move travel on a Tuesday, Wednesday, I'm going down to Albania this evening. We're opening up a four-aircraft base in Tirana tomorrow morning. There's lots of 19 euros and there's an exciting, interesting new destination, Albania.
15. CF: All right, let's talk about the passenger cap, because you have a major pre-occupation with the passenger cap. And the government says it's going to pass the legislation, it's a priority for them, and that it will be passed perhaps by the summer.
16. MOL: I mean, look, we elected the government in November 2024. They have a 20-seat majority. If you have a 20-seat majority, you should be capable of getting legislation passed in a month, two months, three months. They produced a government programme in January of 2025, 16 months ago, that said we will scrap the cap as soon as possible.
17. CF: But it is a process. There's a process there, Michael. They have to do things

with transparency. I mean, we've literally had tribunals in this country over planning. We know the passenger cap comes under planning laws. And we've had politicians and ministers involved in corruption in the past. So there has to be a process. There has to be transparency. There has to be pre-legislative scrutiny.

18. MOL: Oh, give me a break. You have a 20-seat majority. If you want to ram through legislation and you really want to deliver change, you ram through legislation. I mean, I would forgive the government if they had passed it by February, March or April of 2025. But we're sitting here in April of 2026. Our prime minister is wandering around Finland today getting his photograph taken.
19. CF: Looking for foreign direct investment for this country?
20. MOL: That's what you have a foreign minister for. I mean, you know, Micheál Martin wastes more time going around to open envelopes and getting his photograph taken, but nothing gets done here at home. When you have a 20-seat majority, you have the power, you can deliver whatever change you decide you want to do. But the problem with Micheál Martin is it is dither and indecision. Hang on a second now. It's complex and it's complicated.
21. CF: In defence of the government, Michael, in defence of the government...
22. MOL: Why are you defending the government, Colette?
23. CF: Because I'm trying to be objective about the whole situation, right? The economy is flying right now. We have record tax receipts. We have record employment, record low unemployment, record exports. They must be doing something right as opposed to being this do-nothing government.
24. MOL: They promised they'd scrap the cap as soon as possible. And they will do that. 16 months later is not as soon as possible. We have record congestion in Dublin. What are they doing about infrastructure? Nothing. We can't build houses quickly enough. What are they doing about it? Nothing. This government gets nothing done despite having a 20-seat majority.
25. CF: Michael, effectively the cap isn't there anyway at the moment. I mean, there's a stay on it because of the legal...
26. MOL: Thanks to the airlines.
27. CF: Because of the legal process. So what, 35, 36 million people went through Dublin Airport?
28. MOL: It'll be about 36 million passengers this year. And the real risk with this cap...
29. CF: So why is this urgency? I mean, it's not there effectively.
30. MOL: Well, it is likely that the European Court is going to overturn the injunction we got, we think, probably by the end of this summer. The greater risk is that the Americans are so pissed off with the Irish government inaction, there's a real risk that they're going to stop Aer Lingus landing flights in New York or elsewhere in the US, because the American airlines who want to expand in Dublin but can't because of the cap.

31. CF: Yeah, you said there was a real risk, though, that Micheál Martin would be disinvited to the White House, and there he was with Donald Trump on the day. So you say a lot of things.
32. MOL: I do. I can't foretell the future. Much more important, though, was the head of Airlines for America, A4A, who went in front of a Dáil committee last week. He's a Republican ex-governor of New Hampshire and said he had been in the White House the previous weekend. Uppermost on the agenda for the US Secretary of State for Transport is the cap at Dublin Airport. They are really looking at this. There is a real risk that Aer Lingus flights will get stopped in New York. And I guarantee you, if they stop Aer Lingus flights in New York, Micheál Martin will pass this legislation in about two days because now it's a national crisis. Only when it appears on social media does Micheál Martin get around to doing something.

Part 2: North Runway noise and residents

33. CF: Passenger cap, it's also related to the residents in North Dublin, as you know. Would you take your Ryanair hat off, you know, just for one moment and put yourself in the position of a resident in North Dublin with young children, putting them to bed at seven, eight o'clock, nine o'clock at night, and the noise of the planes going overhead. You have no sympathy for that. But now, Ryanair aside.
34. MOL: Ryanair aside, they don't even hear the planes going overhead.
35. CF: They do.
36. MOL: They don't. Trust me. We've actually done the research, unlike these residents, these NIMBYs, one of whom moved into the area in 2016. The other one who heads the Ballyboughal Community Council moved in in 1998. The airport has been there since 1940. They knew the airport was there, but the noise at the airport is getting quieter and quieter. We opened up a second runway two, three years ago. That has halved the number of flights.
37. CF: Well, can I tell you...
38. MOL: No, let me finish the point. We've done the research, and we have sent around all the audiometers, whatever it is. And so have they, by the way.
39. CF: They haven't.
40. MOL: They have come up with different research to say that the noise levels... They have produced no evidence whatsoever because they can't produce any different evidence. So over St Margaret's, on normal, when there's no aircraft overhead, it's about 47 decibels. When there's an aircraft overhead, it goes up to 53 decibels. By the way, 50 decibels is safe. 65 decibels is moderate noise. 85 decibels is unsafe. We did exactly the same thing over Ballyboughal. It goes from 47 decibels to about 52 decibels.
41. CF: And when Virgin Media News and the other news organisations go out there to interview them, we have to stop and start the interviews because of the noise of the planes going overhead.
42. MOL: Not true.

43. CF: It is true, Michael. You know that they're watching now tonight and they're going, isn't it well for him in his big detached house in the quiet countryside and he doesn't have to put up with it.
44. MOL: Excuse me, I work about 12 hours a day beside the airport. I don't have any issue with the noise. When you're putting the beloved children to bed, the windows are closed. The noise levels are way under 50 decibels. This is a bunch of nimbies. Let me deal with it. The Ballyboughal Community Council is a fictitious organisation, of self-appointed lunatics.
45. CF: I can't let you say that.
46. MOL: I can say what I want.
47. CF: You can retract it.
48. MOL: The St Margaret's residents, most of them work around the airport. There's 171 of them. And then this other bunch of loonies, which is the Children's Rights Not Flights, they're trying to get a petition signed. And they say the nighttime noise really affects their stress level. They don't even live at the airport. And they can't even get a petition signed by more than 400 people.

Part 3: Climate and environment

49. CF: OK, let's talk about the people you call the tree huggers.
50. MOL: The NIMBYs.
51. CF: Well, I'm talking about environmentalists now. Are you a climate denier? I mean, do you believe the science?
52. MOL: Firstly, I really object to this climate denier kind of attack.
53. CF: Well, I'm asking, so you're saying no?
54. MOL: No, sorry. Do I believe that the climate is changing? Absolutely. But it's been changing for billions of years. Do I believe that the globe is getting warmer? Yes, it clearly is for about the last 20 years.
55. CF: And fossil fuels like aviation fuel is contributing to that.
56. MOL: Absolutely, and we do need to decarbonise. But the solution to this, which is to tax fossil fuel, just raises more money for governments, which they then squander. That is not the way forward. New technology is the way to reduce and to decarbonise our economy. The greatest contributor to emissions is road transport. It accounts for 26% of Europe's CO2 emissions. By the early 2030s, most of that will have electrified. Now, where's the electricity coming from? Natural gas or nuclear? Because we don't produce any ourselves. Aviation accounts for 2%. And we don't have any alternatives.
57. CF: And yet you carry on like you're being picked on the whole time. I mean, what about the poor farmers?
58. MOL: We are being picked on.

59. CF: You're not being picked on. What about farmers? What about data centres? What about consumers?
60. MOL: Every time the media want to show global warming, it's the contrails of an aircraft taking off. Oh, look at the globe warming up. They never show you the buses going around Dublin because they're moving too slowly. Road transport, and we will dramatically transform road transport in the next 10 years by electrifying it. That is the greatest contribution we can all make. Taxing air travel will do nothing for emissions or for global warming.
61. CF: It's a progressive tax, really, isn't it? Because the wealthy are the people who fly more often.
62. MOL: No, the people who fly on Ryanair is your average Joe. Our average fare is about 45 euros. We live on a rock on the west of Ireland. There isn't an alternative to getting on and off the island, unless, of course, you're a green politician, in which case you can wander around taking ferries and bicycles for the next three weeks because you've nothing else to do.
63. CF: Is there going to be more flights if the passenger cap is lifted by Ryanair?
64. MOL: Yes.
65. CF: And will you have them in the middle of the night?
66. MOL: No. You're not allowed? Sorry, it's not that it's not allowed. We actually, with our deal with our crews, we don't fly between the hours of about 11.30 at night until about 6am in the morning. We don't fly at night.
67. CF: But if you had your way...
68. MOL: Another mythical claim by these NIMBYs in North County Dublin.
69. CF: If you had your way, would you have flights in the middle of the night?
70. MOL: No. Because, I mean, there's lots of airports I can fly through the middle. There's actually, our flights are so cheap during the day from 6.30am to 11pm at night. There's no price discount that will encourage people to fly. And we want to get all the maintenance, get the aircraft cleaned, etc. at night.
71. CF: All right, Michael, stay with us. We're going to talk about some of your headline-grabbing ideas after the break. Stay with us.

Part 4: Publicity stunts and headline-grabbers

72. CF: You're welcome back to The Big Interview. My guest this evening is Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary. Michael, we're going to go through some of the headline-grabbing ideas, whether they were publicity stunts or not, down through the years. Charging for the loo. Now, that was a load of nonsense, wasn't it?
73. MOL: But it was one of the great publicity stunts of all time. I mean, still, I get asked at press conferences, and I'm going down to Albania this evening, they'll be asking me about charging for toilets. Is there any risk we'll charge for toilets?
74. CF: Yeah, so you had no intention whatsoever of ever charging for toilets.

75. MOL: At the BBC, I was doing an interview at BBC TV in the car park outside our office at Dublin Airport. And they asked me, what's next, charging for toilets? I went off on a riff. Of course, yeah, it's a great idea. We'd take out two toilets. We'd have six extra seats. Look, I mean, we're a low-cost airline. I don't have the money. Well, I didn't then have the money for expensive advertising budgets. We still don't. But the amount of, if you can just make up PR and generate PR, Elon Musk did wonderful work for us in the last couple of weeks, having a pop at me for being an idiot, which I thought was a reasonable, fair comment.
76. CF: I think he said you were an insufferable chimp, or was it the other way around?
77. MOL: No, I think he called me an idiot at one stage, insufferable chimp, and that I should be fired.
78. CF: We'll get back to Elon Musk in a minute. Taking out the last 10 rows and having standing areas.
79. MOL: Yeah. That was never going to be a runner. That would be a runner, but the safety authority would never allow it. Well, I don't quite understand why. We allow people to stand on trains. You allow people to stand on buses.
80. CF: But you're not belted in. I mean, you're flying up 36,000 feet.
81. MOL: Well, if the train crashes, you're not. But nobody's belted in on a train either. Now, you know, I'm not advocating for it because, frankly, it wouldn't add anything else. But if we had a standing area at the back of the plane and you guaranteed everybody the fares would be one euro, would people stand? They'd snap it up.
82. CF: They would.
83. MOL: But I don't think they'll ever be offered the choice.
84. CF: What about the padded roller coaster seats? You know, these kind of half-sitting, half-standing.
85. MOL: They're nonsense. They're nonsense as well. But they're nonsense. They were invented by, I don't know, somebody else jumped on. Actually, if you look at them, you can't actually add any capacity there. The advantage of having a standing area only is you can probably put another 20 or 30 people onto the plane. But no, we wouldn't be doing stand-up seats.
86. CF: Now, what about fashion advice? Did you tell people to stop wearing jeans on flights there recently on TikTok?
87. MOL: We didn't. I mean, it would ill behold Ryanair, given that I've worn nothing. I'm pretty sure you did. Something to do with deep vein thrombosis or something. I think it was some social media nonsense. I've been wearing jeans for 50 years. The first person who blows out in a ban against jeans would be me. So, I mean, it would ill behold, given my fashion sensibilities, for us to start getting fussy about what people wear on board our aircraft.
88. CF: Right, let's talk about the bags and the sizers and the controversy and paying for it.
89. MOL: Yeah.

90. CF: So we covered this story here on Virgin Media News. We sent Marie Cleary out to the airport and she asked Ryanair straight out, do the staff on the ground get paid commission if they catch people with an oversized bag? And she was told no.
91. MOL: And that turned out to be not correct. That's one way of saying it.
92. CF: Well, it was. Is that how you characterise it? That's not correct.
93. MOL: Our actual director of sales and marketing made a mistake.
94. CF: Did he make a mistake? Genuinely, he did.
95. MOL: Look, actually, I had to go and check, do we pay commission on bags? And it turned out we did, so we corrected him.
96. CF: Of course you do, because it's a revenue stream for you.
97. MOL: Actually, look, the revenue streams are tiny. We started charging for checked-in bags about 15, 20 years ago. We were the first airline to do it, and there was outrage. We don't want the money, we just don't want the bags. If we could get rid of all the bags, I would happily do it. When we started charging for bags, 80% of our passengers checked in a bag. Today, 20% of passengers check in a bag. That means 80% of people don't come near a check-in desk, don't go near a baggage carousel. They are much lower cost for us to carry those passengers. And because we've reduced checked-in bags so much, the planes now fly lighter, they burn less fuel. It saves us a huge amount of money.
98. CF: So what are you charging then if you can't get your bag into the sizer? Is it 75, 80 quid, something like that?
99. MOL: If it doesn't fit the sizer, 75 quid.
100. CF: Okay, and how much does the staff get?
101. MOL: I think about four or five euros of it. And is there a cap on that? No, I would have no idea of a reason to put a cap on it.
102. CF: So they're incentivised to catch you out.
103. MOL: They're not catching you out. They're incentivised to identify that you're breaking your agreement with the airline. We ask you, show up with a bag that is 60 by 40 by 20 centimetres. And the bag sizes on Ryanair are bigger than the minimum sizes. So don't be telling me afterwards, oh, it was just the wheels were sticking out. If it sticks out, it's too big. You're getting charged.

Part 5: Drinking, customer service, and the onboard experience

104. CF: All right. Let's talk about drinking. You asked Dublin Airport to stop people drinking. All airports.
105. MOL: All airports. Yeah.
106. CF: From two drinks, the two-drink limit. So it would really suit Ryanair if someone who's had two drinks and is in great old form, off on their holidays, gets onto the

Ryanair flight and says, sure, I'll have another few in here. I don't mind paying a tenner for a gin and tonic.

107. MOL: Yeah. Well, of course they wouldn't be paying a tenner for a gin and tonic.

108. CF: What would they be paying?

109. MOL: Oh, I don't know, five quid or something. I don't do gin and tonics. I'm a beer man myself. The issue for us and all airlines, and it's not just Ryanair, is the rapid rise in disruptive behaviour by passengers on board aircraft, certainly over the last decade.

110. CF: How bad is it?

111. MOL: I mean, in numerical terms, it's quite small. We operate, what, about 3,500 flights a day, but we're probably averaging one flight a day that has to divert because some disruptive passenger is creating a danger to aircraft safety. They're either drunk or they're on drugs, or there's a combination of the two. You know, in the old days when they might've been drunk, they get on board and they'd fall asleep. I think what happens today is you tend to have much more a mix of alcohol and drugs, and then they get aggressive and misbehaving. And it's not just male, it's females as well.

112. CF: Is it particular routes?

113. MOL: I mean, generally, the holiday destinations are the worst. Ibiza. Ibiza and Ibiza, which tends to have younger people, is by far and away the worst. We don't even serve alcohol on flights to Ibiza. We go through people's bags at airports. We thought we were very clever. We used to ban duty-free. And then we'd let them on with bottles of water. Of course, then it took us a year to work out the bottles of water were full of vodka. Now we don't even let you on board with a bottle. And it is a safety measure. We cannot have our cabin crew being assaulted or abused. We're not willing to tolerate that. And all we've said to everybody, I don't understand, at airports why airports are not subject to the same licensing law as everywhere else. Why are we serving pints in airports at seven o'clock in the morning? Who needs to be drinking pints at seven o'clock in the morning?

114. CF: Which you're happy to have them drinking on your flights.

115. MOL: If you asked me and Fitz said we'd have the same rules on board aircraft, no alcohol before 12 o'clock, no problem. We're serving very little alcohol at 7 o'clock in the morning. Most people are buying teas and coffees. All we want, and the real issue for us is during the summer, particularly at weekends when you have ATC delays, people are stuck in the bars and they're drinking more and more and more pints. And everybody's like, why don't you just stop the boarding? Because actually, unless they completely fall down, we can't identify the ones who are drunk, and you have that mix of too much alcohol. We think it's reasonable. We don't allow you to buy more than two bottles of duty free. Why do we allow you to buy more than two pints at an airport bar? And if you said to us, don't sell them more than two drinks on board, we'd happily do that. No problem.

116. CF: Michael, let's talk about customer service. How would you characterise your own customer service?

117. MOL: Best in the industry.
118. CF: You don't believe that, do you?
119. MOL: I absolutely do. We are the most on-time airline with the lowest fares.
120. CF: And you know there's been phone-in shows and everyone complaining about customer service and you saying they were refunded when they weren't refunded and all of this.
121. MOL: Do we get it right 100% of the time? No. But if you look at our growth, I mean, we have grown in the last, pre-COVID, we had 149 million passengers. This year, that will rise to 260 million passengers. The evidence is there on a daily basis. People cannot get enough of the customer service we provide. They're queuing up to get it. They're beating each other over the head to get on board Ryanair flights.
122. CF: The experience on board a Ryanair flight. Is it all about get people to buy as much as they can, unsettle them, the colours, the noise, here's the lottery tickets, here's that. Like, are you supposed to be on edge on a Ryanair flight the whole time?
123. MOL: And I say this as one of the Ryanair's most frequent flyers. It is a great experience. You can buy what you want. You're not pressed into buying anything. I've never bought a lottery ticket on board. I don't understand why anybody buys lottery tickets, but yet they do. It's a great experience and we get you there. What people want, they want, what's the lowest fare? 99.9% of people book you. What's the lowest fare? And then we are more likely to get you there on time than any other airline.
124. CF: Did you say before you might get the pilots to create a little bit of turbulence to get people buying drinks?
125. MOL: I say lots of stupid things at various different stages. Yes, I undoubtedly said that, you know, and yes, we create a bit of turbulence. People don't buy more drinks because of a bit of turbulence.
126. CF: And then you did say, I think, that the ideal customer is someone with a pulse and a credit card. Is that right?
127. MOL: I mean, that's absolutely true. You know, we are operating a very low fare airline. If we can encourage people to buy more stuff on board, great. But we don't force you. You know, you don't have to pay for a reserve seat. Half our passengers don't. You don't have to check in a bag. 80% of our passengers don't. But if you want to fly from A to B for 19 quid, you can do it on Ryanair with no difficulty and we'll get you there more on time than any other airline.
128. CF: All right, lots more to talk about. Stay with us. We're going to take another break now and then we'll talk further to Michael O'Leary.

Part 6: The O’Leary brand, politicians, Trump, and Musk

129. CF: You’re welcome back to The Big Interview. My guest this evening is Ryanair boss Michael O’Leary. This brand you have, this sort of brash, outspoken, tell it like it is, cutting through all the bull. Is it for publicity, for publicity’s sake, there’s no such thing as bad publicity? Or is that who you really are? Is it authentic, Michael?
130. MOL: Well, firstly, there is, I mean, there’s no such thing as bad publicity as long as it’s not around safety. You know, we will never go near safety. We never make jokes about safety, but anything else, service, politicians, airports, me, we’ll send up anything at all. But if it generates free publicity, particularly when you have such price advantage that Ryanair has, sales go through the roof. Is it me personally? No, I live a reasonably quiet life. I’m a simple farmer from Mullingar.
131. CF: A simple billionaire farmer from Mullingar.
132. MOL: You know, but that’s the reality of it. I mean, I’m not interested in personal publicity. I get asked to do all these profiles of this. The answer is no. And my family, my wife and children are not interested in it either. They don’t want to be in VIP magazine or going to, you know, the premiere nights of movies. We live very quietly, very happily in Mullingar. But the rest of it, I will do all the PR I can and the schlock for Ryanair.
133. CF: But some of your comments about politicians in particular have been very personalised down through the years, particularly around, you know, Green Party politicians, Micheál Martin, Simon Harris. They’re quite personalised.
134. MOL: I don’t think they are.
135. CF: Calling them dunces.
136. MOL: The Greens were dunces. After five years in power, we have the second most congested city in the world. We have the second most expensive electricity in Europe. They have been useless. I criticise Micheál Martin, but I criticise his performance.
137. CF: And you said vote for Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael in the last election and don’t vote for the Greens and don’t vote for Sinn Féin.
138. MOL: I would. I mean, they were running on a ticket that was going to abolish the cap at Dublin Airport. 16 months later, nothing done on the cap at Dublin Airport. We want to grow. I’m going to take delivery of 300 new aircraft in the next decade. I want to put about 50 more of those aircraft here in Ireland. And I can’t because this government, with a 20-seat majority, won’t get off its backside and scrap the cap.
139. CF: Is there any politician you do like and you do admire?
140. MOL: I mean, there’s lots of politicians I admire over time. You know, Margaret Thatcher, I think, was a fantastic leader.
141. CF: Any Irish politician?
142. MOL: I mean, I look back on what Charlie Haughey got done over the years. And yes, he was surrounded by corruption and all the rest of it. But he delivered a

major change. The IFSC, Seán Lemass, opened up Ireland in the 60s. I mean, the biggest dunce we ever had was de Valera. You know, we should have joined NATO.

143. CF: We're going to really upset people today.
144. MOL: And we should, but we should have joined NATO in 1945 when it was obvious they were going to win the war. The Americans would have built all our airports, all our motorways and deep sea ports. But of course, no, we were there with comely maidens over the half bloody door.
145. CF: So what about Peter Burke? Peter Burke, you were at the launch of his general election campaign.
146. MOL: I was. He did a wonderful job. He topped the poll.
147. CF: Did you really upset the teachers that day?
148. MOL: I didn't upset the teachers that day.
149. CF: You did upset the teachers. A lot of people said it was very offensive what you said about teachers.
150. MOL: And they were completely wrong. But you know, so what? I don't mind defending people. I'm quite happy to defend my position. I said teachers are very good in the classroom. That's where they should be. But the teachers we have in the Dáil, most notably Micheál Martin, get nothing done because he sits around...
151. CF: There's loads of people in the Dáil with different jobs, like accountants, for example, Peter Burke.
152. MOL: The biggest number of TDs in the Dáil are teachers. And they're very good at educating our people, but history shows they're not particularly good at getting things done or delivering real effective change.
153. CF: What about Trump, for example? Do you admire him?
154. MOL: No, I think he's a nutjob.
155. CF: He's made a mess of everything in Iran.
156. MOL: He hasn't made... Oh, sorry, he's certainly made a mess of things in Iran. There are certain policies in the States that I think on the economic side he's been very good at. He has been absolutely right in embarrassing NATO. I mean, the lack of defence spending in Europe, particularly in Ireland, and we're one of the wealthiest countries in Europe, our ability to be neutral is over. We have to be, I think, we should be a member of European defence policy and we should be squarely supporting Ukraine in trying to defend itself from the illegal invasion by the Russians.
157. CF: OK, back to Trump for a moment. Have you ever met him? Have you ever spoken to him?
158. MOL: I've spoken to him on the phone. He called me when he bought Doonbeg and he owned the golf club in Turnberry in Scotland, which is beside Prestwick, and Doonbeg beside Shannon. And he was looking for extra flights into Shannon and into Prestwick. And we had a very good conversation. I was explaining to him

the challenges of growing in Prestwick, which at the time was APD, which is the environmental tax, hampers Prestwick. And Shannon at the time, I said, look, we'll happily grow in Shannon, but most of the growth needs to be at Dublin Airport.

159. CF: But on a personal level, what did you make of him?
160. MOL: He's very charming, very talkative. It's very hard to get a word in edgewise with him. He talks about himself most of the time. He tells you how wonderful you are, but I wouldn't spend too much time listening to that. And then off he went and, you know, did the next 10 or 15 phone calls he made that day.
161. CF: What about people who would say that, you know, your brand of brash, tell it like it is, is out of the same playbook as Trump? Would you find that offensive?
162. MOL: I wouldn't find anything offensive. You could say anything about me and I'm not going to find it offensive. I couldn't care less.
163. CF: What about Elon Musk? I mean, that got very personal between yourself and Elon Musk.
164. MOL: I think Elon Musk was terrific. I mean, here we are in January. I came out correctly and said, look, the Starlink system is very good, putting Wi-Fi on board, but we have to put an aerial on top of the aircraft and the fuel drag penalty plus the fitting costs about 200 million a year. He said I knew nothing about Wi-Fi and planes. I know more about Wi-Fi and planes than he does. He knows nothing about planes at all. And the fuel drag is real. His own people who we're talking to in Starlink, it's real. I think it's inevitable with the technology. And, you know, I have no difficulty with it. If we can provide our passengers with free Wi-Fi, they'll use free Wi-Fi. But I'm not going to spend 200 million providing them with free Wi-Fi because actually that would add about one euro to my average airfares.
165. CF: And you don't think people would be prepared to pay an extra euro?
166. MOL: No. I mean, time and time again, look at the media. Are people prepared to pay a euro for a newspaper or for a great TV service like Virgin? No. If it's free, they'll use it. Look at all the kids. They are not willing to pay for media. They're not willing to pay for access to Wi-Fi, particularly on one-hour flights. But the technology is improving. And I'm pretty sure in the next five years, we'll be able to put aerials inside the aircraft or in the baggage hold of the aircraft that are now free of all those empty, wasted checked-in bags. And then we'll be able to provide free Wi-Fi, but without a fuel cost penalty. And then we'll do it.
167. CF: So have you made up with Elon Musk? Have you been speaking to him?
168. MOL: I'm desperately trying to find some way of annoying him again so that he'll abuse me again with his 1.4 million Twitter followers.
169. CF: Did you say he was stupid and an idiot?
170. MOL: He is. I mean, I think he's very rich, but he's also an idiot. You know, anybody who presides over... I mean, he bought X for 45 billion. I think today it's worth about 20 billion. And it is a cesspit. I think social media is a cesspit. Ryanair has an account on, we have an account on TikTok. We have an account on X. We have an account on lots of that rubbish.

171. CF: So you have the account on the cesspit.
172. MOL: We're very happy to appeal to the people who are on the cesspit if they want low airfares. Absolutely. I don't understand why governments around the world, though, allow people to post all this stuff anonymously. If you want to post on social media, you should do so under your own name and then you would clean up an awful lot of the crap and the rubbish that's on social media.
173. CF: Some of the stuff, Michael, that you have said in the past, it would probably...
174. MOL: All true.
175. CF: Well, it would probably have you cancelled now.
176. MOL: I hope so.
177. CF: I mean, do you regret anything you've said in the past?
178. MOL: I'm sure I do.
179. CF: Have you ever apologised for anything?
180. MOL: I'm sure I have at various stages. I mean, I shoot my mouth off. I generate lots of publicity. I've undoubtedly made mistakes along the way. And I have apologised regularly wherever Ryanair, we've made mistakes. And we have made mistakes. We will continue to make mistakes.
181. CF: So what is your biggest regret in terms of what you've said? Where you've thought, I just went too far with that one and your colleagues had to rein you in a bit.
182. MOL: I'm sure, honestly, I don't remember it, but I'm sure there are...
183. CF: Come on.
184. MOL: I don't, because I don't spend too much time looking back, Colette. I'm always looking forward. We're buying 300 new aircraft from Boeing. We'll be carrying 300 million passengers a year in the next decade. I mean, if I have upset, and I'm sure I've said something nasty about people, but Elon Musk, Donald Trump, Micheál Martin, they can take it. They're up there in the public eye. I'll take it. I don't mind people slagging me off.
185. CF: But does it bother you that, you know, as part of this public discourse and how it's all gotten so abrasive and undignified, that you might be part of that, that you might be contributing to all of that and kind of using the "I just tell it like it is" as a bit of a cover?
186. MOL: But I don't. If I'm asked my opinion on certain things, why is a children's hospital that should have cost 400 million going to cost us two and a half billion? Because you have an incompetent civil service in this country and politicians who come in for two or three years and disappear and deliver nothing. Why can't we fix the infrastructure in this country? Because we have elected a government with a 20-seat majority that in 16 months has done nothing.
187. CF: Nothing. And as I said, and I just have to say this in defence of the government, the economy...

188. MOL: Why are you defending the government?
189. CF: The economy is flying.
190. MOL: That's thanks to business. It's not thanks to stupid politicians.
191. CF: OK. We're going to talk about your future after the break, Michael. We've lots more to talk about. Stay with us.

Part 7: Contract, succession, personal life

192. CF: Now you're welcome back to the final part of our Big Interview. My guest this evening is Ryanair boss Michael O'Leary. I think you were renegotiating your contract recently. Were you, Michael?
193. MOL: I am. We're in discussions, yeah.
194. CF: So what does that mean?
195. MOL: We're discussing extending our, my contract runs to 2028, running it out to 2032. So signing up for another four years, that'll take me out to about 70, 71 years of age. God help me. But I see no reason to retire. I enjoy working. Ryanair's a great place to work. We have a great team of people there. And we are transforming for the better flying in Europe.
196. CF: But what is the succession plan when you eventually leave Ryanair, whether it's in 2028 or beyond?
197. MOL: We review a succession plan every year. There is five airlines in the group. There's five airline CEOs. There's really good people in operations, commercial, legal, accounting underneath that. And, you know, if I get run over by a bus in Ballymount as I leave this studio, there is a succession plan both internally, people who could replace me, and externally.
198. CF: But for you yourself, I mean, it's difficult to imagine Ryanair without Michael O'Leary. And I'm sure Michael O'Leary would find it difficult to imagine himself without Ryanair. I mean, the company's sort of created in your own image, isn't it?
199. MOL: Yeah, but it's slightly overdone. I mean, that RTÉ documentary, you know, a couple of weeks ago, too much of it was focused on me. Like, Ryanair is a huge, very successful company and there's a very good senior team of people, men and women there, who do most of the day-to-day work. I do a lot of the PR stuff because, you know, that's really all I can do. I mean, they try to keep me away from the day-to-day controls because the airline is much better run when they're in charge and not me.
200. CF: Well, they'll have to pay a substantial amount more for marketing if and when you leave.
201. MOL: That's probably true. But some of the marketing might be a little bit better than what I do. It won't be quite as much fun or it won't be quite as notorious.

202. CF: But can you see yourself retiring after the end of this next contract comes up? I mean, you seem like a workaholic.
203. MOL: I mean, I enjoy working.
204. CF: You don't do it for the money.
205. MOL: No, thankfully. Yeah. Look, I have no great plans. I have children who are still in school and in college. And I think when my youngest, who's currently, I think, doing his junior cert this year, when he goes off to university and they don't need us anymore, I certainly, myself and my wife, would like to travel a bit more. And I don't want to be working as intensely then, say, in three or four years' time as I am now.
206. CF: I thought you didn't like holidays.
207. MOL: I don't like holidays, but I like my wife. Like? Don't overplay it. I'd like to go back to before the children arrived, spending more time with her, which is fun. We have spent the last 20 years of our time bringing four kids around together. And I look forward to the day when all we have to do is send money and they'll look after themselves.
208. CF: Outside of Ryanair, what is the best airline in the world?
209. MOL: It used to be Southwest Airlines, which we copied ourselves on, but they've kind of lost that focus in the last 10 years. I think the best airline in the world outside of Ryanair actually is IAG, BA Aer Lingus. Willie Walsh created that airline. They are, I think, by far the most successful of the international carriers. They've done a terrific job at growing Aer Lingus' transatlantic operations, again, which are currently being hampered by the Dublin Airport cap. That would be an airline that I admire.
210. CF: So when you fly and when you're not on a Ryanair flight, which one do you choose? And do you always fly first class?
211. MOL: No, well, I mean, everywhere in Europe I fly Ryanair because we fly everywhere in Europe.
212. CF: What do people say when they see you getting on? I mean, you're so well known.
213. MOL: I mean, I put a few boarding cards, so it's great. They all want a Facebook picture. So they're all putting me up on their Facebook accounts and it looks like I'm working at the front line, whereas really I'm just getting on board the flight. Most of them expect me to get on the first row of seats. And then the usual thing is, you know, this flight will be going on time because you're on it. Trust me, every flight goes on time and me being on the flight or not has nothing to do with it. I think it adds to the gaiety of the nation. Lots of people like to see me on board the flight. They're all, I mean, I'm pestered with people looking for selfies. But if that's one of the prices of it, then so be it.
214. CF: But the cabin crew must be nervous when you're getting on. I mean, their direct boss is there on the flight.

215. MOL: I'm not their direct boss. I mean, we employ now about 12,000 cabin crew. I'd say half the cabin crew don't even know who I am.
216. CF: They do, of course.
217. MOL: I guarantee you they don't. We are opening up a four-aircraft base in Tirana tomorrow morning and I'm going down to do the launch PR and none of them know who's that old fart over there.
218. CF: The pilots might remember that you called them glorified bus drivers, would they?
219. MOL: Oh, I mean, they don't. I think the pilots are very grateful to be flying brand new aircraft in an airline where it is not going out of business. There will be some other airlines in Europe that will go out of business at the end of this year because of the war in Iran and the Middle East. We're growing from strength to strength thanks to a terrific group of pilots and cabin crew, fantastic staff delivering a great service for customers on a daily basis.
220. CF: If you saw someone slip up, one of the cabin crew, would you bring it to their attention?
221. MOL: I would occasionally, quietly. I mean, the only thing that kind of annoys me on board an aircraft is if I'm on and they don't get the trolley out quickly. That kind of annoys me.
222. CF: Because you're losing money.
223. MOL: It's not I'm losing money. It's just there's an inefficiency there. Get the trolley out. Let's get the service underway. Let's see what people want. I mean, certainly I want a coffee. My standard order is a coffee and a shortbread biscuit and I want my coffee and shortbread biscuit. But we've this great new order-to-seat thing now where you can put in your order and they'll deliver.
224. CF: You don't pay for it.
225. MOL: I do pay. I go out of my way on every flight to be seen to be paying for it because if I pay for it, everybody else, we still have people get on board our aircraft, "I'm Michael O'Leary's cousin or his sister and he said I can have that for free." Go away. But the only problem with the order to seat is because they arrive down with the coffee and the shortbread biscuit, every time, people think I'm getting some VIP service, they're serving me first. No, no, it's the order-to-seat service. It'll work for you as well.
226. CF: Are you no-frills in your own life? I mean, you don't look like you dress cheaply.
227. MOL: I got specially dressed. I put on a jacket for you.
228. CF: So you're not low fares, low frills, kind of low budget in your life. You go to nice restaurants. You don't go to cheap old restaurants, right?
229. MOL: I was in Milano's on Baggot Street last weekend with the kids having pizzas. I prefer to be in, the one thing I won't go to is Michelin three star, two star, nonsense. I can't abide all the bloody tasting menus. I want a steak and chips and I don't want to be eating this stuff, tiny portions.

230. CF: Has it ever occurred to you as a billionaire to just up sticks and go off out to Monaco?
231. MOL: No, I mean, I'm not sure.
232. CF: Become a tax exile?
233. MOL: I think, I mean, I wouldn't rule it out at some point in time in the future. You know, if you had some lunatics like the Shinnors got elected here and there's rumours of a wealth tax, I'd be gone the following day. You know, and I'm probably the biggest taxpayer in this country. I think next year on my famous bonus, I have to pay tax about 100 million euros on my bonus. You know, there is a price to be paid for living in this country. I don't mind paying that price. But at some point in time, if there's a wealth tax or they screw around with inheritance tax, yeah, then I will go. But I have more than paid my dues here over many years.
234. CF: Have you still got the taxi plate, by the way?
235. MOL: I do. One of the best investments I ever made.
236. CF: So is it an actual plate on top of the car?
237. MOL: There is a big plastic sign on top of my taxi. There's also the big two yellow line green taxi signs on the doors, which were introduced specifically at one stage because they thought I wouldn't put the green signs on my Merc. Happy to do it. And I employ two full-time taxi drivers to do week on, week off. This is O'Leary Cabs.
238. CF: Well, I wouldn't call it O'Leary Cabs.
239. MOL: But yeah, so I create employment. And we should go back to deregulating the taxi industry again. It was one of the most successful policies we had. And this nonsense about not allowing Ubers and the rest, we should deregulate it. Anybody who wants to drive a car in a taxi should be allowed to do it. I think it is disgraceful what goes on in Dublin late at night when you can't get taxis. And I would have no truck with the Taxi Drivers Union.
240. CF: All right, horses. You didn't have any winners at Cheltenham this year. Are you still as into them as you were?
241. MOL: I have less horses now because I have four children and their various activities. But I used to have too many horses when I first got married. I've slimmed it down. I probably have about 80 or 100 horses in training. It is my major outlet. I am low cost in everything except when it comes to buying horses or jewellery for my wife. I love the horses. I have them in training with Willie Mullins and with Gordon Elliott and my brother who takes care, buys and does most of the buying and the organising. And I really like, the people involved in National Hunt Racing in Ireland are terrific. It is a great sport and it's a great outlet.
242. CF: And what about the cattle and the farm? You love farming.
243. MOL: Love the cattle, love the farming. We have the 30th anniversary Gigginstown bull sale coming up on the 18th of April in three weeks' time.
244. CF: The Gigginstown bull sale.

245. MOL: The Gigginstown bull sale. I'm not the only bull that comes out of Gigginstown. We actually have high-quality bulls. So we have a bull sale every year. I breed Angus cattle. So I've got, what, 650 cattle. I'm very proud of them. I love my Angus cattle. My wife doesn't share. I think they're gorgeous and beautiful and she thinks they're...
246. CF: They're the beautiful black ones, aren't they?
247. MOL: Yeah, black Angus.

Part 8: Future of flying and close

248. CF: And finally, Michael, the future of flying, where do you see it going? I mean, I'm not talking about in the months ahead, I'm talking about in the years ahead. Is low-cost travel, will that be gone?
249. MOL: No, I mean, low-cost travel will remain. I think it's to be the only form on short haul. Within Europe, within North America, within Asia, it will only be low-cost travel. But there will be technology. It will be more of the same certainly for the next 20 years because that's all the manufacturers, the airlines and the engines can and will produce. Now, they're producing better engines. The new aircraft we're buying will carry 20% more passengers, burns 20% less fuel. So it's a 40% reduction in fuel per passenger. But I think there will come a time in the future when Star Trek travel will be beaming people around the world and then low-fare air travel is screwed.
250. CF: We're going to be beaming people around the world.
251. MOL: Beam us up, Scotty, and beam me down to bed in Palma, Mallorca.
252. CF: When I was trying to organise this interview and I was speaking to your PR people, Michael, they said to me, under no circumstances ask him about his private life because he will rear up on you and he will leave the studio.
253. MOL: That's not true.
254. CF: So can I ask you about your private life? You certainly can. You just won't get any answers. Well, what's it like to live with you? Can I ask you that?
255. MOL: Are you difficult to live with? I don't think so. I mean, you know.
256. CF: You're probably never there. That's why you're not difficult to live with.
257. MOL: I have to ask others. Like, I think I'm wonderful. I think I'm humble, engaging, charming, et cetera, et cetera. I work hard. But I think that has, it provides frustration, certainly for my wife. She doesn't like the publicity. She's uncomfortable with the PR side. She likes to live very quietly. And I recognise that, which is why I try not to stray into kind of personal PR. I don't mind doing the dog and pony show for Ryanair. But, you know, we live quietly in Mullingar. I have four children, two of whom are in college, and they don't want to be kind of, you know, all the PR and the crap as well. So we're very happy.
258. CF: Do they ever say to you, please don't do any of that stuff, Dad?

259. MOL: Frequently. You have no idea the amount of times they say, please don't do that. I mean, whenever we're travelling, you know, and I'll go up and I'm pulling boarding cards and getting my face and they're going, oh, for God's sake. But they've kind of learned to live with that. But I, you know, I don't get my photograph taken with them. They don't want to be involved. And that's their right. And, you know, you should protect. I mean, you're in the public eye a lot. And you do a very good job of protecting your children. They don't want to be. You know, I think people who are there with social media and putting up pictures of their children, this and the other, it is unfair on the children. And I don't want to go there.
260. CF: She was late to the altar, wasn't she? She must have been on an Aer Lingus flight.
261. MOL: Correct. I thought so. To be fair, it was only about 25 or 30 minutes. But, you know, I was 42 years of age, so I waited a long time for the right one to arrive.
262. CF: Michael O'Leary, thank you very much for coming in to us in the Big Interview tonight.
263. MOL: It's a pleasure. Thanks a million. My pleasure.
264. CF: So that's it from this edition of the Big Interview. My thanks to my guest this evening, Michael O'Leary of Ryanair. Thanks for watching and good night.