

# AS MAGGIE HABERMAN UNABASHEDLY JOINS THE KAYFABE, TIM WALZ SINGS THE MENARDS JINGLE

Sunday marked the 1/3 mark for Kamala Harris' presidential campaign (36 of 107 days). Yesterday, she announced her first sit-down interview (with Dana Bash, whom I consider a poor choice); the media hounds are already wailing that, like interviews Barack Obama did with Joe Biden, Mitt Romney did with Paul Ryan, and Trump did with Mike Pence, the Vice President will do the interview with her own VP nominee.

By comparison, Sunday marked the 9/10 mark for Trump's presidential campaign (650 of 720 days).

Meanwhile, there are a slew of question to which media hounds have not bothered to demand answers from Trump:

- Will he hire his failspawn to work in White House again?
- What is Trump's business relationship with Emiratis and Saudis?
- Where are his tax returns?
- Did Trump get \$10 million from Egypt to stay in 2016 race?
- Where are the missing classified documents?
- What did Putin say in Helsinki?
- Did Trump have an overt quid

pro quo on the Stone,  
Bannon, and Manafort  
pardons?

- How much of his campaign donations has he spent on legal defense?
- How and (why?!?!) does Trump plan to implement his plan of mass deportation?

In the wake of the DNC, there have been some really good critiques of the media's failure. Asawin Suebsaeng mocked at the "mollycoddled hogs" who bitched about their own access while bemoaning that of influencers, the bloggers of 2024.

Much of what I witnessed and heard about during my time in Chicago reinforced my preexisting beliefs that far too many so-called elite members of my profession – national political media scribes who fancy themselves as speaking truth to power, but more often just speak words to financially destructive Google algorithms – are mollycoddled hogs who are doing everything they can to fail to meet the enormity of this moment.

Like Suebsaeng, Will Bunch grieved the way journalists were blowing this most important election. He cited three examples:

- Axios' Alex Thompson laundering a right wing smear about a typo Tim Walz' campaign made in 2006 just like he laundered right wing smears about Hunter Biden with little notice from Democrats
- Rich Lowry's argument that

if Trump repeats a lie over and over – like his 2016 claim that he would build a wall and Mexico would pay for it – that would amount to “character” that might launch him to victory

- Various “fact checks” that discount direct quotations of Trump’s comments because he later reneged on those quotes

Citing Mark Jacobs, Bunch also flipped Suebsaeng’s focus on mainstream gripes about influencer access. Bunch laid out how, in significant part because of declining trust in mainstream media, those influencers are actually the best route for Kamala Harris to reach voters, particularly the ones who can make the difference in the election.

Jacob has harsh words for how reporters have covered the race, writing that “too many political journalists are marinating in the Washington cocktail culture, writing for each other and for their sources – in service to the political industry, not the public.” But he also notes that traditional media can’t figure out how to compete for young eyeballs against sites like edgy and fast-paced TikTok. Jacob pointed out that public faith in mass media has plunged from 72% in 1976, after Watergate, to just 32% today.

You know who gets the new landscape better than anyone else? Kamala Harris.

The vice president and Democratic nominee is running to be America’s first post-media president. In Chicago, much was made of the fact that Team Harris and the Democrats invited 200 sometimes

fawning internet “content creators” who got VIP treatment while mainstream journalists fought over nosebleed-level seats and refrained from eating or going to the bathroom for fear of losing them.

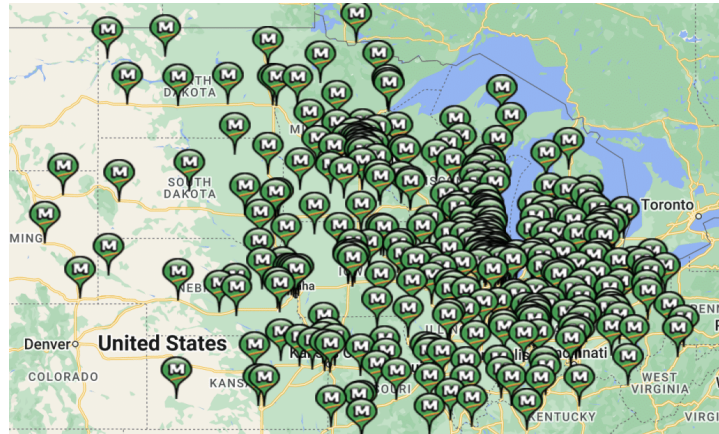
I would add several comments about the real tensions between mainstream reporters and influencers.

First, these discussions of tensions between influencers and journalists have ignored what has happened among right wing media in the last decade— during which time people who would have formerly been called “influencers” (or, more accurately, trolls) have become mainstream, including even former shitty blogger JD Vance. What Harris has done by welcoming these influencers was to foster a progressive media infrastructure akin to the one Barack Obama largely let collapse after his win. If Democrats are lucky, in a matter of years, influencers will be able to feed lazy hacks like Alex Thompson stories that he’ll package up and DC insiders will imagine that amounts to journalism. Until then, they may be able to magnify genuine right wing scandals that the media otherwise ignores. One *source* of the double standard with which mainstream media has always treated Trump, for example, is this pressure from the right, which really does dictate a lot of press coverage (and which, the Douglass Mackey exhibits showed, those trolls explicitly set out to do as early as 2015).

Second, one thing few people have — still! — accounted for is the degree to which Trump has never been asked to explain policy, allowing him to instead coast on the goodwill and trust accrued over decades of appearing in people’s living room as a TV star. The imagined authenticity that Trump — *still!* — wields from that gives him an enormous advantage.

To counter that, there’s real value in Tim Walz doing appearances with influencers like this one.

Not only will Walz appear to be an authentic Midwesterner because he shops at Eau Claire based big box store Menards (I, a snooty outsider when I lived in the Midwest and someone who had other people do my gutters, tended to shop at the pricier Lowes instead).



And there's no quicker way to convey that he understands how middle class people budget than his comment about sending in receipts to get an 11% rebate.

Most of those that Suebsaeng called mollicoddled hogs would be hard-pressed to understand, much less explain, the thick cultural connotations of this video. Instead, Walz just performs it, with his off-tune Menards jingle rendition to boot.

In other words, it's not *just* that Harris has chosen to prioritize those who have trust with the voters she needs to mobilize. Influencers do several other things – things that are absolutely crucial for competing against Trump – that were encouraged on the right but are deemed a slight to journalism now.

Meanwhile, journalists treated with respect are increasingly pumping out Trump-scripted propaganda. Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan have been releasing increasingly supine coverage for months. They falsely reported that a platform that enshrines fetal personhood presented a “softened” GOP face on abortion.

After a year of reporting on policies that directly parallel those in Project 2025, Maggie floated Trump's complaints that Democrats were calling him on it. When that team reported on Trump's Mar-a-Lago "press conference," the only lies they called out were Trump's claim to have left office peacefully – but not his lies about the Biden-Harris hand-off, Kamala's record, Biden and Pelosi's demeanor, prosecutions of him, Willie Brown and a near-crash in a helicopter, the price of bacon, polling, or even crowd size.

But with yesterday's coverage of the RFK Jr and Tulsi Gabbard news, this team really stepped over into joining Trump's faked conflict. Both the subhead and the story presented the two as "progressive Democrats," adopting Trump's apparent goal in countering the increasing number of Republicans who are endorsing Kamala Harris.

## Trump to Put Kennedy and Gabbard on His Transition Team

Mr. Kennedy and Ms. Gabbard, who had been progressive Democrats for many years, will join the former president's sons and Senator JD Vance, his running mate, as honorary co-chairs.

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Robert F. Kennedy Jr. ended his independent campaign for president and endorsed former President Donald J. Trump last week. Uli Seit for The New York Times



By **Maggie Haberman**, **Jonathan Swan** and **Rebecca Davis O'Brien**

Aug. 27, 2024

Both Mr. Kennedy and Ms. Gabbard spent most of their public life as progressive Democrats. Only four months ago, Mr. Trump was calling Mr. Kennedy a “Radical Left Lunatic” who was “far more LIBERAL than anyone running as a Democrat.” Trump allies pushed stories about Mr. Kennedy’s record of supporting abortion rights and far-left environmentalism as they tried to make his independent candidacy less appealing to Trump voters.

The basis for treating RFK as such was a citation from comments Trump made earlier this year, when he was lying about Kennedy in order to improve RFK’s value as a spoiler to Joe Biden. It was all a show, the kind of drama any wrestling promoter uses to enhance the character of his conflicts. And yet Maggie and Swan just quoted it as if they’re too stupid to know Trump’s comments were all a show.

When Maggie and Swan “broke” the “news” that Tulsi was helping Trump with debate prep just weeks earlier, they included details also appearing in yesterday’s piece (such as about Tulsi’s long friendship with Trump, which totally undermines the claim that this association is news), but also repeated something else that is, at best, Trump’s interpretation of how well Tulsi did in the 2019 debate against Kamala.

Ms. Gabbard, who left the Democratic Party after her 2020 presidential run and has rebranded herself as a celebrity among Trump’s base of support, has long been friendly with Mr. Trump and was briefly considered to be his running mate. But her involvement in Mr. Trump’s debate preparation, which has not previously been reported, was partly because of her own performance in a 2019 Democratic presidential primary debate, **when Ms. Gabbard eviscerated Ms. Harris in a memorable onstage encounter.** [my

The unmarked repetition of this *opinion* is particularly relevant given that others argue Kamala eviscerated Tulsi, precisely because the then-Senator called out all the ways Tulsi was already simply posing as a Democrat so as to platform her attacks on the party.

And Democrats have long been repulsed by Tulsi's apologies for dictators, starting with Bashar al-Assad, but including Vladimir Putin.

You don't have to decide which woman eviscerated the other. Indeed, avoiding such comment would invite a better explanation for Tulsi's role in Trump's orbit, one that these two Trump-whispers don't claim to know.

Do they – two Trump whisperers who have covered Trump for years – not know that Trump is just a carnival barker, setting up conflict to distract people performing a role called journalism? Have they unwittingly come to merge their own consciousness with his? Or are they just wittingly part of the kayfabe now themselves?

Whichever it is, as actual journalists continue to treat Trump's obvious con without comment, it flips the complaints about influencers back on its head.

The coverage Trump has enjoyed has long worked to pressure straight journalists into covering things with a right wing spin. And these days, it's not clear whether the straight journalists need any help.