

PEELING OFF MTG

Robert Draper did a 1,000-word piece describing the Four Takeaways of his much longer magazine profile describing Marjorie Taylor Greene's Break With Trump. It focuses on four steps in the process, which he presents out of chronological order:

- "Trump's speech at Charlie Kirk's memorial was a clarifying moment," because it contrasted Erika Kirk's forgiveness with Trump's lack of Christian faith
- "Greene's demands to release the Epstein files seemed to be the last straw for Trump," because MTG's threat to reveal the names of those who abused Epstein's victims would hurt Trump's friends
- "Her disillusionment with Trump goes beyond the Epstein files," in which Draper lumps tariffs and Gaza but focuses primarily on the way Trump's stochastic terrorism led to threats against MTG's son
- "Greene said she was wrong for accusing Democrats of treason in the past," which simply doubles down on the apology MTG made already on CNN and explained that MTG realized Christians don't do such things

I don't doubt that Draper thinks of the transformation he describes as dominated – bullets one and four – by MTG living by her faith, but the word "Christian" only appears in the 8,100-word profile six times.

And word frequency is just one tell that Draper may be indulging MTG's own retroactive reconstruction of it.

The profile is based on interviews that took place earlier this month, though as Draper recounts, he has been covering MTG closely since 2021 and met with her repeatedly before this month. The Kirk memorial with which Draper began both his profile and his Four Takeaways occurred on September 21. He describes MTG's perception of the difference between Erika's forgiveness and Trump's doubling down as the moment when, "the stress fracture that had been steadily widening between Greene and her political godfather became an irrevocable break."

But his stress fracture comment introduces a paragraph listing five policy splits with Trump, most of which predate the Kirk memorial, the most important of which – her support for releasing all the Epstein files – predates the memorial by several weeks and gets its own paragraph here and a more focused treatment later.

- Declaring the war in Gaza a "genocide"
- Objecting to cryptocurrency and artificial-intelligence policies that, from her perspective, prioritized billionaire donors over working-class Americans
- Criticizing the Trump administration for:
 - Approving foreign student visas

- Enacting tariffs that hurt businesses in her district
- Allowing Obamacare subsidies to expire
- Argu[ing] that all investigative material pertaining to Jeffrey Epstein should be released

Much later, the profile describes that well before the Epstein break came the realization that Trump does not return loyalty (including a campaign disloyalty similar to the one that drove Elise Stefanik's later break), followed by Trump's targeted harassment when MTG opposed his cryptocurrency graft.

She considered running against Senator Jon Ossoff but announced in May that she had decided not to.

Greene's stated reasoning at the time was that "the Senate is where good ideas go to die." But the week after her announcement, The Wall Street Journal reported that Trump had shared with her a survey from his pollster, Tony Fabrizio, projecting that Ossoff would beat her by 18 points. Later, Trump would claim in a Truth Social post that their split "seemed to all begin" when he sent her the poll – suggesting, in effect, that Greene was pouting over his lack of support: "All I see 'Wacky' Marjorie do is COMPLAIN, COMPLAIN, COMPLAIN!" Greene insisted to me, "It wasn't about a Fabrizio poll." She added: "I never had a single conversation with the president about it. Instead, he told me all the time, 'You should run for governor – you'd win.'"

Still, Greene told me, it began to dawn

on her that when it came to the president, loyalty is “a one-way street – and it ends like that whenever it suits him.” Being disabused of the idea that subservience would be rewarded appeared to have a liberating effect on her.

In June, Greene did an about-face on the president’s One Big Beautiful Bill after conceding that she voted for it without realizing that it contained a provision that would prevent states from enforcing restrictions on artificial intelligence for a period of 10 years. If the Senate did not strike the moratorium from the bill, Greene publicly warned, “when the O.B.B.B. comes back to the House for approval after Senate changes, I will not vote for it with this in it.” On July 1, the Senate voted to sever the provision from the bill, which Trump signed into law three days later.

Greene broke again from Trump on July 17, arguing on X that his cryptocurrency bill could permit a future president to “TURN OFF YOUR BANK ACCOUNT AND STOP YOUR ABILITY TO BUY AND SELL!!!!!!” This time, Trump made his displeasure known to her – and to her peers.

That same day, Greene and roughly a dozen other House Republicans who also had reservations about the bill were summoned to the Oval Office. In Greene’s recollection, Trump focused his wrath on her. “When you have a group of kids,” she said, “you pick the one that is the most well behaved, that always does everything right, and you beat the living shit out of them. Because then the rest of them are like: ‘Oh, man, holy shit. If Dad does that to her, what would he do to me?’” A White House spokeswoman disputes that the meeting was contentious. “Not surprising to me

at all," Greene replied when I informed her of this. "They have major problems, and it's only starting to build."

That all preceded the date when MTG signed the discharge petition, which Tom Massie initiated in July, the day before Trump told her that his friends would get hurt if she exposed their names.

After the hearing, Greene held a news conference at which she threatened to identify some of the men who had abused the women. (Greene says that she didn't know those names herself but that she could have gotten them from the victims.) Trump called Greene to voice his displeasure. Greene was in her Capitol Hill office, and according to a staff member, everyone in the suite of rooms could hear him yelling at her as she listened to him on speakerphone. Greene says she expressed her perplexity over his intransigence. According to Greene, Trump replied, "My friends will get hurt."

When she urged Trump to invite some of Epstein's female victims to the Oval Office, she says, he angrily informed her that they had done nothing to merit the honor. It would be the last conversation Greene and Trump would ever have.

Along the way, Draper inserts something between the Epstein break and the Kirk epiphany and the ultimate break: the 8-week recess, during which MTG stewed as she heard complaints about affordability from her constituents.

But there was one more important ingredient.

As noted, Draper describes the evolving relationship he had with MTG. He first flew down to Rome, GA, in 2022, and honored MTG's confidences, which built trust. She blew off a

meeting for drinks during last year's convention because Trump was giving her pride of place at the Convention, but shortly thereafter met with a NYT team and scoffed at their claim Trump would pursue retribution. Draper persisted with someone who adhered to the axiom that real news was fake for years.

There are a lot of lefties who hate this profile: They feel it goes easy on her (and given the Christian reconstruction, I'd agree). They see it as a willingness to let MTG rebrand herself, even while it foregrounds her transphobia. They hate the glam photo of her, which nevertheless provides helpful context to MTG's claim she always opposed the plastic femininity of Mar-a-Lago (and provides a useful contrast with the still fresh Karoline Leavitt portrait).



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My magazine story on the rise & fall of MTG (free link):



From nytimes.com

In particular, she told me recently: "I never liked the MAGA Mar-a-Lago sexualization. I believe how women in leadership present themselves sends a message to younger women." She continued: "I have two daughters, and I've always been uncomfortable with how those women puff up their lips and enlarge their breasts. I've never spoken about it publicly, but I've been planning to."

I would add that Draper still treats Trump as the actor – *Trump* banished *MTG*, rather than she

stood her ground in face of his demands.

It has been tempting for some observers to predict that the meteoric crash and burn of the MAGA movement's loudest champion signals the beginning of the end for its leader as well. But it is Greene who is exiting the stage, while Trump continues to dominate it, as he did through impeachments and indictments and other controversies that no other politician would have survived.

Still, Draper hedges his bets. Maybe she will be a harbinger.

But because it represents an evolution for Greene, she may yet again prove to be a harbinger of a sea change in the movement she once helped lead.

By far the most fascinating part of the profile to me is how Draper traces MTG's cognitive dissonance. In 2022 – and still today – MTG is certain there's no way Joe Biden could have won the election in 2020.

One autumn evening in 2022, I ventured to ask just how she thought the 2020 election was stolen. Did she really think that a grand conspiracy, perhaps masterminded by the Obamas and the C.I.A., had secretly rigged the results?

"Robert," she replied with a searching look, "do you really think Joe Biden got 81 million votes without even campaigning?"

"Yes," I said. "They counted all the votes. That was the final tally. Why wouldn't I believe it?" The look she then gave me, which I will never forget, was one of bottomless pity.

But the contrast between the earnest stories of the survivors followed by hearing Trump complain

that naming those who abused Epstein's girls would hurt his friends broke through a belief created by the bubble of Fox News.

The reason for her lack of concern, as Greene explained it to me, might seem improbable to anyone who is unfamiliar with how the mainstream press and the right-wing media cover the same story differently – or not at all. “The story to me,” she said, “was that I’d seen pictures of Epstein with all these people. And Trump is just one of several. And then, for me, I’d seen that Bill Clinton is on the flight logs for his plane like 20-something times. So, for people like me, it wasn’t suspicious. And then we’d heard the general stories of how Epstein used to be a member of Mar-a-Lago, but Trump kicked him out. Why would I think he’s done anything wrong, right?”

For Greene, the decades that Epstein spent eluding justice for exploiting and sexually assaulting countless girls and young women while amassing a fortune, and the seeming efforts by the government to cover up the injustice, “represents everything wrong with Washington,” she told me. This September, Greene spoke with several of Epstein’s victims for the first time in a closed-door House Oversight Committee meeting. She knew that the women had paid their own way to come to Washington. She saw some of them trembling and crying as they spoke. Their accounts struck her as entirely believable. Greene herself had never been sexually abused, but she knew women who had. In her own small way, Greene later told me, she could understand what it was like for a woman to stand up to a powerful man.

One of the most important parts of MTG’s split

from Trump has been an evolving relationship with the media, especially Fox News, and therefore, the truth, but with Draper always there persisting. That is, MTG had to work through the cognitive dissonance of learning that Trump really did have ties to Jeffrey Epstein's sex trafficking, that he really was trying to cover it up, before she got to the point of retconning it all inside a faith narrative. Her own banishment from Fox News may have helped work through the cognitive dissonance.

I talk a lot about one of the ways you fight fascism is to peel off members of Congress, four in the Senate or eight in the House. I've laid out repeatedly how central the Epstein scandal was to that process.

Whether you like the Draper profile or not, whether or not MTG's split from Trump will be a harbinger of more (like Stefanik's) to come, what this profile does do is show what it took for one diehard MAGA to go through it: political betrayal, real policy differences, retaliation, and then cognitive dissonance regarding Epstein, the Kirk epiphany, until finally responding to his terrorism in a dramatically different way than almost every other Republican, whether MAGA or not.

There's a process.